North Atlantic Treaty Organization
New Perspectives on Shared Security: NATO’s Next 70 Years

Executive Summary

Hudson Institute hosted a private workshop of public intellectuals and government officials on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The discussion focused heavily on NATO’s capabilities. Mirroring the public discourse, participants in the workshop worried about the alliance’s Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), strategic lift, and cyber capabilities, to name just three areas of military significance. The rapid disembarkation and rapid movement of large numbers of troops from west to east remains an area of attention, too.

Over the years, NATO’s economic and military superiority has caused its strategic rivals to invest in other areas of attack, too. Today, Russia and China have mastered an array of gray zone tactics that leverage the West’s openness against it. In the coming decades, therefore, NATO must steel itself against operations below the threshold of major combat. At times, this may require the use of offensive tools, from sanctions to cyber operations. The prominence of gray zone tactics was an important subject in the workshop.

NATO was founded at a time when Europe was at the center of global affairs. Today, the Asia-Pacific region is supplanting Europe in economic, demographic, and military importance. As a result, the Obama and Trump administrations have sought to shift U.S. resources into the Pacific. In the coming decades, workshop participants argued, NATO will need to clarify its role in the Asia-Pacific. What, if any, role might the alliance play beyond continental Europe?

Finally, the roundtable debated the role of NATO in issues with public resonance, such as illegal immigration and the attendant trafficking of persons, weapons, and narcotics. Will NATO play a role in this area, or are these areas best understood as the domain of others?

Finally, for NATO to remain strong and vibrant in the decades to come, there was general agreement that its members must improve their economic growth rates, emphasizing innovation, and demographics in the face of rapidly declining birth rates.