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## NATO 2022 Strategic Concept in the Face of Security Threats

### Koncepcja Strategiczna NATO 2022 wobec zagrożeń bezpieczeństwa

#### • Abstract •

This study aimed to explore the strategic assumptions contained in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. The research process used literature sources on NATO strategic concepts and strategic documents in the form of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. Qualitative research methods were applied, which included the following: to find out the results of the research conducted so far on the issue in question, literature research and a comparative analysis were carried out to compare NATO's strategic assumptions, as included in the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and previously applicable NATO 2010 Strategic Concept. The comparison of the documents showed a significant difference in the strategic assumptions of the NATO expressed in the content of the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept and the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, determined primarily by the change in NATO's attitude towards the Russian Federation (from a partner to a source of threat) and the change in the assessment of the security of the Euro-Atlantic area (from stable to unstable). The further evolution of NATO's strategic assumptions will depend primarily on the actions of the Russian Federation, including in the context of its armed invasion of Ukraine.

#### • Abstrakt •

Celem badania była eksploracja założeń strategicznych zawartych w Koncepcji Strategicznej NATO 2022. W procesie badawczym wykorzystano literaturę przedmiotu dotyczącą koncepcji oraz dokumentów strategicznych NATO opracowanych w Koncepcji Strategicznej NATO 2022. Zastosowano jakościowe metody badawcze, które obejmowały: zapoznanie się z wynikami dotychczasowych badań nad omawianym zagadnieniem, a także analizę literatury oraz analizę porównawczą w celu porównania założeń strategicznych NATO zawartych w Koncepcji Strategicznej NATO 2022 z wcześniej obowiązującą koncepcją strategiczną NATO z 2010 roku. Porównanie dokumentów wykazało istotną różnicę w założeniach strategicznych NATO wyrażonych w treści Koncepcji Strategicznej NATO 2010 i Koncepcji Strategicznej NATO 2022, uwarunkowaną przede wszystkim zmianą postawy NATO wobec Federacji Rosyjskiej (z partnera na źródło zagrożenia) oraz zmianą oceny sytuacji bezpieczeństwa obszaru euroatlantyckiego (ze stabilnej na niestabilną). Dalsza ewolucja założeń strategicznych NATO będzie zależeć przede wszystkim od działań Federacji Rosyjskiej, w tym w kontekście jej zbrojnej inwazji na Ukrainę.

**Keywords:** NATO 2022 Strategic Concept; North Atlantic Alliance; NATO; threats; security

**Słowa kluczowe:** Koncepcja Strategiczna NATO 2022; Sojusz Północnoatlantycki; NATO; zagrożenia; bezpieczeństwo

## Introduction

Established as a result of the signing of the Treaty of Washington on April 4, 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), often referred to as the North Atlantic Alliance, is one of the most important international organisations in terms of its impact on the global environment with a focus on military security issues.

As can be seen both retrospectively and contemporarily, NATO has continuously updated its strategic assumptions, expressed in individual strategic concepts, in view of the constantly evolving security environment, including changing security threats.

The current (as of October 2024) binding Strategic Concept was enacted at the NATO Madrid Summit in June 2022, replacing the previously applicable one adopted at the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010.

As will be outlined later in this article, over the 12 years that separated the enactment of the two documents, events such as the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine rendered NATO's 2010 strategic assumptions inadequate to the realities of the global political environment.

From a cognitive perspective, this situation prompts the following question: To what extent does the content (regarding the Alliance's strategic assumptions) of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept reflect the security situation in the Euro-Atlantic area at the time of adoption?

## Theoretical background and discussion on the state of research

Literature research reveals the existence of a number of publications devoted to the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.

Tomasz Chłoi's (2022) publication focused on the 2022 NATO Madrid Summit, which resulted in the adoption of a NATO Strategic Concept – including an assessment of the impact of events between the publication of the 2010 and 2022 concepts, identifying Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine and its aftermath as the most crucial event for NATO in this period.

Detailed analyses of the assumptions of the 2022 Strategic Concept are contained in publications by scholars such as Emanuele Farruggia (2024) and, in the context

of exploring the process of developing the new strategic concept, in the work of the NATO Defense College research team edited by Thierry Tardy (2022).

Other category of sources analysed includes publications, analytical and scientific alike, devoted to comparing the 2010 and 2022 NATO Strategic Concepts.

Examples include publications by Marek Madej (2023) (part of which was devoted to listing the key differences between the two concepts), by Dominic Solari and Hannah Sweeney (2022), as well as by Jonny Hall and Hugh Sandeman (2022) (which are both analytical in nature). As a result of literature research, the publications by Lech Chojnowski and Mirosław Banasik (2023), as well as by Zoltan Szenes (2023), were assessed as the most comprehensive and research-valuable.

Notably, the cited publications all focused on the comparative aspect. Identifying with the authors' conclusions contained in the cited publications, it was decided that the analysis of NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, and its subsequent reference to the conclusions contained in the NATO Strategic Concept 2010, should be expanded for the purposes of this article to increase its research value.

## **Research methodology**

The object of research conducted for the purposes of this article was the strategic assumptions of the North Atlantic Alliance contained in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.

This study therefore aimed to explore and compare the North Atlantic Alliance's strategic assumptions contained in the NATO 2022 and NATO 2010 Strategic Concepts.

To achieve the research objective, the following research problem was formulated: To what extent do the contents of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept (indicating the strategic assumptions of the Alliance) reflect the actual security situation in the Euro-Atlantic area?

No hypothesis was formulated, as only qualitative research was employed in the research process.

Qualitative research methods were applied in the research process, including analysis of literature sources (using content analysis to find out the results of the research conducted so far on the issue in question) and comparative analysis (to compare the North Atlantic Alliance's strategic assumptions contained in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept and NATO 2010 Strategic Concept).

The research process adopted a research limitation, which was to focus exclusively on the content of NATO 2022 Strategic Concept in order to explore the Alliance's

strategic assumptions. This decision stemmed from the fact that the evolution of NATO's strategic assumptions, as reflected in all strategic concepts to date, has been extensively investigated by other researchers and, due to its volume, would require separate research.

## Research results

### 1. Assumptions of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept

Currently in force (as of October 2024), the eighth Strategic Concept in the Alliance's history was enacted at the NATO Madrid Summit in June 2022.

Following years of relative stability, the international environment was significantly disrupted in 2014 by the actions of the Russian Federation, which carried out armed aggression against Ukraine and occupied parts of its territory. Due to its location affecting the outer borders of NATO: Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, as well as Russia's imperial policy, which threatens an expansion of the invasion to other states, especially in the context of NATO member states: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland bordering the Russian Federation, the ongoing conflict (as of October 2024), which escalated significantly in February 2022, also poses a significant threat to the North Atlantic Alliance.

These events show that, much like during the Cold War, NATO's role is to significantly strengthen the military security of its members. This is exemplified both by its intensive efforts to provide logistical support to Ukraine and by the expansion of the Alliance to include new members who have so far remained neutral: Finland (in 2023) and Sweden (in 2024).

As will be outlined later in this article, over the 12 years between the enactment of the two documents, events such as the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine rendered NATO's 2010 strategic assumptions inadequate to the realities of the global political environment.

The final adoption of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept was preceded by the so-called reflection process on the future of the Alliance, especially in terms of developing methods to strengthen its political impact. To achieve this goal, a Reflection Group was established, which, following consultations, indicated the need to update NATO's current strategic assumptions in light of significant changes in the global political environment since the adoption of the Strategic Concept in 2010 (Chojnowski & Banasik, 2023). As a result of the conclusions from the Reflection Group's work presented during the Alliance's summit in Brussels on June 14, 2021,

a decision was made to develop a new NATO Strategic Concept, the publication date of which was set for 2022 (Simón, 2022). Despite the final deadline, work on creating a new strategic concept was hampered by external factors: mainly the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, which generated the need for countries to focus on combating the effects of this phenomenon at the expense of other undertakings, as well as internal factors, which included the divergence of interests of individual NATO member states, e.g., in relation to Russia and China (e.g., Slovakia and Hungary cooperate with Russia in the energy sector) and the involvement of the Alliance in Syria. An example of the differences was the negative position of French President Emmanuel Macron towards the withdrawal of American forces from Syria, while Turkey intervened in that country at the same time (Lorenz, 2021), as well as the increased focus of the United States (as a strategic member of NATO) on domestic policy (Madej, 2020), and the failure of some NATO member states to fulfill the commitments made during the Newport Summit in 2014 to spend at least 2% of Gross Domestic Product on defence.

In terms of structure, the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept features a layout characteristic of strategic documents (Mickiewicz, 2020). Accordingly, it contains an introductory part, a diagnostic part (an assessment of the initial state of affairs for the strategy being developed, titled “Strategic Environment”), and an indication of the course of action, titled “NATO’s Core Tasks”, detailing the planned actions in three key areas: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. An additional section separated from the rest of the document is an indication of the goals and principles that guide the Euro-Atlantic community in its actions.

Analysing the introduction of the document, one can notice that even its very first sentences strike a pessimistic tone. Its authors pointed out that the Madrid Summit in June 2022, during which the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept was adopted, took place at a critical moment for the Alliance and international security. This is due to the Russian Federation’s military invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022 on a much larger scale than in 2014. The wording of the introduction also emphasises upholding the core principles and values on which NATO is based, in the form of democracy, human rights, and the renunciation of armed violence, as well as the desire to work with partners who share these values. The importance of the Alliance’s nuclear capability as the main means of deterrence was also reiterated.

The 2022 Strategic Concept identifies maintaining momentum in three key areas: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security, among NATO’s objectives and principles for the years ahead. At the same time, it was noted that collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty would remain the

Alliance's main task. It also emphasised that the Alliance remains the most important actor in ensuring international security.

The document's diagnostic part concerning the global security environment opens with a thesis stating that the world is not at peace. The authors of the analysed strategic concept identified the following as, in their view, key threats that could negatively impact the Euro-Atlantic environment:

– The Russian Federation's imperial policy resulting in violations of international law, including violating the territorial integrity of other states (Ukraine). The document identified the Russian Federation as the greatest threat to international security, including NATO. This thesis was not only exemplified by the armed invasion of Ukraine, but also by the non-compliance with international conventions on armament limitations and the potential threat to the territorial integrity of the Euro-Atlantic area. It was unequivocally stated that further cooperation with Russia is impossible in view of its invasion of Ukraine, with the assurance that the Alliance is not an enemy of the Russian Federation and is open to resuming cooperation if Russia ceases to violate international law. This shows that, despite the breakdown in cooperation, NATO still recognises Russia's important role in terms of influencing global security due to Russia's potential and remains open to cooperation in the event that the country ceases to pursue its imperial policy. Notably, in the context of cooperation with the Russian Federation, including in the military aspect, Belarus was identified as a country that negatively affects the Alliance's security.

– The rising potential of the People's Republic of China. Apart from Russia, another state whose actions may undermine the security of the Alliance, as identified in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, is China. China's cooperation with the Russian Federation, aggressive cyberspace actions, a non-transparent armament policy, as well as economic, maritime and space imperialism, were all identified as sources of threat. An example of China's maritime imperialism (seeking to expand its sphere of influence) is the territorial disputes it has had for years with other states over the Paracel and Spratly Islands. At the same time, the Strategic Concept indicates NATO's willingness to cooperate with China but, as with the Russian Federation, provided that China complies with international law. Identifying China's actions as a potential threat to the Alliance shows NATO's recognition of the country's growing potential, particularly in the economic and military spheres.

– The armament policies of certain states. The following states were identified as representing the main sources of threat in the context of armament policies pursued with disregard for international law: the Russian Federation in terms of violating the limits on military assets; Iran and North Korea in terms of developing nuclear capabilities; the Russian Federation, North Korea and Syria in terms of chemical

weapons testing. Regarding the Alliance's security, it should be noted that all of those countries cooperate with the Russian Federation to a greater or lesser extent, especially in the context of armament policy (e.g., the supply of armaments to Russia by North Korea, Iran and China during the conflict with Ukraine), which, in the context of identifying Russia as the main threat to NATO's security, further substantiates the importance of monitoring the situation in terms of the armament policies of the countries in question.

– The unconventional activities of certain states. Alongside the military threat, the authors of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept also recognised, in the context of the security of the Alliance's members, the intensifying threats in the form of unconventional actions like migration pressure (e.g., the promotion of illegal migration into EU member states by the Belarusian authorities with the intent of destabilising them), as well as disinformation – including in cyberspace – to instill information chaos among the population, and acts of sabotage. However, despite recognising these threats, the document's authors did not indicate which states are carrying out such activities, merely stating that they are authoritarian states, which may be construed as a cognitive vagueness.

– Terrorism. This phenomenon was identified in the 2022 Strategic Concept as the Alliance's most serious security threat of an asymmetric nature (a situation in which, among other things, non-state actors attack states), including due to access of terrorist organisations to technology that facilitates terrorist activities. Much like in the case of the unconventional activities analysed earlier, there is no indication in the case of terrorist activities as to which terrorist organisations pose the most serious threat to the security of the Alliance, which can be seen as imprecision.

– Regional conflicts outside NATO territory. Africa and the Middle East were identified as the main areas at risk of armed conflicts that could potentially threaten the Alliance itself, including in the context of the need to de-escalate these conflicts using NATO forces through out-of-area operations. As one can observe based on the locations of most of the armed conflicts in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (e.g., the Arab Spring), this diagnosis can be considered valid.

– Violence against civilians. This is a threat directly linked to armed conflicts, as analysed earlier, the consequences of which include sexual violence, the destruction of cultural property, and the migration of populations to protect their health and lives. The events of recent years – primarily the Russo-Ukrainian war and the Arab Spring, in which violence against the civilian population, including sexual violence (e.g., during the Russo-Ukrainian war), destruction of cultural property (e.g., during the Syrian civil war), and numerous migrations of the population, including to NATO member states, indicate that this diagnosis is accurate.

– The malicious use of modern technologies, including in cyberspace. The document's authors stressed that despite the benefits to the Alliance of technological developments enabling it to strengthen its capabilities, including in terms of countering threats, these developments could at the same time also generate risks for the Euro-Atlantic community. Examples of such activities include spreading disinformation in cyberspace to create information chaos among the public and cyberattacks on public administration bodies. As in the case of several other threats analysed earlier, the authors of the document did not specify which actors could generate threats related to the malicious use of modern technologies.

– Climate change. The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept indicates that climate change (especially in the context of a steady rise in temperatures) will pose a significant challenge to the Alliance and the global community as a whole. It emphasises that climate change could both pose a source of direct, physical threat to the public and, through its vulnerability, have an impact on the Alliance's military action. Climate change-induced natural disasters, which NATO military forces could potentially be involved in tackling, were identified as particularly relevant in this regard. The fact that the document's authors recognised the possibility of negative climate change impacts demonstrates how accurately the Euro-Atlantic community observes global trends (in this case, the forces of nature), which at the same time may also pose a potential threat to the Alliance.

As can be seen, the range of threats diagnosed in the 2022 Concept is wide, covering both anthropogenic (human-generated) military and non-military threats and those caused by the forces of nature (climate change). Given the threat posed by the Russian Federation's aggressive actions, diagnosing the contemporary security environment as unstable should be deemed correct. Although, as indicated, some of the threats may be seen as specified too vaguely (e.g., no indication of actors that may generate terrorist threats and those engaged in unconventional activities), considering the accurate diagnosis of threats in such areas as cyberspace, threats to the civilian population, and climate change in the context of the observed global trends, the overall effectiveness of threat predictions in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept can nevertheless be viewed positively.

The third part of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept designates three main courses of action for NATO and the nature of efforts planned under each of them. These areas include:

- collective defence;
- crisis management;
- cooperative security.

The section on collective defence emphasises that it remains (on land, at sea, in the air, as well as in cyberspace) a core area of action for the Alliance and that continuous improvement of capabilities in terms of its assets (including the financial outlay for the defence of member states), structures, and procedures (in terms of the conduct of operations) is necessary for its implementation. In the context of the innovations introduced in NATO Strategic Assumptions to date, it should be noted that – apart from the “traditional” military threats – hybrid attacks (e.g., in cyberspace) and sabotage targeting critical facilities (e.g., energy infrastructure) have also been identified as grounds for initiating action under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, reflecting a recognition of the increased importance and likelihood of such attacks.

The document analysed notes that deterrence, including through nuclear capabilities, remains the primary form by which NATO’s defence policy is implemented. It was emphasised that while the international community’s ultimate goal should be to abandon nuclear capabilities, NATO would remain a nuclear alliance – mainly due to the nuclear capabilities of the US, France, and the UK – to pursue a policy of deterrence against potential adversaries. At the same time, it was indicated that these activities would take place in compliance with international law in terms of the prohibition of nuclear, chemical, biological, and radiological weapons testing and armament limits with regard to NATO assets. Another threat identified in the document analysed and recognised as a key one for NATO to counteract in close cooperation with the UN and the EU is terrorism originating from terrorist organisations.

Analysing the Alliance’s strategic assumptions in the field of collective defence, one can note the comprehensive nature of the provisions in this area, which may indicate its importance for the Euro-Atlantic community, especially in the context of the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation.

In the context of crisis management activities, the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept indicates that despite the Alliance’s increased focus on collective defence, crisis management also remains an essential element of NATO’s operations, and one of the Alliance’s goals will be to improve its capabilities in terms of bolstering its assets, enhance crisis management procedures, hold joint exercises in this area, as well as engage in civil-military cooperation (including with the local community in the area of operation) – whether at the stage of crisis prevention, crisis response, or restoration of the pre-crisis conditions. Recognising the evolution of security threats globally, the document’s authors emphasised that threats, the effects of which necessitate NATO’s crisis management tasks, may not only be of a military nature (such as during ISAF’s operations in Afghanistan), but also of a non-military nature,

in the form of natural disasters (the source of which may be climate change, analysed earlier) and terrorism. In the context of cooperation in the area of crisis management, it was emphasised that it would be carried out jointly with partners who, in addition to their interest in cooperating with the Alliance, share its values (e.g., democracy, human rights). The United Nations, the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the African Union were identified as the main cooperation partners; as such, apart from the UN, such cooperation is meant to primarily involve regional organisations, which may indicate the Alliance's focus on regional cooperation.

Analysing the crisis management-related strategic assumptions in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, one can observe that they have been given much less attention compared to the area of collective defence. This may therefore be indicative of the Alliance's increased focus on the defence of its own territory (primarily due to the malicious activities of the Russian Federation) rather than on managing crises outside the transatlantic area.

In the context of NATO's pursuit of cooperative security, the so-called open-door policy, allowing all countries sharing the Alliance's values to join, was upheld, emphasising that NATO enlargement to date has had a positive impact on the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Key partners recognised in the document included Georgia, Ukraine, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and among international organisations, the European Union (emphasising the complementarity of NATO and the EU, including in the context of jointly combating non-military threats such as human rights violations, climate change, and cyber threats). Significantly, China was singled out as the only country in relation to whose actions the need for cooperation between NATO and the EU was identified, which may indicate an awareness of the threats (e.g., in cyberspace) that they pose to both organisations.

In the context of regions outside the Euro-Atlantic area which are vital to the security of the Alliance, also in terms of building cooperative security with their representatives, the identified regions included the Western Balkans, the Sahel region, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Indo-Pacific region; in the context of the security threats to NATO countries occurring in the quoted regions (illegal migration from the Middle East and North Africa, and maritime piracy in Indo-Pacific waters), as indicated earlier in the document, this can be considered an accurate diagnosis.

It is also innovative to emphasise the need to cooperate with Alliance partners not only in terms of military cooperation but also in countering the negative effects of climate change, which again demonstrates the Alliance's important focus on this aspect, recognising its negative consequences on a global scale.

The summary of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept includes the provisions already quoted in the introduction, which concern the Euro-Atlantic community's commitment to the development of the Alliance and the solidarity-based pursuit of its strategic objectives, with a particular focus on the defence of NATO territory.

Since the current Strategic Concept has been in force for a relatively short time (as of October 2024), it is difficult to accurately assess all the strategic assumptions contained in the document. Yet, observing the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation indicated in the document, the global scale of illegal migration, hybrid threats – including disinformation and cyberspace threats – as well as the negative impact of climate change, the diagnoses made can be assessed positively overall.

As a result of the analysis of sources, one can observe divergent assessments of researchers regarding NATO's strategic assumptions contained in the 2022 Strategic Concept. Examples of these divergent assessments are presented below.

As Aybike Yalçın-İspir (2024) points out after Stanley Sloan, due to the lack of specification of methods for implementing the adopted assumptions, the document should be considered too general.

A similar, critical opinion, expressing a too general record of strategic assumptions, is expressed by LSE IDEAS analysts (*NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept: One Year On*, 2023), who indicate the lack of a clear declaration regarding future relations between NATO and the Russian Federation as the biggest drawback of the analysed document.

Arif Bağbaşıoğlu (2022) presents a different assessment, believing that it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the assumptions presented in the analysed strategic concept, and the criterion for a positive or negative assessment should be the end of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A positive opinion is expressed by Tomasz Chłoń (2022), who assesses the currently applicable strategic concept as “corresponding to the needs of the Alliance”.

Having explored the assumptions of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, it is reasonable for the next section, in order to indicate the evolution of the Alliance's strategic assumptions, to refer them to the assumptions of other, previously applicable strategic documents of the Alliance. For the comparative analysis, the previously applicable strategic concept of the Alliance was selected, which was the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept.

## **2. Comparison of the assumptions of the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept and the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept**

It must be noted that the comparison of the two documents focuses on identifying the most important elements of their content and pointing out the similarities and differences between them.

The first element that differentiates the documents and is discernible even before a detailed content comparison is their volume. For example, a comparison of the number of articles in both documents shows that the 2022 Strategic Concept is a much more extensive document (49 articles compared to 36 in the 2010 concept), with the articles themselves being greater in volume as well. The reason for this is the greater attention given to threats in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept than in the previous document, which is a direct result of the very different security environment in which the two documents were produced (the 2010 concept was developed in a far more stable environment). The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept is therefore a document with more precisely defined content (including objectives and threats) which, from a cognitive perspective, makes it possible to assess that it presents a more complete perspective of the Alliance's strategic considerations. On the other hand, both documents feature an identical layout consisting of an introductory part, an assessment of the global security environment, including its greatest threats, and a detailed reference to the Alliance's three main strategic areas: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security (which are identical in both Concepts).

Another noticeable element that differs between the two documents is the nature of the narrative they contain. While the Alliance's main areas of activity, as defined in the 2010 Concept, remained unchanged in the 2022 document, the 2010 Concept paid greater attention to cooperative security (and therefore cooperation), whereas the 2022 Concept focused primarily on collective defence. Regarding the nature of the narrative in the two documents, it is far more pessimistic in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept than in the previous document, reflecting the detrimental changes in the global security environment that have taken place since 2010, the year in which the previous concept was enacted. Indeed, whilst the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept states that the security situation in the Euro-Atlantic area is stable (in Article 9), the 2022 Concept outright declares that NATO territory is not at peace – primarily due to the aggressive military actions of the Russian Federation (in Article 6).

As discussed in the part of the article cited, among the changes resulting from side effects of the shift in global political environment that occurred between 2010

and 2022 (the years of adoption of both analysed strategic concepts), the most important development is the transition of the Russian Federation from the role of NATO partner to becoming the source of its threat. As regards the documents' narratives, it is noticeable that the authors of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept focused more attention on defence aspects (mainly in the context of Russia's actions) while the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept concentrated on cooperation. In this case, once again, the main reason for the change is the aggressive (imperial) policy pursued by the Russian Federation.

NATO's approach to the Russian Federation itself may be viewed as the most significant difference between the two documents, which can also be observed in the opinions of other researchers (e.g., Szenes, 2023; Chłoń, 2022; Tardy, 2022). The NATO 2010 Strategic Concept identifies the country as an important partner of the Alliance (Articles 33–34), including in ensuring global security. In contrast, the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept identifies the Russian Federation as a threat to the Alliance (Article 8).

Analysing the references to other states, one can also observe another vital difference in the two documents. The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept identifies specific states whose activities may pose a threat to the Alliance: Iran, Syria, and North Korea (in the context of their chemical weapons testing), as well as China and Belarus as states allied to Russia. In the case of reflections on individual countries, most attention was given to China, which may reflect a recognition of the growing potential of that country, with China possibly deemed a potential threat due to conflicting political interests with NATO countries. In contrast, the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept did not identify any country as a threat and did not mention China at all. Analysing the reasons for the appearance of the indicated countries in the content of NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, as indicated by Christopher S. Chivvis and Jack Keating (2024), in the case of several of them (Russia, North Korea, Iran, China), they can be classified as the so-called new Axis of evil (a concept originally created in 2002 by then US President George W. Bush in the context of countries posing a threat to global security by supporting terrorism and possessing weapons of mass destruction). These countries have both nuclear potential, will violate the international order (e.g., Russia by invading Ukraine), and cooperate with each other (economically: e.g., Russia and China within BRICS, and militarily, e.g., logistical support for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine by Iran and North Korea, sending soldiers fighting on Russia's side).

The cited differences point to the aforementioned deterioration in the global security environment and thus the need to revise the Alliance's previous strategic assumptions.

The situation is different in the context of the countries that NATO defines as its allies. Both strategic concepts identify Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine as allies and potential future members of NATO. Nevertheless, it is noticeable in the context of Ukraine that even though the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept was published after the launch of the Russian invasion in February 2022, the next phase of the conflict that has been ongoing since 2014, Ukraine did not receive much attention compared to the 2010 document – it is only mentioned in one sentence that Ukraine's independence is in the Alliance's interest. Regarding cooperation with individual states, however, it should be noted that both documents uphold the Alliance's intention to pursue an open-door policy for states interested in NATO membership and sharing its values.

As for identifying the institutional partners and key regions for NATO in the cooperative security framework, both concepts specify that these are the United Nations and the European Union. What is notable though is that, in contrast to the 2010 Concept, the 2022 document assigns a greater role to the European Union (as well as to the African Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which were not mentioned in the 2010 Concept) than to the UN. This may be indicative of the Alliance's increased focus on deepening regional security building, especially in the context of the threat to European states resulting from the Russian Federation's aggressive actions.

The Western Balkans was identified as a key region outside the Alliance in both documents, indicating NATO's continued interest in the area, as evidenced by the already noted planned enlargement of NATO to include member countries from this region. Other regions identified in the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept were the Persian Gulf (under the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative), and the Mediterranean (under the Mediterranean Dialogue). The 2022 document significantly expands on regional cooperation, including in the context of jointly combating threats, encompassing the Sahel, Indo-Pacific, North Africa, and Middle East regions (thus geographically extending the Mediterranean and Gulf areas under the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the Mediterranean Dialogue, which were not mentioned in the 2022 document) and this, as with the other changes analysed, is a direct result of the evolving global security environment. NATO's interest in the Indo-Pacific region is determined, among other things, by the concerns about the actions of China in whose sphere of political influence the region lies; its interest in Africa and the Middle East is due to the large-scale illegal migration from these regions to the Euro-Atlantic area (mainly Europe), as observed especially after the Arab Spring of 2011, in 2015 (the so-called migration crisis), and 2021 (people fleeing Afghanistan for fear of persecution after Taliban return to power).

The negative impact of migration is identified in the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept as one of the hybrid threats facing the Alliance, as exemplified by the actions carried out since 2021 by the Belarusian authorities to create migratory pressure (allowing migrants from African and Middle Eastern countries to pass through their territory) in order to destabilise European countries. The NATO 2010 Strategic Concept mentions neither migration nor other hybrid threats (indeed, it does not contain the word “hybrid” at all), which once again shows the Euro-Atlantic community’s recognition of the evolution of the global security environment. Another new element in the 2022 concept, not included in the previous document, is the safeguarding of women’s rights, including in terms of sexual violence occurring in such contexts as armed conflict.

The threats to the Alliance’s security identified in both documents include terrorism, cyber threats, and climate change. As noted earlier, in view of the subsequent rise in cyberspace threats (though not specified as disinformation activities in the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept, as in the 2022 document) and climate change, both of which were identified in 2010, this proved to be an accurate diagnosis.

Another element that is common to both documents is NATO’s approach to its nuclear capabilities which, despite the previously cited threat from the Russian Federation and the declaration of the ambition to strive for a world without nuclear weapons, continues to serve the Alliance’s deterrence policy, which has remained the most important element of collective defence. One difference in the context of the approach to collective defence expressed in the 2022 document is the emphasis that it must also include maritime areas, which was not mentioned in the 2010 concept.

As can therefore be seen from the conclusions of the comparative analysis, the two documents contain both similarities and differences. To make the conclusions of the comparative analysis clearer, the most important elements of the two documents analysed for the purpose of this article are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of the Most Important Elements of the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept and the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept

Element	NATO 2010 Strategic Concept	NATO 2022 Strategic Concept
content	✓ more general	✓ more precise
narrative	✓ more positive	✓ more threat-focused
diagnosis of the state of security in the Euro-Atlantic area	✓ stable situation	✓ unstable situation
NATO-Russian Federation relations	✓ Russia viewed as a partner of the Alliance	✓ Russia viewed as a threat to Alliance security

Table 1 (cont.)

Element	NATO 2010 Strategic Concept	NATO 2022 Strategic Concept
NATO-China relations	✓ no reference to China	✓ diagnosis: China's interests conflict with those of NATO
countries posing a threat to Alliance security	✓ no such countries are specific	✓ Russia, China, Syria, Belarus, Iran, North Korea
indication of the nature of hybrid threats to Alliance security	✓ no reference to hybrid threats	✓ yes
terrorism identified as a threat to Alliance security	✓ yes	✓ yes
malicious cyber activity identified as a threat to Alliance security	✓ yes	✓ yes (identified as a hybrid threat)
climate change identified as a threat to Alliance security	✓ yes	✓ yes (broader description)
illegal migration identified as a threat to Alliance security	✓ no (no reference made)	✓ yes
women's rights at the core of NATO activities (including counteracting sexual violence)	✓ no (no reference made)	✓ yes
collective defence identified as an area of Alliance activity	✓ yes	✓ yes
crisis management identified as an area of Alliance activity	✓ yes	✓ yes
cooperative security identified as an area of Alliance activity	✓ yes	✓ yes
NATO focus on maritime security in the Euro-Atlantic region	✓ no reference made	✓ yes
the role of NATO's nuclear capabilities	✓ a deterrence tool	✓ a deterrence tool
the open-door policy	✓ yes	✓ yes
the most important regions for NATO in the context of cooperation	✓ Western Balkans, Persian Gulf, Mediterranean	✓ Western Balkans, Sahel, North Africa, Middle East, Indo-Pacific

Table 1 (cont.)

Element	NATO 2010 Strategic Concept	NATO 2022 Strategic Concept
the key countries cooperating with NATO (as potential future members)	✓ Georgia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina	✓ Georgia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina
NATO cooperation with international organisations	✓ European Union, United Nations	✓ European Union, United Nations, African Union, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept and the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.

As can therefore be seen from the conclusions of the comparative analysis, the two documents contain both similarities and differences.

## Conclusion

A comparative analysis of the NATO 2010 Strategic Concept and the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept shows that due to the significant shifts in the global security environment between 2010 and 2022 (when the two analysed documents were adopted) and the recognition of these developments by the authors of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, the strategic assumptions presented in these two strategic concepts are markedly different.

This assessment can be made despite the apparent similarities in the content of the two documents, which include the affirmation of the Alliance's desire for further development (including in terms of assets and operating procedures), as well as the recognition of threats facing NATO, including international terrorism, malicious cyber activity, climate change, and above all, basing the Alliance's functioning on three areas: collective defence (e.g., a declaration that NATO remains a nuclear alliance for the sole purpose of deterring potential aggressors), crisis management, and cooperative security (e.g., openness to accepting new members; cooperation with other international organisations).

The reason for this is the dramatic shift in NATO's perception of the Russian Federation which, due to Russia's pursuit of an imperial policy resulting in military aggression against Ukraine, has turned it from a vital NATO partner (as per the 2010 Concept) into a threat (according to the 2022 Concept), a development that

has also directly influenced the change in the diagnosis regarding the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area: from a stable state (as set out in the 2010 document) to an unstable state (in line with the 2022 document). Accordingly, one can assume that the evolution of NATO's strategic assumptions in the strategic concepts over the coming years will be determined primarily by the nature of further actions of the Russian Federation, including in light of its ongoing invasion of Ukraine, as well as the evolution of security threats: climate change, terrorism, migration, disinformation, and the effectiveness of NATO's actions to combat them.

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