



Military Personnel Organisation

Australian Defence College

Grey Oration: How NATO sees the Future

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The following is the transcript of the Grey Oration: How NATO sees the future, presented by Dr Florence Gaub in the Blamey Theatre on the 28th August 2025.

Okay. So good evening everybody. Um, we have about 45 minutes or so, or I have decided to speak for 45 minutes, and then it's your turn to ask me questions or comments. Um, I thought what I will do when I was asked, what kind of lecture could you give? I thought, I'll blend the two things I know best NATO and the future.

And as you just heard, I have a background in strategic foresight. I mean, I'm a middle East analyst by training. Actually, at the very outset, I was a military sociologist. So, like many academics, I have quite come quite a long way thinking about many different things. But where I am today, I'm thinking on behalf of NATO, and how NATO sees the future will give you an idea not of just where we think we're going, but I will also, by the same token, hopefully in forty five minutes you'll understand a little bit what NATO is, because I always say NATO isn't an organization. From where you're sitting here in Australia, it might look like an organization with a headquarter in Brussels.

That's part of the story, but it's also a universe. NATO is much more a universe than just an organization. So how NATO sees the future. Let's start with, I think, a fun fact.

I don't know if I'm the first one to have recognized this, but NATO's founding document, the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in 1949, is written entirely in the future tense. So that's one of those moments where, as a researcher, you think, wow, this I must be really important. Surely, I'm the first one to know this. I don't know if I am, but it is a fact that NATO is a promise, and that's important when we're having conversations later on about what will actually happen.

Article Five. How valid is it? The truth is, NATO has always been an intention to *be there for each other in case of an attack*. When it was created, US President Truman called it a powerful deterrent to war, *"a shield against aggression and fear of aggression"*. Now, you know, as any good academic, I go back to the origins to understand what we are. Because this document, this treaty, is pretty short, actually, still defines a lot of our thinking. Whenever allies or people working in NATO think about a problem and they can't get their head around it, we end up going to the document that created us in the first place.

Now, none of us were there at the time. So short reminder 1949 was a time where for Western Europe, there was a lot of fear in the room because the Soviet Union. Stalin specifically openly said, these democracies, they have no future. It's a matter of time until they will fall and become communist countries.

So, you probably might not know this, but actually, communism's strength over democracy is that communism has a definite vision of the future, right? So, if you actually go to the origins of Marxism? Marxism is actually not unlike Fukuyama. A definite interpretation of history as a predictor of what's going to happen next. And communism believes that we know where the future will end up, which is, of course, the rule of a population by the working class. So it was at that time that democracy was, which was a minority political system in the world, felt very threatened. And so, NATO was created. NATO was created, you know, the joke:

to keep the Americans in, Russia out, and the Germans down.

Um, in many ways that's still the case, maybe less about Germany, but I think for everything else, that's still the case. Why? Because World War II created the feeling of many Europeans that without the United States, Germany would have won or Russia would have overrun. The Soviet Union would have overrun the continent.

Just bear that in mind, because as much as Gallipoli, as I've discovered in the last 10 days, still informs the Australian strategic DNA. World War II informs how Europe thinks about whatever is coming next. So, NATO is a future oriented organisation, but a lot of what you see today has evolved over time. Here I wrote perception that NATO has remained static since 1949. So, in 1949, the treaty actually created only the basics. A lot of what you see today about NATO did not exist or actually doesn't even feature in the North Atlantic Treaty.

For instance, the command structure, which I believe is NATO's real added value. At the outset, the treaty said actually, the idea for NATO was more like a coordination body where the member states would come and say, okay, what are you doing these days on defence? Well, I'm doing this. Well, then the Korea war happened and Eisenhower had the insight that we need an established military structure where it's very clear who's doing what. And that was, I think, the creation of NATO.

I'll show you what it looks like today. The command structure, it has evolved significantly over time depending on the threat perception. But of course, at the time, the threat perception was more or less what you see here, the idea that the Soviet Union would launch a massive attack on Western Europe and that has, of course, defined the Cold War. I don't want to bore you with all the Cold War story, but suffice it to say that throughout the Cold War, NATO went through multiple crises. You wouldn't believe it, but true. And that also had to do with disagreements on defence, with inflation.

So, the '70s was a huge crisis. We had founding documents that created rethinking how NATO thinks about what's going to happen next. The Harmel report, the three wise men, the withdrawal of France from the coordinated military structure, the Suez War, etc., etc. you don't need to know all of this. All you need to remember is that it's not like NATO had from '49 to 1990 smooth sailing, like yada yada. We're just here waiting for the Soviet Union to attack. There were multiple crises that the organization went through.

It grew, of course, in size over time. Even before the end of the Cold War and of course, after. So, NATO is like a school. You never you never walk into the same NATO twice. It's always a different organization. And here's what I told you just now the fear of the future, 1971, 1983, 1996. Pretty much identical titles. Will NATO survive détente in the '70s? You know, détente with the Soviet Union? Also in the '70s, late-mid to late '70s, massive inflation meant that defence spending, uh, you know, the burden of defence was an issue as much as now we had in the '80s here, you see, America's relations with its European allies are going through yet another period of crisis.

The reason I put that up is not to say, hey, we're not in crisis. It is to say *NATO is always in crisis*. And the reason for that is what I said at the beginning. NATO is a promise. NATO is a promise that we will do something in a situation that is probably the most terrible any state can endure.

And until we have proof of the fact that we're actually going to be there for each other, there's always going to be doubt.

So, nature relies on trust.

How much do we trust that the others will be there for us? Small caveat. You know, of course, that September 11 was the only time NATO declared Article Five, i.e. one member state had been attacked. And everybody agreed that this was the case. So, um, but funnily enough, what many people don't know is that it was not like the United States called NATO and said, hey, we want Article Five. It was the secretary general at the time who the day itself, the day 11 September 2001, convened a meeting and said we should. I think we should do this, and all allies agreed.

So you can argue a terrorist attack. Technically, that's not what NATO was designed for. So many people feel we still don't know if Russia launched an attack on a Baltic state on Poland, or we don't know whether everybody would actually be there. But that's because we don't know until the proof's in the pudding. So, until then, we rely on trust, on feeling, on intention and on capabilities. And that's where I think when we talk in a second about where we are right now, my feeling is that the less you have invested in your capabilities, the more you need NATO, and the more fearful you are of what's going to happen in the case of Article Five.

So, doubting NATO's existence is as common as NATO's existence itself. So, we are back in the future of doubt. Not the first time, but of course with a little... with a little more existential nature to it than in 1996 and 1990s the debate was does NATO even need to exist? Arguably less scary than today.

So, I brought to you one of my proudest achievements, the NATO radar.

When I joined, we joined NATO two and a half years ago. The first thing I did was find out who else in NATO thinks about the future. James, you can also download it from our website, for anybody else interested. But, you believe it or not, I put it up, I took it down from the website because I thought, nobody cares about this. I got a lot of emails saying, can you please put that back up because it's very useful to us. So, I sent an email to, well, loads of people in our little universe saying, hey, who is thinking about the future with how many people and what time horizon, and also, what kind of future are you thinking about?

Everything that's pink is the civilian structure in NATO and everything that's white is the military structure. Don't worry, I'll show you. I know how much military people love a good organigram. So, you get that on the next slide. But for the moment, just look at the closer you are to the centre, the closer your line is to the centre. The more you're thinking about today, and the further out you go, the more you're thinking about the future.

So I'll give you the example of Allied command transformation. And the bigger the line is, the more analysts you have. So Allied command transformation, they are the ones officially in charge of the future in NATO, meaning they create the conditions necessary for allies to understand what the future operating environment could look like, will probably look like. It's literally they're saying that's the probable future. Um, and they sit in Norfolk, Virginia. Uh, it's a pretty substantial organization, I'll say.

But as I said, they are looking at from a probability point of view and to with a definite purpose to create conditions to buy equipment, essentially. Science and technology. Organisation shape, of course. That's the military. The operational command structure. They have an analytical cell. Political and security analysis. Everything that's pink at the top is, um, as I said, NATO HQ. And they're looking mostly at the more immediate future.

So, what you'll see. And then the yellow thing, that's US Defence College Research Division. So, I decided based on this okay, we don't want to be too long term. We don't you don't want to be too close to the present, because there are many people in headquarters that are thinking about the present. When I say present, I mean the short future between now and the next year, tops.

So, we're in between that. We're doing five to ten years more or less. So what is very interesting is that there's a few things interesting about that. When I sent that email out, you know, I had just spent ten years in the EU. The EU has its own idiosyncrasies. I sent that email out expecting, as I would have knew a lot of people giving me a hard time for asking that question. Who are you? What are you doing with this map? What are you doing with that information?

But here I found a lot of people happy that somebody finally came and looked for them. And so based on that initial round of emails, we now created the informal native Foresight Network because we realized nobody actually has given us a real official mandate for this. But there's a lot of people in NATO suddenly thinking about the future in a way they haven't before. And that's why I noted here most of these structures are not older than twenty years.

Allied Command Transformation was created in 2003 as part of a command structure reform. Office of Net Assessment is a... very sorry... It's called Net Assessment Section actually is a very recent unit. Now it's 2 years old maybe 3 tops but fully staffed only now. etc. etc.

So, I think you can read a lot of, uh, the strategy... maybe not strategy... but you can indirectly read into what that means. Why did NATO start creating left, right and centre without necessarily a head of state meeting saying, from now on we shall all look to the future? It's one of the indications that something is changing. And whenever something changes, all kinds of future thinking becomes much more popular. And then what happens?

Inevitably, when we have a grasp on the future, we dismantle all these units because we think we don't need them. But that's not where we are at the moment. So the organigram of NATO tells you that NATO is becoming more concerned about the future, including the long term future, not just the short term, because you could argue that intelligence, that's always been an issue. But actually, that unit hasn't existed for that long either.

So, none of this is older than 20. A lot of it is actually less than 10 years old. Perhaps just a note on what we do as NATO Defence college. So, as I said, we are working on a 5-to-10-year time horizon. We are we see ourselves very much as part of this larger family, but we are looking at what I call fringe futures. So, the futures that the others are not looking at. We're looking at the future of the others.

So how others see the future?

How does China see the future of war?

Has the war in Ukraine changed how Russia thinks about the future of war? etc. etc.

So, we are filling the gaps that the others are leaving, but very much in coordination. So, here's just a quick one, because I realized in the last 10 days that a lot of you are not familiar with the NATO command structure, and it makes perfect sense. But some of these things probably need some explanation.

At the very top, you see the North Atlantic Council, you see the face of the secretary general here. But that's a bit of a misnomer, because the North Atlantic Council is, of course, the 32 member states. The secretary general is the face of NATO. He has the job to coordinate the 32 allies so he doesn't have much like the UN secretary general. He doesn't have that much executive power. Actually, his job is to coordinate. So, the real boss of NATO is the North Atlantic Council, which is chaired, of course, by the secretary general, currently a Dutch man, former prime minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte.

But below that, below him, you have the military equivalent, much less in media. Obviously, the military committee is the 32 military representatives from the member states, and they are, I'm going to say, the second highest authority because they are the member states. Member states are the highest body that the most important authority in NATO. So, if you want to know where NATO Defence College is, we just under the military committee, which is great for us because I have 32 bosses, which means I have effectively none.

Well, I have one. He's in Rome, but...

And so, the military committee chooses the Commandant of the NATO Defence College. They approve a work program etc. etc. So, NATO is NATO is part of the military command structure rather than the civilian. That's a very important one. And then you have the two command structures and three branches, the two strategic commands since 2003, since the reform on the right, you see Allied Command transformation, since creation, since France returned to the military structure in 2009. It's always been a French four star, at the moment it's Admiral Vandier.

And then on the left you have the operations command, which is always traditionally headed by an American. And now I have to cheat because it was Cavoli and he was just replaced, and I forgot the name. It's a new one who just arrived literally a few weeks ago. So, the way

it works in NATO, these posts aren't... It's not like if the US don't fill that job, that position, then it's vacant. If the US had said we're relinquishing our priority rights on this post, then another member state would have nominated. Maybe you heard in the media rumours that the US might let go of this traditionally American and arguably most important military position in NATO. But I think if that was ever a serious debate, they realized that once you let go of that, it's going to be hard to bring it back. So, it is in conjunction with the secretary general, who's traditionally a European. So, this is nowhere in writing, you know, how in international organizations, norms are as important as what's written. So just because it's a tradition that NATO does, it doesn't mean that you'll necessarily find a document that says, this is how it is, but this is always an American. This is traditionally a European. And then allied transformation is French, which is something else altogether. So below that you have the tactical commands. Operational commands etc. etc.

But just to bear that in mind when I say nature is a universe, you can understand why, because a lot of these bodies independently also think about the future, independently developed concepts. So, there is you know, we are multinational organizations. So not necessarily everything makes always sense from the inside because I think from the outside, people always think overplay the level of cohesion and organizational efficiency.

So let's get to the building blocks of how NATO perceives the future to be. And it's interesting that the key document was written or had begun... had begun being written. I'm not sure that's English, but you get what I'm saying. Before the war in Ukraine and it was initiated by shape. So, by the military side of the house, by the operational side of the house, rather the... what we call the DDA, the concept for deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic area.

What's interesting about this is that when the initiative was launched, the civilians in NATO. So, the civilian NATO member state's representatives. They didn't like it. They thought that this was being escalatory because what does this concept do? It actually says Russia is a threat. It says NATO faces two major threats. One is Russia and one is terrorism. Now, if you're in NATO, you know that the second part is a concession to the southern member states, particularly Italy, who think indeed that for them, terrorism is probably more important than Russia because it's closer to home than Russia is for them.

So traditionally, NATO has always had to juggle the east south dimension. We'll talk about whether there is another dimension in a second. But there's always been that, let's say, struggle. Which side of the flank is... which flank is the more important one? So, the DDA broke with a thirty-year understanding that NATO's role was primarily crisis management. So, peacekeeping operation and asymmetric threats. So, peacekeeping as in Kosovo, Bosnia, even humanitarian intervention 2011 Libya but not conventional defence and deterrence. So, 2020 is when this was launched and it was it was a premonition in a way, because it advocated for a return to NATO's roots and advocated to realign how NATO thinks about its military structure, about the future it envisions for itself in a much more conventional way.

And so that document, it took a while to be fully accepted. And in fact, you can imagine what which event helped that. You can Google it. You'll find an unclassified version of it online. But it's actually... if you read it today... it's pretty vanilla because like, yeah, Russia is a threat.

Okay. But if you read that in 2020 when people in NATO... when... well, not if you ask Warsaw or the Baltic capitals, but, everybody else thought, well, yeah, Russia is an annoying neighbour, but surely it's not a military threat to us?

Well, that has changed.

So as part of that, and I will say, we are work in progress, right? Because we have new member states, Finland and Sweden. Things are evolving, but you will see that as a result of this... Sorry, it's a bit grainy, but I think it speaks for itself... You can see a really big push towards the eastern flank, in fact, a very bold presence of NATO in the Baltic states. So enhanced forward presence in a way that of course before was not the case.

So that is not just the response to the war in Ukraine. As I said, the thinking about this, the thinking about along those lines started a year and a half, two years before the actual invasion, of course, between the invasion, the occupation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine as a whole. The attack on Ukraine.

There were six years of really uncomfortable coexistence, right? And during those six years, there were cyber-attacks. There were, you know, in the UK in particular, a poisoning of former Russian spies. I mean, a lot of below the threshold stuff was going on that gave many people the feeling that maybe Russia isn't as cool as we thought it was going to be. So, every time we're very scared of the future, we adjust. And when I say we, I mean NATO, but of course, I think it applies to everybody, every institution. That's why I said strategic foresight units tend to appear when people are scared of the future.

So, we had the D-Day and then we had the new strategic concept. And here same thing. The strategic concept initiative was launched before the invasion of Ukraine. So, a brief note I wrote here. The strategic concept is after the treaty, NATO's most important document. And the reason for that is that it's endorsed by all member states. It's well, not co-authored necessarily, but it's endorsed. You get. I'll show you in a second. Other reports, publications like when we publish a report, people will think, yeah, that's NATO document. Well, it's not endorsed by all 32 member states. So, when it's endorsed, it means we're all on board for that.

And that's where NATO consensus, I'll tell you, is a bit of a tricky thing, but I'll tell you that EU consensus is much more difficult. So, since 1949, we've had eight strategic concepts. And for between '49 and the end of the Cold War, which I think remember earlier when I said, there's this idea that during the Cold War, NATO was a static organization. The fact that it had four strategic concepts during that time gives you an idea of the change that was ongoing during those 40 years.

So since then we've had four more. Obviously, every time at a strategic junction, '91, '99, very much influenced by the Balkan Wars, 2010 and of course, now 2022. 2010 was the aftermath of Afghanistan. There was some debates at the time. Do we actually need a new strategic concept? The old one actually still does the trick, but I think it had a lot of the Afghanistan insights in it. So, 2022, as I said, started at a time before the invasion. You will hear a lot of Europeans say that the invasion was a wakeup call, a traumatic event. It changed rapidly and massively. How many people in NATO and NATO member states were thinking about whatever would come from Russia?

But of course, there were there were there were precursors, there were elements that led people to believe, I think, things are changing. And so, in addition to the DDA, the strategic concept mentions Russia fourteen times, so it stands at the epicentre - Russia. The new strategic concept, which you can Google, it's now an unclassified document. It very clearly states Russia is a threat. And remember what I said earlier about the 2020 DDA. Certain civilians, civilian politicians weren't happy about that because they were still mentally at a time when let's not designate Russia as a threat. Maybe we can still aim for détente and some kind of de-escalation.

That ship has sailed.

Nobody is up for détente in Europe now with Russia, like, literally almost nobody. But what's interesting for you is that we have a newcomer in the strategic thinking of NATO, and that is China. It was mentioned in the NATO summit declaration of 2019, but not as forcefully as here. And let me quote for you. So, the PRC stated ambitions, and coercive policies, challenge our interests, securities and security and values. So, China is not designated as a threat, but it's pretty strong language if you go further down. So, it's very opaque about its military buildup, its malicious hybrid and cyber operation, and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target allies and harm allied security.

It goes on about supply chains. And then the deepening strategic partnership between the PSC and the Russian Federation undercut the rules based international order and run counter to our values and interests. I mean, for a multinational organization that is really, really strong, the not the caveat, but the number fourteen below, tries to take the sting out a little bit, says remain open to conversation.

We remain open to constructive engagement with the PRC, including to build reciprocal transparency that we have not changed since then. We still have not declared China a threat as NATO. But... and that's why, you know, the second point, there is still some hope that also at the European level, I'm going to say the EU level, that although China is the, you called it a systematic challenger, a competitor, that there is some possibility for diplomacy somewhere down the road. But it's pretty strong.

So, we have the strategic concept and then we have another document. When I say here the other futures of NATO, there are less political. But in a way, I think it makes it more interesting because you have less steering from the political level and maybe a bit more directness. So, in 2020, again before the war, the secretary general at the time, Stoltenberg, he launched the process NATO 2030 - a large reflection, reform and innovation process across the alliance to make NATO ready for the future. So, launched in 2020.

So, remember we had the DDA. So clearly some people started thinking maybe Russia isn't so cool. We had the pandemic. What happened during the pandemic? During the pandemic, Europeans discovered that China can actually be pretty aggressive in terms of language, but also cyber-attacks. We had very scary cyber-attacks, for instance, one on a Belgian hospital during the pandemic, which we suppose came from China. So this document that I quoted here from is an expert report which quoted, sorry, which ranked China second in terms of threat for NATO, ahead of terrorism. Remember I said earlier terrorism was the concession to the to the southern member states, the South.

So, political instability in the Middle East, North Africa and climate change. So, that means you have a real break from NATO's strategic understanding of the future between, well, 2010, obviously, when the last strategic concept was written in 2020, 2020 is actually the turning point. I'm going to argue when it comes to China. Everything else.

Then it picked up speed. But the fact that you have it in so such bold terms. While China does not pose an immediate military threat to the Euro-Atlantic area on the scale of Russia, its expanding military reach into the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Arctic, we'll talk about Arctic in a second.

Deepening defence ties with Russia. That was at a time when it wasn't where it is now etc. etc. pose a real issue to NATO. And then, of course, we had the summit in Washington last year, declaring linking officially Russia and China, saying China is a decisive enabler of Russia's war in Ukraine. Decisive enabler means they're not just looking the other way at the UN. They're actually helping them duck EU sanctions, helping them and equipment terms, helping them in many other different ways.

At the same time, that summit also announced deepened relations with the IP4, especially when it comes to cyber defence. So, if you're going to say, let me just do a quick detour to Japan. Okay, but what happened to the NATO office in Japan that was announced and that never happened because the French didn't want to. Doesn't that contradict it? It does, but not in a strategic sense.

So, it's true that there was an initiative by the General Secretariat to open a NATO liaison office in Japan, and then the French blocked it. But that doesn't mean that NATO doesn't worry about China or that NATO doesn't like Japan. It just means that in an institutional sense, the French were not sure that this would not be seen as an escalatory measure by China, that a liaison office is the right way to go.

So you have a lot of disagreement on how are we going to frame this? But on the direction, I think there is not much disagreement. I have another document for you if you're not tired yet.

What strategic foresight says so. This is the document from Allied Command Transformation, the ones officially in charge of the probable future of their strategic foresight analysis, which came out two years ago, mentions Russia 38 times and China 33 times. So near parity. And what's interesting, especially in one sentence. So that is the thing that I'll tell you bluntly that we're all worried about is not that just that they're friends. The worst-case scenario is that they coordinate in a military manner, meaning you have a two front situation: China, Taiwan or something along those lines. Russia in the Arctic or something, Ukraine, Baltic state, Doesn't matter because we do not... the United States in particular cannot do both, and we as Europeans, we can't do it alone right now. So, if something along those lines happened today, it would be a real issue, I think, for all parties concerned. Well, not maybe not for Russia and China, but for everybody else.

So, the way Allied command transformation looks at this is with a very simple. Two variable scenarios. And they're thinking the pervasive competition scenarios for the worst-case high disruption low cooperation. They consider the likeliest so a pretty bad environment impacted by structural disruption, strategic shock, cascading effects, the state societies. So, the worst worst case.

Now that doesn't mean that's what's going to happen, right? Our job in military affairs generally is to be worst case thinkers, but it shows you that we have completely left the world behind. That used to characterize European thinking about the future of the security and defence. We for probably 30 years thought that the biggest threat to European security is a terrorist attack, maybe a cyber-attack. But definitely not a conventional attack by Russia. And now, if you're asking, is that actually... is actually that's what's going to happen?

This is why I have this slight caveats to bear in mind. So, there is a few... there are a few controversial aspects to how much NATO should take an interest in this region or not. When I say that, I don't think that anybody thinks that Taiwan or China is not an issue, or that it doesn't concern Europeans. That's literally you have here a quote from the section at the time, Stoltenberg.

Taiwan could become the next Ukraine.

And there has been this very clear understanding that these two are Russia and China, and not just their ambitions, but also the way they think about defence are so similar, and they're colluding in a way that could potentially become very dangerous. I think nobody disagrees with that.

But you have still some disagreements over division of labour. Who does what? You heard Hegseth saying at the Shangri-La dialogue. Well, the Europeans actually should stay in Europe while at the same time, the last administration kind of expecting Europeans to kind of show up in the IP4 and signal support NATO as an organization.

So, this is an interesting one. NATO as an Organization according to Article Six. Its area of operation is the territories of its member states north of the Tropic of Cancer. Why did they write that? Because at the time you had France having colonial territory in North Africa. So north of the Tropic of Cancer. So New Caledonia is not part of the NATO treaty, for instance, and of vessels and aircraft in, in the same area.

So technically, Article Six says very clearly that this region is not... is not part of NATO's area of operation. However, the NATO treaty also says that NATO is a collective self-defence organization as defined by the United Nations Charter. So, in the spirit of self-defence, if you're saying it's a collective defence situation, you can always argue that there is no territorial limitation.

And that's why we looked at a paper, we looked at a situation, a scenario where China attacks the United States via Hawaii. That was a really interesting study. Legally speaking, because Hawaii is, of course, not north of the Tropic of Cancer, it's south of the Tropic of Cancer. Also, when the United States joined NATO, Hawaii was not a state, but a territory.

But we came to the conclusion that we're not in a legal context. We're in a political context. I would find it hard to believe that if we have a situation where the US is attacked by China in Hawaii and it comes to the North Atlantic Council says, I think it's Article Five that the other member states say, well, we don't think so because legally speaking, it isn't right. So, I think the law will not give you the right answer to this. At the end of the day, it's a political decision.

Just as NATO's intervention in Yugoslavia in 1999 was not mandated by the United Nations. Technically, well, legally it's a breaking, breaking of international law. So, I would say that this is a bit of a cosmetic conversation where there is a will, where the political will, NATO can very well decide that it could be active in the Indo-Pacific. Whether it does that is a political question. And that's why, when I say here you have a desire to maintain as a Euro-Atlantic organisation, that is, as I said, it's France. It's to some extent the US, but it's not clear why. But you also have especially European commercial, which I realize now echo very much Australia's concerns. Many European states trade heavily with China, especially Germany. So cannot afford actually to have to be dragged into a military conflict with China. Ideally, what we want is that nothing happens, and I think that's what we have in common.

So these are a few caveats to bear in mind. The last thing I want to say is that when you look at one, I have a pet peeve. I love looking at old futures. We also have a series at the college called the Hindsight Series and like to assess how well old foresight did. And a lot of it is really good, and a lot of it is not good, especially when it comes to the future of war. We tend to not be so good because if you read Lawrence Freedman, *Future of War a History*, we tend to overstate the impact of technology and underestimate how much an opponent can actually adjust to us.

So let me talk a minute about what the current scenario is that many Europeans are thinking about, or NATO is actually thinking about. The scenario that's conventionally, pitched at the moment is that by 2030, Russia will be ready for an attack on a NATO country. Specifically, people are mostly thinking the Baltic states. Sometimes Poland also appears in this conversation, but it's mostly the Baltic states. So what do we do as a result?

Well, we plug the hole in the Baltics. We put a lot of troops in the Baltics assuming, well, if they're there, surely Russia won't attack. So, a few things about this. Number one, what I find interesting is that the European public debate conflates Ukraine with NATO. Ukraine is not a member of NATO. I think we had this conversation yesterday about failed deterrence around Ukraine. Well, Ukraine was on its own, and arguably that's why it's always wanted to be part of NATO. Because when you're in NATO, your chances of not being attacked are much higher than not. So, Russia has never, the Soviet Union has never, attacked a NATO country in a conventional way.

Of course, you know, you can argue the cyber-attacks on Estonia, but has never been an attack on a NATO country. You only know that deterrence works when it doesn't work right, when it fails, you can point at it and say, okay, it clearly hasn't worked. We're assuming the Cold War remained cold because NATO was NATO and has a strong deterrent capability. The debate around Article Five. To me, I think you can actually swing it in the other direction. Instead of asking ourselves, do we think the Americans would come? Do we think the others would come actually to our rescue? You could also ask, Does Moscow think that they would come?

Because even if there is reasonable doubt, then surely the deterrent aspect is still very strong. So, I do not think that Russia is actively seeking a war with NATO just to bring NATO down. But that is the perception in many European circles, however. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying Russia is not a threat, but what I'm saying is we need to understand a lot better

how Russia thinks about the future and what Russia wants from it. Do I think Putin would love NATO to disintegrate? 100%!

But that's not his strategic priority. Number one, strategic priority number one, is build Russia as an important economic and strategic power. To that he needs trade. He needs to become an export power. North and south, Arctic and Persian Gulf.

Now let's talk about the Arctic for a second. I mentioned earlier Finland and Sweden joined NATO. We have to adjust the way we're thinking about the... the future of war, our deterrence capability. We now have a much longer border with Russia because of Finland. How do we do that? So that is still a work in progress. We never had to have a northern flank in NATO. We were just not going that far north. Now we do. And where it all culminates is in the Arctic.

So, in the Arctic, you have the United States. You have 53% of Russian territory, of Arctic territory, is Russian. And you also have Norway and you have Denmark. So, in Finland, sorry, and what does that mean? It means, in addition, that climate change will open that area, which never used to be interesting for strategic reasons because it was all ice. Climate change will mean that region will open up in the next five to ten years. Probably by 2038, it will be open for shipping year-round.

Why is that an issue? Well, because it's also an opportunity. Shipping between Hamburg and Shanghai can be cut down to ten days, as opposed to ten days shorter than via the Suez Canal. So global shipping lanes will, probably many of them, probably not from Australia, but all the others will probably move north.

And Russia, very much like China, has declared that that area has a... you need Russian permission to enter those waters, even though they're not Russian waters according to international law.

So, number one, global interests mean that the presence of... well, all kinds of ships will increase.

Number two, Russia is feeling, on the one hand emboldened, but on the other also scared because the ice used to give it a lot of protection. Without the ice, it feels that, you know, it feels vulnerable to the north. So, it has restructured its military districts. It has a new naval strategy. Most of its nuclear submarines are actually in the Arctic.

And guess who doesn't have an Arctic strategy? It's NATO.

And the elephant in the room is Greenland, because Greenland, as you know, belongs to Denmark and the United States is very interested in it. Now, the Greenlanders are not very interested in the United States, but China is very interested also in Greenland.

So, we have, in my analysis, a lot of potential flashpoints, friction points that are unfolding that could involve, United States, Russia and other NATO member states. So, if I had to place my bets or the real the real gap that I see the real danger for NATO in the future is the Arctic.

Because the Russians are moving there. We are not moving there.

We're not even thinking about it. We're putting all kinds of soldiers in the Baltic states, and then we think our job is done. I think that we should do that, definitely, but I don't think the job is done.

So last but not least, our trend analysis capacity is emerging. Remember I showed you the radar earlier and I said none of this is older than 20 years. We're getting quite well. We're getting better, but it's still a work in progress. So, everything that I just told you, we are a very small unit working on this.

And I think overall NATO future thinking could still... is still a work in progress, still needs to get a lot better.

Last but not least, uh, please sign up to our publications. This was a publication that got us a lot of attention from China, NATO, and a Taiwan contingency. They didn't like it, but of course, this is an AI generated picture of Taipei in flames. And with that, I'll give you the floor. Thank you.