

**Focus: The Liquefaction of NATO:
The Atlantic Alliance Under the Trump 2.0 Administration**
(Summary)

Essay: The Liquefaction of NATO

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), one of history's most robust and powerful multi-lateral alliances, is facing a crisis of melt-down. Having weathered the storm of the first Trump administration and regained its unity in the years following the invasion of Ukraine, NATO now finds itself in a situation where the concept of collective self-defense, its very foundation as an institution, is being called into question by the reinstated President Trump and his administration.

The essence of this crisis lies in the Trump administration's desire to disengage itself from Europe, its rejection of the values that have underpinned the postwar relationship between the US and Europe, its collaboration with far-right forces in Europe, and its attempts to restore relations with the heretofore common enemy in Moscow without regard for the views of European countries.

Looking ahead, various options for NATO's future can be considered. Drawing on the scenarios explored by one German think tank, three possibilities are presented here for examination: ① an Atlantic Alliance minus, ② a European defense alliance, and ③ toolkitization.

The Atlantic Alliance crisis is not something Japan, reliant as it is on the Japan-US alliance, can afford to ignore. The implications of this crisis, including the differences between the two alliances, must be ascertained.

1 America's "Betrayal"?

The Domestic Political Factors Behind Its "Abandonment" of Europe

Takayuki Nishiyama (Professor, Faculty of Law, Seikei University)

US President Donald Trump has been critical of NATO since the 2016 presidential election and has even suggested that the US might withdraw from the alliance. In March 2025, he went so far as to state that NATO would not defend member countries who failed to pay their fair share of defense spending. However, he has abruptly begun to praise NATO since the June NATO summit, where member countries agreed to significantly increase their defense spending. The unpredictability of the Trump administration's foreign policy has a strong personal aspect. It is nevertheless an indisputable fact that the foreign policy of the United States, which has played a leading role in creating a liberal international order since World War II and been actively engaged in foreign affairs, has been undergoing major changes in recent years. This paper seeks to explain the reasons behind the changes in US foreign policy, particularly toward Europe, by focusing primarily on domestic factors such as public opinion, populism, party politics, and fiscal considerations.

2 Trust in the US Nuclear Umbrella Shaken:

The Second Trump Administration and Nuclear Deterrence in Europe

Tsuyoshi Goroku (Associate Professor, Faculty of International Politics and Economics, Nishogakusha University)

Europe now faces a dual "threat": growing Russian assertiveness and American unpredictability.

While Russia continues its assault on Ukraine and intensifies its nuclear intimidation and hybrid operations against NATO member states, the second Trump administration appears to be turning its back on Europe. Consequently, distrust toward the United States is spreading across the continent, and confidence in extended nuclear deterrence has been severely shaken. European anxiety over the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella is not new, yet this time is different: countries that have traditionally placed their transatlantic ties above all else are now more open to discussing a European nuclear deterrent centered on the nuclear forces of the UK and France. Both London and Paris are seeking to embed their nuclear forces more firmly within European security, but they possess neither the capacity nor the political will to replace the US extended nuclear deterrence. Instead, they are working to reinforce their complementary role in Europe's nuclear deterrent posture and to strengthen the "European pillar" of NATO.

3 Transformation of the EU through "ReArm Europe Plan"? **Towards Overcoming Fragmentation**

Yoichiro Usui (Professor, Faculty of International Studies, Niigata University of International and Information Studies)

This paper provides an overview of the EU's "ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030," which is the security and defense policy programme published in March 2025, and examines its political significance, demonstrating that this policy framework could enhance the European Commission's political power and serve as a practical example of a "differentiated integration" designed to prevent the fragmentation in EU security system. Additionally, this paper examines how the EU functions within the four-tier European security system consisting of: major power-led minilateral military cooperation such as FNC, JEF and EI2; NATO; the EU; and the European Political Community (EPC). It presents the view that the EU maintains political cohesion through consistent policy orientations while allowing for flexible institutional adaptation. Following this analysis, the paper concludes by noting that the three major Euro parties constituting the pro-EU grand coalition have unanimously expressed support for the concrete institutionalization of Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on European Union, which stipulates the right to collective self-defense, and for the establishment of an EU military force under unified command. This suggests that the current EU security and defense policy is not its final form.

4 In Moscow's Eyes: Unresolved Forces or Resolve without Forces?

Miho Okada (Professor, School of Liberal Arts and General Education, National Defense Academy)

In Moscow's eyes, the Trump administration's words and deeds are highly ambivalent, so Russia can never optimistically take them at face value. With reduced US engagement increasing the uncertainty of NATO's collective defense function, the EU is seeking defense autonomy and rearmament. This is not necessarily to Russia's advantage, as it means simultaneously facing two threats: strong forces that do exist, albeit with an unclear level of resolve as US engagement diminishes, and the building of forces by a political and economic organization heretofore without forces but full of resolve. Russia will eventually face integrated and resolute forces – a coalition of the willing – and may find itself in even more worsened balance of power. Deliberate drone intrusions and airspace violations can be seen as attempts to balance conventional inferiority by weakening confidence in the collective defense guarantee and thus undermining the credibility of the Atlantic Alliance.

5 Alliance and Deterrence: Implications for Japan and East Asia

Tomohisa Takei (Former Chief of Staff of the Maritime Self-Defense Force; Adjunct Fellows at The Japan Institute of International Affairs)

Looking at East Asia from the perspective of the Ukraine war, a bold move by China to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait would find US deterrence ineffective, while military intervention by the United States would turn the crisis into a long-term war of attrition as the US and China both seek to avoid escalation to nuclear war.

A collapse of the semiconductor industry caused by such a crisis in Taiwan could immediately trigger economic chaos surpassing past oil crises and the first Gulf War, or at the very least a recession that could last for several years. Given Japan's economic ties with Taiwan as well as its own geographical location, Japan has better reasons than most to prevent a Taiwan crisis.

As history has shown, the best way to deter major powers is through alliances, and Japan will need to rally a coalition of countries centered on the Japan-US alliance. The greatest challenge will be rebuilding a strong and enduring US presence in the region. East Asian allies and partners must take proactive steps to enhance the overall resilience of their defense capabilities and cooperate in revitalizing the US' defense industry to restore US deterrence.

国際問題 第727号 2025年10月号

編集人 『国際問題』編集委員会

発行人 佐々江 賢一郎

発行所 公益財団法人日本国際問題研究所 (<https://www.jiia.or.jp/>)

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電話 03-3503-7263 (出版担当)

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