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# Perspectives on Integrated Deterrence Among US Allies and Partners in Europe



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*Prepared for the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office  
(Joint Staff, J3)*

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction and Study Overview .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Theme #1: Achieve a common understanding of deterrence.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Theme #2: Understand adversaries’ and Allies’ strategic cultures .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Understanding our adversaries .....	6
Understanding our Allies .....	8
<b>Theme #3: US leadership and presence is critical for the credibility of deterrence, building cohesion, and Allied coordination .....</b>	<b>10</b>
US and Ally commitment to Ukraine is crucial for future deterrence .....	11
<b>Theme #4: Utilize alliances within alliances and well-designed divisions of labor .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Bilateral relationships.....	13
Increased European role and division of labor .....	14
<b>Theme #5: Emphasize NATO alliance cohesion and shared values as a source of strength.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Internal threats to cohesion .....	16
External threats to cohesion .....	17
Emphasizing shared values.....	17
<b>Theme #6: Harness shared capabilities and potential synergy across theaters .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Capabilities challenges .....	18
Funding shortfalls and slow implementation of defense spending.....	18
Procurement speed and system.....	19
Insufficient numbers of personnel .....	19
Lack of personnel with required expertise .....	20
Military industries are not on a wartime footing .....	20
Insufficient infrastructure.....	20
<b>Theme #7: Shift mindset, invoking whole-of-society efforts and proactive campaigning .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Proactive campaigning .....	23
<b>Concluding Thoughts .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Selected Bibliography .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix: Full List of Study Questions Asked of Participants .....</b>	<b>30</b>

## Introduction and Study Overview

This work was situated within the broader Strategic Multilayer Assessment **Strategic Deterrence Frameworks (SDF)** study, which incorporated four lines of effort (LOEs) and was initiated at the request of US Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM).<sup>1</sup> The present LOE<sub>4</sub> study was oriented around two guiding questions in a supplementary project request letter signed by US European Command (EUCOM) Deputy Commander, Lieutenant General Steven Basham:<sup>2</sup> 1) How does USEUCOM deter with and through allies and partners as part of integrated deterrence? and 2) What is the optimal balance of US and ally commitment and capability to maintain an effective deterrent to aggression in Europe?

This study conceptualizes integrated deterrence as incorporating multiple elements, including coordination that occurs across domains, capabilities, or instruments of national power, among allies and partners, and across geographies—emphasizing the latter two elements. The study was contextualized to a three-peer deterrence problem,<sup>3</sup> for which we explored three aspects: signaling, challenges and opportunities, and resources required for effective deterrence.

Twenty-two<sup>4</sup> experts were interviewed<sup>5</sup> for this study<sup>6</sup> under the Chatham House Rule.<sup>7</sup> Participants represented the perspectives of 13 countries<sup>8</sup> and subject matter expertise on Russia, China, and hybrid threats. A participant summary can be found in the tables to the right. Country experts were drawn from four categories: 1) retired generals or admirals at think tanks or individual countries’ war colleges, 2) current military officers (US equivalent O-6 and above), 3) country subject matter experts, including non-government experts, and 4) National Liaison Officers. Interviews were conducted in two rounds to enable the team to gather initial insights, determine topics for further exploration, identify any gaps in knowledge or understanding, and allow for question refinement based on initial findings and USEUCOM feedback.

Desk research was conducted to provide a basis for study and question development, guide study interviews, and inform analysis. Analysis was conducted on over 250 pages of interview transcripts to develop an appropriate framework in which to organize and contextualize the experts’ rich and wide-ranging insights. While experts’ opinions varied, this variation typically reflected nuance along a conceptual spectrum rather than opposing schools of thought. There was a great deal of convergence across the experts’ inputs, not only within this study but also coherent with study findings from other LOEs in the broader SDF project. The current analysis yielded seven key themes, the content of which **reflect the experts’ insights and recommendations** and are elaborated below. For clarity of presentation, the experts’ ideas are stated in a straightforward, declarative way (i.e., most sentences will not begin with “the experts indicated...”); all assertions not otherwise cited thus represent the study experts’ statements and suggestions rather than the present author’s. Themes 1-3 broadly capture the necessary

### Participant Summary

Type of Institution	Count
Academic Institution	9
War College	3
Gov't Ministry or Office	7
Gov't - Diplomatic Org'n	1
Gov't Affiliated or Funded Org'n	7
Think Tank	6

Background / Role	Count
Military (current)	5
Military (retired)	3
Non-Military	14

**Note:** Categories may overlap, and experts may have multiple affiliations. Total counts thus may not equal number of study participants (N = 22).

<sup>1</sup> To receive a copy of the SMA SDF project overview, please contact Mariah Yager at [mariah.c.yager.ctr@mail.mil](mailto:mariah.c.yager.ctr@mail.mil).

<sup>2</sup> To receive a copy of the original or supplementary request letters, please contact Mariah Yager at [mariah.c.yager.ctr@mail.mil](mailto:mariah.c.yager.ctr@mail.mil).

<sup>3</sup> More precise than “three-body,” the phrase “three-peer” refers to deterrence problems involving three major powers or near-peer competitors. For an articulation of the concept, applied to two nuclear-armed, near-peer competitors, please see Astorino-Courtois (2021).

<sup>4</sup> The affirmative response rate for study participation was 69% (32 individuals contacted, nine non-responses, three declined to participate). It is with deep gratitude that we thank this study’s participants for their time as well as frank and thoughtful insights.

<sup>5</sup> Study interviews were conducted from November 2023 through March 2024, with the majority (77%) conducted in January and February.

<sup>6</sup> The full set of study questions asked of the participants can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout the report, direct quotes from study participants that are highlighted in callouts will appear in *green font* and without attribution, to observe the Chatham House Rule. One quote appears in *purple*; this is a quote from an external publication and is, therefore, cited.

<sup>8</sup> Country list: Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, and the UK.

prerequisites for effective integrated deterrence, while themes 4-6 focus on execution, and the central focus of theme 7 is forward-looking. There are significant connections across themes.

## Theme #1: Achieve a common understanding of deterrence



For the success of *integrated deterrence with and through allies and partners*, it is essential to begin by reaching a common understanding of what deterrence is. These discussions must address not only deterrence but must also fully explore the integration component.

To achieve this goal, it is important that the US begin by comprehending how its Allies and partners<sup>9</sup> interpret the phrase *integrated deterrence* and how they conceptualize deterrence and related concepts. This may be influenced significantly by Allies' and partners' strategic cultures (see theme 2).

This theme does not simply make a pedantic point about terminology. On the contrary, reaching a common understanding can minimize or eliminate misconceptions that limit coordination and can allow for more precise synchronization of capabilities and actions toward well-specified goals. It may also increase actors' understanding of how and what they are signaling to their counterparts when interacting with them. A significant barrier to effective coordination among Allies has been the absence of a common strategic language, which is rooted in part in a lack of practice with strategic studies among political leaders. Key leaders in larger countries (e.g., the United Kingdom, France, or Germany) have a basic background in strategic studies by virtue of having large bureaucracies and institutional memory and capability from the Cold War period, which reinforces their ability to think strategically about military issues. Smaller countries may lack this foundation, resulting in political leaders speaking very different languages when it comes to strategy.

The Euro-Atlantic Allied community, in fact, lacks a common understanding and language surrounding deterrence.<sup>10</sup> There is significant variation not only across the US and Allies in the conceptualization of deterrence but also among Allies—even those with similar socio-political histories or within the same geographic region. Regardless of how close the Allies are, they often have different ideas about deterrence. Their degree of interest in deterrence as an effect may also vary, which can result in the use of different concepts altogether. Some countries, instead, may lack existing doctrine or terminology to facilitate discussions of deterrence. Understanding all this variation is fundamental to the US's ability to speak with its Allies about integrating deterrence, and the experts recommended that the US socialize its use of integrated deterrence well to clarify its intended meaning and provide the vital conceptual framework. Multiple experts indicated that countries' liaison officers, perhaps through further integration within USEUCOM, can assist the effort to increase understanding.

The US conceptualization of integrated deterrence is broad, invoking a multifaceted approach involving seamless coordination across 1) warfighting domains, 2) capabilities or instruments of U.S. national power, 3) Allies and partners, and 4) geographic theaters (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022). Some US Allies may conceive of deterrence more narrowly. The French restriction of deterrence (translated as *dissuasion*) to nuclear deterrence is well-known: "When Washington says 'integrated deterrence,' Paris hears 'integrated nuclear deterrence'" (Pappalardo, 2024). Yet, deterrence, translated as *découragement*, refers to all instruments of military power in all domains (Pappalardo, 2024) and may leave more room for discussion of integration. Among some European Allies, the interpretation of deterrence as signifying solely nuclear deterrence may, in fact, create uneasiness. Some Allies invoke different concepts from

<sup>9</sup> In this report, Allies will be capitalized when referring to NATO Allies, specifically. Lowercase will be used in instances referring to US allies more generally. NATO Allies' commitment, via Article V, provides for collective defense, and thus delineates a specific course of action in the case of an attack on a NATO member. While that topic is beyond this paper's scope, see theme 5 for a related discussion of NATO cohesion.

<sup>10</sup> One expert observed, however, that the language that is used more generally at NATO meetings is unified across participants—though he urged that this unity must be maintained over time.



deterrence. For example, the German focus is on the concept of integrated security, and smaller European countries (e.g., Finland, Sweden) that may lack the capability to deter through punishment may use the concept of *threshold*. Allies may also use different words to refer to different deterrence concepts, like the US. For example, Finland uses *pidäke* as a direct translation of deterrence, while *pelote* mainly refers to deterrence by punishment. These examples underscore the importance of ensuring that interlocutors are all aware of the intended meaning when terms like *integrated deterrence* are used.

*"... part of the debates also arises from a problem of interpretation steeped in semantics, that should not overshadow the fact that there are also many points of convergence between France and US strategic thinking on how to dissuade, deter, and constrain potential adversaries."*

— Pappalardo (2024), external publication

Beyond coming to a common understanding of what integrated deterrence is, the US and its allies also need to specify more clearly and agree on what behaviors we intend to deter and what actions within and outside NATO we may, therefore, take in specific contexts. One expert illustrated this point with an example: If we know what kind of components Russia uses for its main weapon systems and seek to deter their development, we can focus on how we might ban the materials and other required components. The more precise the problem definition and well-specified the context, the more concrete and, thus, effective the solutions are likely to be. Toward that end, workshops and conferences may provide Allies with a useful opportunity to share concepts and work through terminological and conceptual disagreements or misunderstandings. While that cross-cutting conceptual work is being crystallized, Allies can work together to establish a set of concrete and achievable objectives that can obtain widespread buy-in to ensure the credibility and practical implementation of integrated deterrence.

## Theme #2: Understand adversaries' and Allies' strategic cultures



Strategic culture has been defined in multiple ways. A recent review of the relevant literature (Kuznar et al., 2023) provides the following definition that, as the authors note, captures the consensus of most scholars, “An actor’s<sup>11</sup> **strategic culture** is composed of beliefs, experiences, assumptions, attitudes, and patterned behaviors that shape perceptions and preferences **about its security-related interests, objectives, and activities.**” The present study’s experts underscored that effective integrated deterrence with and through allies and partners will require a deep understanding of the strategic culture not only of US adversaries but also of US Allies.

### Understanding our adversaries

A failure to fully understand competitors’ strategic cultures presents a current challenge to deterring Russian aggression in Europe and a potential threat to effective deterrence of future Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. The US must know its competitors and define any threats they pose properly to design the correct approach to combatting them. As one expert emphasized, it will be important to “right-size” our understanding of opponents’ resolve,<sup>12</sup> as underestimation can result in inadvertent escalation, and overestimation can lead to deference or self-deterrence. US Allies and partners—perhaps especially smaller countries—know the threat landscape, and their histories, geographies, and recent experiences have deepened their understanding of our common adversaries. Their perspectives, in turn, can enrich US understanding and help with right-sizing.

<sup>11</sup> “An actor is defined as the collective decision-making unit, which itself may be comprised of different stakeholders, each of whom has its own strategic culture and interests” (Kuznar et al., 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Naturally, it is also important to properly assess opponents’ capabilities, but that assessment is a separate consideration from factors that may be tied most directly to strategic culture, such as resolve.

**"We are not pushing [the] Russians almost any way. We are not creating any strategic dilemmas... We are afraid of ourselves... But look, let's be realistic. Nobody wants a new war in Europe and large conflict... countries in the region would be most exposed. We would suffer most if something happens. But we just cannot be understood in Moscow as weak. And now we are, and that's a problem."**

To date, US and NATO signaling have been predicated on an inconsistent understanding of Russian strategic culture. While one expert noted that there is significant continuity from the Soviet era to the present Russian regime in terms of mentality and how those in the Kremlin think about the world, another expert urged that we must avoid the mistake of fully equating the current scenario in Europe to that of the Cold War period. Whereas the Soviet Union was a status quo power, the Putin regime—as in the Xi regime in China—was described by the experts as a fundamentally revisionist power.<sup>13</sup> A failure to fully understand Russian strategic culture has resulted in a misreading of Russia's intentions, the lens through which it interprets others' intentions and behaviors, and the complex interplay of both domestic and foreign factors that have shaped Russia's approach to foreign policy. Russia understands the language of capabilities and bases its own power on *military* power.<sup>14</sup> According to some of the experts,

Russia recognizes and responds to demonstrations of strength and the language of force—not signs of weakness or hesitation, which it will view as an opportunity. This suggests the need for a continued strong US presence on the continent (see theme 3). A strong consensus among the Allies, along with effective coordination of individual countries' national resources, will signal strength to Russia in a way that increases the likelihood of successful deterrence of further aggression (see themes 5 and 6). In contrast, difficulties encountered in reaching consensus (e.g., on NATO enlargement) or in the defense planning process will be read by external observers, including Russia, as a sign of weakness. Military exercises are one useful avenue both to demonstrate capabilities and to signal that the US and other Allies are coordinated, ready, and willing to use those capabilities. One expert argued that the US and Allies have, to date, refrained from stronger demonstrations of capability in part due to fear of unintended escalation.

The war in Ukraine has offered the West the opportunity to learn more about Russia and its capabilities, though Russia is not remaining static; instead, it is learning and adapting every day. The ongoing conflict has underscored that Russia views its infantry as disposable and thus does not fear significant losses among its troops. As a result, strategies that put large numbers of Russian troops at risk may not change Russia's decision calculus. One expert highlighted that we must think carefully about what our competitors fear and what assets they value when designing our strategies. This is facilitated by an improved understanding of their strategic culture. Knowing the adversary well also enables the US to better understand when its own "benign, non-military signals or coercive signals designed to shape [the adversary's] non-military behavior" might be interpreted as dangerous and prompt asymmetric and escalatory responses. We must be mindful of the fact that integrated deterrence, by design, bridges multiple instruments of national power and multiple domains, which can be harnessed in an asymmetrical way that increases the potential for rapid progress up or down the escalation ladder. The tight interconnection between the public and private (or military and non-military) spheres in Russia and China exacerbate this issue. It increases the likelihood that US and ally actions in one domain may trigger a competitor response in another domain—and the linkage between US and ally *action* and competitor *reaction* moreover may be unclear to the initial actors. These points underscore the importance of communication to ensure that competitors do not interpret integration or build-up of capabilities aimed at bolstering deterrence as an arms race.

<sup>13</sup> One expert argued that Russia and China are also *personalist* regimes; as such, it may be necessary to tailor deterrence to identify and understand decision-makers' personal interests, as these can exert a larger influence on leaders' decision-making than national interests.

<sup>14</sup> One expert emphasized the similarity between Russia and China in their respect for power, referencing the "peaceful strength" motto.

Finally, understanding our competitors in the context of a three-peer deterrence problem also entails understanding the uneasy relationship between Russia and China, which is characterized by a lack of trust. It is important to recognize that the two countries have very different strategic cultures, are driven by different national interests, and thus do not operate as a single bloc.

## Understanding our Allies

Strategic culture also shapes US Allies' threat perceptions, assessments of competitor provocation, and security priorities—which can influence their views on whether and what type of deterrence is necessary and what types of capabilities should be developed and integrated (see theme 6). There is no longer a common perceived adversary as in the Cold War period and rivalry with the Warsaw Pact nations (cf. theme 5 discussion of external threats and internal cohesion). In the current multi-threat environment, European countries and regions differ in their national interests and priorities, and threat perceptions, thus, may differ substantially.

For example, European nations do not all share the same perception regarding the threat from Russia, and there are segments within European societies that are even sympathetic to the Russian cause. Geography will naturally shape these threat perceptions. While the countries of the eastern flank feel the “vital or existential threat” from Russia acutely, the concerns of those in the southern flank are centered more around border issues and the threat of terrorism.<sup>35</sup> Until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many countries questioned whether the threat from Russia should be taken as seriously as the asymmetric threats emanating from south of Europe, including radicalization, malign use of cyber, and fragile states and refugees. We must also be mindful of the “tyranny of geography”; countries such as Türkiye may need to strike a difficult balance between treating Russia as a strategic rival and maintaining peace with them due to their location and history, as well as national interests and associated objectives.

Even when sharing threat perceptions, Allies may differ in their perception of the intensity and priority of the threats or in other ways that influence subsequent deterrence signaling and strategic communications. For example, while Finland and Estonia are geographically close and share a similar threat perception regarding Russia, they have very different views about the risks involved in communicating their cooperation concerning the Gulf of Finland, which constitutes a bottleneck for the Russian Navy. While the history, culture, and experience of Finland yield a desire for more subdued signaling, the same factors for Estonia result in a desire for increased communication about their cooperation, in part to reassure domestic audiences that the Russian threat is being taken seriously.

*"It's quite difficult to convince people who are watching the war in Ukraine [from within] their own borders... that this is a minor thing, and the future is the threat coming from China."*

Smaller NATO countries furthermore may not share the US assessment of a three-peer deterrence problem. For many countries, China is conceived solely as an economic competitor or no threat at all—an assessment that may be guided in part by countries’ conceptualization of China’s strategic culture. Even when a three-peer deterrence problem is perceived, countries may disagree on whether NATO is the right venue to address it, and the experts cited differing threat perceptions surrounding China as a notable and enduring potential

impediment to NATO consensus. Nonetheless, while China may not be conceived by many in Europe as a direct military threat to Atlantic security, one expert acknowledged that China might pose a threat when considering security in the broader sense—namely, in terms of the security of supplies, “sovereign modern domains,” and vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure. Even where there is a conceptual

*"If partners see how US and NATO actions also advance their own national interests and goals for security, this will increase buy-in. This requires the US to—to the extent possible—understand its allies and partners and tailor their communication to show how the chosen actions will meet their specific goals."*

<sup>35</sup> In some cases (e.g., with respect to illegal immigration), concerns may be shared by the leadership and/or public within multiple countries—but which issues are considered most pressing will vary in part as a function of geographic location.



understanding of the potential threat from China, it has nonetheless not been realized fully in policies and actions. However, the economic domain is one area that has seen recent change, shaped in part by US-led conversations and US influence within NATO, as well as the presence of US security commitments and backing in the Indo-Pacific region. Some European countries have begun a degree of de-risking or decoupling of their economic ties to China. For example, Lithuania began loosening its ties with China by withdrawing from the 17+1 format. In other cases (e.g., Germany, the Netherlands), a greater degree of economic entanglement with China makes decoupling difficult. This may be true more generally for European economies, which are somewhat fragmented despite the European Union's (EU) single market, and thus lack some degree of robustness. China's economic relationship with European states in the future will also be shaped by China's concrete actions.

To bridge these perception gaps, the experts recommended several potential solutions; these include working with leaders to increase understanding of the strategic aspects of military and security issues, workshops or conferences aimed at achieving a shared understanding of deterrence (see theme 1), using simple language and concepts that are unlikely to be misconstrued, alignment of nation-level doctrine and NATO doctrine, and educating Allies on the nature of the threat from China. It will be incumbent on the US, with continued support from allies including the United Kingdom, Poland, and others, to link NATO discussions on China and the logic behind strengthening ties with Indo-Pacific partners more strongly to deterrence. One expert suggested that the only productive entry point to strengthening this link is to focus on what China is doing in the European region or the Euro-Atlantic theater of operations. This includes China's global reach via its cyber capabilities, its development of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and a blue-water Navy, and port visits and exercises with the Russians. China's so-called *debt-trap* investments and emphasis on making bilateral deals with smaller eastern and central European states in conjunction with anti-EU messaging are other key activities to consider. However, given the relatively small near-term impact on Euro-Atlantic security and deterrence, the indirect impact on Europe through the US (as Europe's security guarantor) may be more significant. US strength globally helps ensure European security, and challenges to US power thus are not in Europe's interest. Some degree of US rebalancing toward the Indo-Pacific, therefore, helps to ensure greater security and stability not only in the Indo-Pacific but also in Europe. In expert circles, the need for this pivot is understood, along with the fact that NATO may be called upon to assist in the Indo-Pacific theater—though popular mindsets still need to shift (see theme 7).

It will also be important for the US and European Allies to understand one another's socio-historical backgrounds and sensitivities, which must be acknowledged for Allies to productively address problems together. Experts suggested that war games are a good opportunity for Allies to increase their understanding of how others think, as well as break down the stereotypes they may hold about one another that can impact how the threats that other countries communicate to them are perceived. One implication of a failure to do so is that smaller states' concerns may not be viewed with the degree of gravity that might be merited (e.g., in the past, some smaller states have been thought to over-securitize Russia or exaggerate the Russian threat).<sup>16</sup> One expert observed that firsthand experience with a challenge may help people understand the difficulties other countries can face. For instance, the rise in illegal migration from Belarus to Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia has helped these recipient countries better comprehend the challenges faced by Italy, Spain, and Greece. However, gaps in understanding might also be bridged partly by increased communication designed to illuminate the threats that countries perceive and how that perception shapes priorities and goals, especially if the stage is set for such conversations to be productive (e.g., see recommendations in the paragraph above). As a different expert

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<sup>16</sup> Smaller European states may particularly feel they are on their own when they are threatened with a hybrid operation, as they may lack the requisite capabilities or carry less diplomatic weight to resolve the situation themselves and need to prove they are under attack to activate the NATO or EU "machine."

elaborated, speaking about doctrine, the more differences between nation-level (and especially US) doctrine and NATO doctrine, the less relevant the latter will become. This weakens a potential source of coherence for perception and goals.

Understanding the factors that influence Allies' preferences and decisions enables the US to frame its goals and explain its vision in a way that makes sense to its Allies and partners and increases their buy-in. Just as these discussions enable the US to voice its perspective and goals, they should also incorporate opportunities for the US to listen to its Allies. This signals that their inputs and concerns are being heard and considered, even if the outcomes do not align with Allies' preferences. Ultimately, however, it will be important for the US to balance listening to its Allies with taking a stance and exerting strong leadership (see theme 3).

### Theme #3: US leadership and presence is critical for the credibility of deterrence, building cohesion, and Allied coordination



Nearly all the experts emphasized the importance of the US continuing to demonstrate strategic leadership, commitment, and physical presence, for the credibility of deterrence in Europe. The criticality of such leadership was underscored by one expert's description of it as a "red line." US strategic leadership is necessary for "preserving Europe's deterrence architecture" and for building cohesion and effective coordination (e.g., of capabilities) among Allies. It will also be important for the US to maintain situational awareness and manage escalation dynamics in both the European and Indo-Pacific theaters to avoid frontline allies making decisions with systemic implications. While strong and committed US leadership on these and other issues is important for both political and military reasons, it does not preclude fair burden-sharing with European Allies.

*"So this starts with the simple fact, America has to lead NATO, and I don't think it's doable to leave NATO and Europe to Europeans. Europe is currently suffering by far from the results of two or three decades of falling asleep and being exposed to the new ways of both Russia and China spreading their influence."*

The often-significant differences (e.g., in security concerns, domestic political and economic situations, etc.) among Allies and partners may give rise to disagreements (see theme 2 for a related discussion) and result in political barriers to effective integration. In the absence of US leadership, it may, therefore, be difficult for Europeans to agree on who is in command. There may be a tendency to discuss extensively which action to take without settling on a decision (e.g., as in the "European Union Rapid Reaction Corps HQ"). The US is widely perceived as being the only country that would be accepted by all European countries as the leader for military engagements, given its strategic weight in military and security thinking. As such, the US must lead the development of new strategic concepts and doctrine, drawing in part but not exclusively on the lessons from Ukraine.<sup>17</sup> The US can help to shape conversations among Allies, working toward a shared understanding of integrated deterrence and a shared strategic vision to produce a single voice and facilitate timely decision-making and unity of effort. Toward that end, the US can emphasize common threats as well as underscore how Allies differ from their competitors in their fundamental values and views about how to organize societies or think about people as human beings (see theme 5 for a more detailed discussion on fostering NATO alliance cohesion).

The US logistics capacity and capabilities and the types of effects it can achieve are seen by its Allies as unparalleled. For this reason, the US must also provide the necessary military ecosystem and "heavy metal" to facilitate integrated deterrence across geographies (e.g., command and control, intelligence, situational awareness, enablers, and nuclear), as well as "boots on the ground" in Europe (however, see

<sup>17</sup> One expert suggested that the US—starting from SACEUR through the operational level—can help Europeans to revisit thinking around how the Army is organized, executes its orders, and functions as the final tool for politicians to achieve certain effects.

themes 4 and 6 for discussions of how to leverage European contributions to integrate deterrence). This, one expert indicated, is essential to ensure military credibility due to perceived US competence at the “strategic high-end level...just leagues and leagues apart from even the top-tier European powers, and that’s not going to change in the foreseeable future.” Several experts emphasized that European countries cannot assure the European order and the security of Western interests in the face of an increasingly aggressive Russia. In illustration, some experts expressed skepticism that the EUROCORPS would be fully functional and ready to provide European security in the near term. One reason for this is that the level of military spending in Europe seen in the ‘70s and ‘80s may no longer be possible. Ultimately, EUROCORPS “is too weak for this mission...and has a low priority even for its member states. It could be the start of a kind of European force, but it is not the case right now.” Small states especially lack the capability and credibility to effectively compete against or deter large and well-resourced states such as Russia and China, who do not view these states as peers. European security, therefore, will depend on strong and committed American engagement. However, the US should pair its “heavy metal and kit” with local expertise (see themes 2 and 4 for related discussions).

To play its leadership role effectively, the US must be perceived as having a strong and inflexible will to continue its commitments in Europe. The experts repeatedly noted the uncertainty surrounding the US commitment to NATO, particularly considering the current internal divisions in the US and the upcoming 2024 US election. There is a tangible fear in European capitals that the US will “move towards isolation,” though some experts suggested that complete withdrawal from NATO is less of a concern than eroded commitment or trust in Article 5. One expert put it plainly, “a NATO minus the US does not exist.” The US, therefore, must signal clearly that it is not disengaging and that there will be retaliation should Russia attempt to invade any NATO country; US resolve is particularly important to smaller countries close to the threat of aggression in Europe. The messaging about political commitment seen in the latest NATO strategic concepts must be followed up in the NATO summit declarations. One expert suggested that the US should make its motivations clear to its Allies in areas of competition both within and outside of the military realm, which will also give Allies adequate time to digest and begin preparing their societies and resources (see theme 7). Ultimately, US confidence will motivate other states, and its determination and steadiness in defining a goal, pursuing that goal, and making the necessary sacrifices will set the example and provide the “fuel and air” for the flame of European politicians’ political will.

***“This...is one of the principles of US democracy, that you care about every single person. [The] US military, they always come back for the last one remaining in the field. So, consider us—your smaller partners, international partners—as those last ones that you should never forget about, and you should also help us. And then we will do whatever it takes to support you as well and to become this fence or the obstacle for the flow of the Eastern powers.”***

## US and Ally commitment to Ukraine is crucial for future deterrence

The experts were also unequivocal about the importance of ongoing US and Ally support to Ukraine, not only for the continuity of Ukraine itself but also as a cornerstone of broader European security. One expert argued that deterrence of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 did not fail, as many observers have suggested, because there was no NATO deterrence goal for Ukraine. However, another expert urged consideration of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, which contains assurances (though not guarantees) providing for Ukraine’s security (see also Pifer, 2019) but did not dissuade Russia’s invasion of Crimea. Regardless, the outcome of the current conflict was seen by almost all the experts as a key determinant of the West’s ability to successfully deter future Russian aggression in the European theater and ensure the security of the Baltic states, Northern Europe, and Central Europe in particular. If Russia wins in Ukraine, one expert asked: Where and who is next? Ukraine, therefore, is seen

by some European populations (e.g., in Germany) as defending not only its own sovereignty but also the freedom of Europeans more generally.

One expert suggested that the current US and NATO activities in the eastern flank, and at NATO's summits in Madrid, Vilnius, and in the lead-up to Washington with the regional plans are "balanced and effective." The Ukraine Defense Contact Group, formed by SECDEF Austin in April 2022, was seen by another expert as a good model of support, as it was agile and bypassed intra-EU and intra-NATO challenges. Moving forward, Western investment could continue to fund things like joint co-production of military equipment and weaponry in Ukraine—a current initiative funded by multiple countries. Ukraine will ultimately require not only military assistance (material help, weapons) but also financial assistance and political assurances. One expert suggested that a multi-year framework akin to the Israeli model would give Ukraine a horizon of integrated diplomatic, political, military, and economic support.

Another recommendation was that the Allies' continued commitment to engaging in and supporting Ukraine over the long term be communicated separately (as countries) and collectively (as NATO). This will be seen as a yardstick for European and broader Allied resolve, which must be supplemented with a demonstration of military capability and prowess. One example is the agreement that the United Kingdom struck with Ukraine, which provides an increased level of security guarantees in the absence of NATO membership for Ukraine. In contrast, current political divisions in the US are seen as undermining or having the potential to undermine the US political will to continue supporting Ukraine. War fatigue in both the US and European nations could also result in a greater focus on domestic concerns and reduce support for Ukraine. Russia will be ready to exploit Western populations' reluctance to support a long-term war. To help sustain population and political elite support, it will be important for US and European leaders to present arguments publicly that underscore that we are all interdependent and that what happens in Ukraine is not isolated from what happens in the rest of Europe (see theme 7 for a related discussion).

## Theme #4: Utilize alliances within alliances and well-designed divisions of labor



Achieving consensus is difficult and may become increasingly so, given NATO's expansion and the growing complexity of the operating environment. However, the NATO consensus requirement does not preclude nations' ability to work together as sovereign states on specific goals. Like-minded, willing nations may share a common understanding of specific issues and can work together in smaller groups to take the lead on these issues and provide guidance or assistance to other nations that may be less likely, capable, or motivated to do so. These groupings can focus on non-military projects, though it ultimately is helpful to support all types of platforms (political, economic, and military) that contribute to a unified position on Russia. For example, in the economic area, contributions can be made to the development of frontline countries in Central Eastern Europe or to digital security investments (as in the Three Seas Initiative); by helping to create sustainable economies, these projects can bolster deterrence. The experts noted that the US and other key nations can play a leading role, akin to framework nations, in the intellectual development of these goals. These efforts would be complementary, rather than work in opposition, to NATO goals. Countries working to cooperate and find common ground with their closest partners ultimately will strengthen NATO.

Groups working together on similar goals may include creative new bilateral and multilateral frameworks, organizations, or platforms—often informal—designed to foster increased cooperation among European states within or across regions. They can also include new mechanisms for cooperation between European states, the European Union, NATO, and/or the US. Examples within Europe include

the Northern Group, Bucharest Nine, Ukraine Defense Contact Group, Visegrád Group, and the Three Plus One platform. For many of these groups, coordination appears to be increasing. The experts also discussed the great potential for existing and new alliances and ally contributions in the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East, including contributions from Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. For example, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which has recently intensified its security and economic ties as tensions with China have risen, was referenced as an example of this type of coordination between the US and countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Several experts highlighted the importance and utility of these *alliances within alliances*. Arrangements among individual nations can contribute to higher quality and more efficient communication, which facilitates decision-making and can smooth the path for NATO-level decisions. For example, collaboration on developing a policy for the Arctic could provide a helpful complement to NATO if consensus cannot be achieved. The experts also underscored that these mechanisms facilitate small countries' communication with "the major players," offering new opportunities for regional Allies and partners to highlight their concerns—which may come to be shared broadly over time. This is crucial, as smaller countries may require the leadership of other countries to act in the international arena. Another benefit of these novel arrangements and diverse approaches is their ability to maintain strategic ambiguity, as their form and decision process are inherently less predictable than NATO's and thus make competitors' decision calculi more complex. If executed with NATO cohesion in mind, alliances within alliances can make significant contributions to increasing European security. One expert offered a note of caution, however: When bilateral or group positions have been worked out in advance, it is important to maintain open communication when going into broader-format meetings so that all actors feel they are part of the decision process.

A well-designed division of labor both within and outside of NATO (e.g., aligning countries' activities with national priorities) can strengthen the alliance and integrated deterrence. For example, countries at the border with Russia may be at the forefront for some actions, with the US behind the scenes but becoming more visible if necessary—or vice versa.<sup>18</sup> This is the fundamental "framework nation" concept behind the Joint Expeditionary Force established at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales, which brings together small groups of countries that already cooperate with one another under the auspices of a lead nation providing command and control (Monaghan, 2022), with leadership rotating at regular intervals. The arrangement enables groups of nations that share ties due to geographic proximity or historical, cultural, or military connections to cooperate on developing "military capabilities, doctrine, interoperability, training, and exercis[es]" (Monaghan, 2022). The UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force focused on the high North and Baltic Sea regions with countries committed to the same goals is one example. Regardless of the groups' specific composition, the ability to have dynamic and preventative responses will be important moving forward.

## Bilateral relationships

Several experts underscored the importance of US bilateral relationships, suggesting that building stronger bilateral relations between the US and its allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific is a foundational building block in integrated deterrence. Bilateral engagement will underpin the success and commitment of US Allies and partners. The US can leverage its bilateral relationships to negotiate with Allies where there are barriers to consensus within NATO. While this process is slow and requires significant US resources in terms of personnel, it presents an unparalleled opportunity for the US both to listen to other countries' perspectives and underscore its own perspectives and motivations, to facilitate agreement. In

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<sup>18</sup> As one expert cautioned, however, countries that are very close to an issue or action may at times be imperfectly objective. For this reason, it is important that decision-making still be executed by the Alliance as a whole.



the context of deterrence exercises or operations, it will be important to understand and acknowledge other countries' political priorities. This kind of dialogue or "deep integration" is more difficult to achieve in a multilateral setting. However, as one expert cautioned, the US must ensure that its bilateral security arrangements are not perceived as a weakening of its commitment to NATO and the multilateral arrangement underpinned by Article 5 and noted that the US should view its role as a security guarantor in Europe and elsewhere in a holistic way.

European countries are also organizing themselves in bilateral or other arrangements that do not include the US, in part due to fears that potential wavering of US support will result in NATO being unable to deliver on its commitments (see theme 3) or due to the security or other issue invoked being a low-priority for the US, and by extension, NATO. Examples include bilateral arrangements between eastern flank countries, the Lithuania-Germany deal, and Canadian investment in Estonia and Latvia.

### Increased European role and division of labor

As one set of experts articulated, integration implies a "two-way street" between the actors involved, where each actor contributes in significant ways. Integrated deterrence in the European theater thus requires an increased role and responsibilities for European nations, which signals a fundamental shift in the relationship between the US and other Allies that will require deeper and more extensive cooperation. One expert highlighted the desire to contribute *actively* to deterring competitors (e.g., in the space domain), stating, "We are more than willing to be at your side, but we don't want just to bring our flag. We want to be part of it." Toward that end, Allies can do more both at the strategic level and tactical level (e.g., "heavy lifting" on the front line) to reduce the US burden and free up US bandwidth and resources (see theme 6 discussion of shared capabilities). European countries can also work alongside the US to leverage the economic instrument of power (e.g., the use of sanctions by the United Kingdom). A well-designed division of labor will establish concrete arrangements—with a specific vision, objectives, and accompanying plan. One expert recommended a regional division of labor organized by sub-theater within Europe, where each Ally's role is clearly specified, and they have sufficient resources to implement their responsibilities in the regional security environment. Another expert underscored the utility of this approach in aligning NATO and national interests but elaborated that some degree of monitoring by the Alliance would be necessary to avoid having individual states conduct national policies "under the NATO flag." Implementing these regional roles will take time to establish, requiring the US to maintain a long-term presence in Europe (see theme 3).

An increased European role and burden sharing in the European theater requires increased defense spending, which will necessitate difficult trade-offs to ensure that appropriate resources are available for capability development (see theme 6). In line with this, there has been a growing ambition within many European countries to increase military capabilities following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which awakened European countries' awareness of the need to increase their burden-sharing and uphold NATO commitments. One expert noted that big countries and small countries are now competing not only for funding but also for defense industrial capacities. The European Union's (EU) strength lies largely in its industrial base, though it will need more European investment to close the innovation gap with the US and increase production. Greater cooperation between NATO and the EU on hybrid threats, including from China, is a potential area for further development. European countries' active participation in integrated deterrence will also require greater information sharing among Allies,<sup>19</sup> along with frank and open dialogues around the division of roles, including for specific situations that may evolve.

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<sup>19</sup> Effective integration requires visibility into US Allies and partners' respective processes for capability development.

European Allies may also be capable of providing support to the US in the Indo-Pacific region, both in terms of offsetting the US presence and deterrence capabilities on the ground and by introducing their own capabilities.<sup>20</sup> Toward that end, some European countries are holding bilateral conversations with strategic partners to decide where to prepare and train, as well as develop capabilities and allocate resources with the goal of increasing capacity in the Indo-Pacific to enable the US to maintain its presence on European soil.

Despite the growing emphasis on building European capabilities, one expert cautioned that the overall European commitment to deterrence may be lacking, partly due to insufficient concern among many European Allies about the threat from Russia. There is also a lack of buy-in for the nuclear mission, particularly among non-nuclear member states, who believe that the US, United Kingdom, or France will look after the mission and do not see its relevance to their own countries.<sup>21</sup> Insufficient concern for deterrence within individual countries or Europe as a whole may result in Europe falling short of its commitments or required defense capacity, thereby undermining NATO's efforts to build its deterrence and defense posture. To avoid this pitfall, Allies must reach a shared and cohesive vision of what is required for effective integrated deterrence moving forward (see theme 5).

## Theme #5: Emphasize NATO alliance cohesion and shared values as a source of strength



NATO alliance cohesion—both actual and as perceived by competitors—is crucial to effective integrated deterrence. While new bilateral and multilateral platforms will offer practical ways forward on key issues (see theme 4), several experts caution that it is important to avoid having “a multi-track alliance” where different caucuses within or outside of NATO advance different strategic visions. To avoid compromising alliance cohesion and weakening NATO, it is essential to seek an optimal balance of security regionalism, as well as minimize existing or new fissures within the alliance (e.g., in Allies’ inclination toward a transatlantic bond or pro-Atlanticism). Signaling Allied cohesion, moreover, has a deterrent effect, whereas fissures among Allies will be readily exploited.<sup>22</sup>

The perceived threat from Russia following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has strengthened internal alliance cohesion. Despite varying opinions or rhetoric, Allies are largely unified in their commitment to collective security, and adaptation of NATO's collective defenses is proceeding rapidly with comprehensive Allied involvement. Nonetheless, a key risk moving forward will be whether a build-up of European defense capacity will manifest as a complement or competitor to NATO, which may experience additional political challenges that weaken its support if far-right (e.g., the Alternative for Deutschland Party, or AfD in Germany) (see also Schmitz, 2023) or far-left political parties with pro-Russian postures

<sup>20</sup> Allies whose main security concern is Russia and thus require military capabilities for a land-based theater may be unlikely to invest funds in acquiring resources that enable them to operate in an air- and sea-based theater such as the Indo-Pacific.

<sup>21</sup> As one expert emphasized, these states nonetheless can make contributions to the nuclear mission (e.g., by participating in activities such as combined air operations, force protection, and security), which would increase their sense of ownership. Another expert stressed that “the use of nuclear weapons should be part of regular planning processes within the Alliance (if these weapons are required). All the Allies may be [required] to approve it, sharing the responsibility...”

<sup>22</sup> The possibility that Russia will test Allied cohesion with limited aggression against a NATO Ally is a significant concern. In addition to the US signaling of resolve (see theme 3), the development of robust military capabilities that can effectively deny access to Russian forces, particularly long-range strikes, will not only signal US and Ally resolve and capability but also reaffirm Allied cohesion. This collective strength is a powerful deterrent against any potential Russian aggression toward NATO members.

come to power or attain power-sharing arrangements. Allied cohesion will also be impacted by how the European Union (EU) orients in terms of its strategic autonomy and whether that orientation is in harmony with the US approach and NATO Alliance goals. For example, one expert emphasized that it would be a major mistake if Europe, basing its decision solely on political or economic considerations, were to develop a policy toward China that was entirely independent of US policy. He further underscored that Europe cannot reasonably exist between two blocs in the contest of value sets.

Other existing or potential threats to alliance cohesion come from multiple sources, both within and outside of the alliance itself.

*"...the center of gravity of the Allies is unity and cohesion. And this is not an easy task to solve if there are some political disputes between Allies. There are different understandings of how to approach things and how to approach adversaries or maybe even defining adversar[ies] as such...So different security cultures and different perception...But we probably all agree that today NATO is as united as ever."*

### Internal threats to cohesion

Competing national interests and idiosyncratic country narratives can undermine the unity of effort when these become too dominant. Varied threat perceptions (see theme 2) can also affect the Allies' acceptance of NATO goals and deterrence priorities, along with their development of associated capabilities. This is especially true for operational matters that require resource trade-offs and organizational energy. There will likely be an ongoing asymmetry of concerns, where the US is significantly more focused on China than are the Europeans. One expert highlighted this point, underscoring that NATO's area of responsibility is in the Euro-Atlantic area, and its mission does not include involvement in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>23</sup>

Another internal source of threat to cohesion is inherently rooted in the concern that alliance commitments will come at the expense of national interests or draw from limited resources. Such fear of entanglement will likely shape how European countries approach their alliance obligations and can undermine cohesion if an appropriate balance between individual countries' national priorities and alliance commitments cannot be established and maintained. As one expert noted, it is difficult to share the military instrument of power if countries do not share the same foreign policy. All countries want to reserve the use of their militaries for issues that arise and do not overlap with the problems on which the alliance is focused. This prioritization means that the consensus requirement within NATO is unlikely to ever be dissolved, nor would that necessarily be desirable. Yet some countries—especially smaller ones that lack other forms of leverage—may use or withhold their vote as a bargaining chip to obtain political outcomes (e.g., financial or political concessions) that are aligned with their national interests. All countries ultimately will be incentivized by and seek the benefits they perceive they can obtain from their participation in an alliance. One expert proposed that countries firmly condemn other nations' use of the vote in this way, either in the context of the NATO consensus requirement or in the EU decision process.<sup>24</sup> A similar threat to alliance cohesion exists when degradation in individual relationships, particularly those between the US and a given country, get transposed into NATO deliberations when a country aims to negotiate with the US as part of the broader multilateral negotiations. For example, widening strategic differences have been seen recently with the breakdown of trust between the US and Türkiye regarding their contrasting views on Iran, Syria, and the future of Iraq. The US can address these issues by

<sup>23</sup> The expert acknowledged that Europeans should not be naïve about the hybrid threat from China (e.g., in terms of cyber, the economic dependence fostered by Belt and Road Initiative investments, and competitive space activities that may not be benign). Thus, NATO has a role in preventing these forms of influence in Europe.

<sup>24</sup> A Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) commentary similarly proposes increasing the political cost for Allies that "break the rules," further recommending that a mixture of incentives and disincentives be used when a violation occurs and cannot be effectively addressed through "monitoring and naming of violations of the code of conduct (behind closed doors)" (Morcos & Ellehuus, 2021).

negotiating bilaterally with countries that create barriers to consensus, which may require focusing on separate issues from those invoked in the NATO context.

### External threats to cohesion

Threats to alliance cohesion also come from outside the alliance. Competitors actively work to undermine this cohesion and divide Western Allies using information operations that target specific states and influence created through strategic economic investment and bilateral relationship development (e.g., China's efforts with Eastern and Central European countries and Russia's efforts with Hungary and Slovakia). China favors bilateral negotiation to offer tailored deals to different countries, capitalizing on their short-term political needs as a form of leverage. It avoids dealing with EU states as a bloc, which would be very powerful—whereas individually, European nations are “small statelets dealing with a giant.” China also promotes its values, emphasizing their incompatibility with democratic values. The debates within and the open nature of democratic societies make them vulnerable to these types of threats. As the war in Ukraine has reinforced, however, the defense is stronger than the offense (see theme 7). For this reason, on the military side, the strategy of deterrence by denial will be important across both theaters—though the alliance must signal its resolve and demonstrate the capability to do so (e.g., that we can reinforce Taiwan and defeat a possible Chinese invasion). On the political side, the alliance must present a unified front.

### Emphasizing shared values

The fundamental and enduring values shared by democratic nations create *ties that bind* that competitors such as Russia, China, or other adversaries do not have. This includes a common emphasis on a rules-based international order that takes a democratic perspective on states' obligations and behavior as global actors, principles such as human rights, recognition of states' sovereignty, arms control, and commitment to multilateral institutions that facilitate cooperation (e.g., Patrick, 2023). Some nations, including Sweden, may already be inclined to approach integrated deterrence from a values perspective and may be particularly receptive to discussions that take a values-based approach. US leadership can underscore the values that Allies share, and which underlie NATO's origin.<sup>25</sup>

These shared values are a significant source of strength that can be harnessed to focus on common goals (see also Morcos & Ellehuus, 2021). Trust grows from and reinforces these values. This trust is essential for integration, which involves information sharing that may expose countries' weaknesses and thus requires countries to have faith that others will not exploit vulnerabilities. An emphasis on shared values can serve as a starting point for discussions and decision processes that require exploration and resolution of differences and thus help to bridge the gaps introduced by varying strategic cultures, along with different national interests and priorities (see theme 2). However, it is important to remember in these discussions that shared values do not simply equate to shared interests.

## Theme #6: Harness shared capabilities and potential synergy across theaters



There is now a greater awareness in both the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic theaters of the interdependence in strategic dynamics across these theaters. Though the geography and

<sup>25</sup> In highlighting the values that set us apart from our shared competitors, one expert acknowledged that it may at first be easier for Allies to agree about who we are *not* and which tools we *will not* use in competition.

nature (air-land vs. air-sea) of the two theaters differ, they face the same fundamental problem of great power competition and accompanying concerns surrounding how to deter strategic rivals. A shared problem suggests the potential to draw upon shared resources, including an “ecosystem of cross-theater operational concepts, capabilities, and technologies.” Such an ecosystem would allow for a “more efficient allocation of resources and economies of scale” and avoid unnecessary duplication of spending and resource development. However, one expert cautioned—referencing challenges within NATO and the European Union—that without integrated defense planning, capabilities cannot be meaningfully coordinated. Another expert observed that while many of the necessary capabilities, resources, or expertise exist at the national level or alliance level, they are not “cohered and aligned and governed to achieve deterrence ends.” The US can advise its allies on how best to use the capabilities that they already have in conjunction with its own capabilities.<sup>26</sup> In this ecosystem, the US would continue to provide long-term leadership at the strategic level and bring enablers,<sup>27</sup> nuclear, and other capabilities to both theaters, while European and Pacific allies engage on the “front lines.” Creating a deterrence-specific governance function may also help to coordinate existing capabilities.

*“[In] your calculation [of] capabilities versus signaling, capabilities, that's most important. Signaling has no meaning if we have no capabilities, and Russians pretty clearly understand our intentions, even without us specifically trying to devise a strategy to convey our intentions—because we strongly believe in military power and we strongly believe if we have capabilities, we will be able to use it.”*

Though the experts varied somewhat in their assessment of the relative importance of capabilities versus political will, credible deterrence ultimately will require states to demonstrate both resolve (or political will; see theme 3) and the capabilities that are relevant to specific deterrence goals. However, it is difficult for individual states to invest sufficiently to deter multiple, simultaneous, potential or actual competitors' challenges. The capabilities needed to deter one competitor (e.g., strong land forces, nuclear) may not be the same as those needed to defeat another competitor (e.g., strong air and sea capabilities, and possibly nuclear). Discussions about capabilities, therefore, should be guided by specific deterrence objectives, then explore how each actor can contribute and complement or enhance the others' deterrence capabilities—which will be situation-dependent. To increase the ease with which this goal can be achieved, it will also be important to link specific national security concerns with the established NATO capability goals and individual country contributions.

## Capabilities challenges

Effective coordination of capabilities will require the US and its allies to overcome several challenges, the resolution of which provides a potential roadmap for the way forward. These challenges include:

### Funding shortfalls and slow implementation of defense spending

The first challenge is the ongoing shortfall and slow speed of implementation of European defense spending, as well as the recent reduction in the percentage of US spending for NATO. Countries, including Germany, may be unable to fulfill their goals, given that baseline budgets remain insufficient to support all purchases (e.g., F-35s). Nonetheless, the time may be right to increase the speed of progress toward achieving the 2% spending targets and required capability development over the next several years. Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, many countries have been endorsing a more assertive stance and increasing their defense budgets accordingly, which has also been influenced by

<sup>26</sup> The future role of the EU in reducing duplication of spending and resources should also be explored.

<sup>27</sup> One expert suggested that, with adequate defense spending, some European countries might also be capable of acquiring key enablers, “even collectively, like the NATO AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft]” or *eyes in the sky* (see also NATO, 2023).



recent NATO accessions. Politically, it will be important for the US to demonstrate its resolve to address the burden-sharing question.

### Procurement speed and system

The second challenge is the speed and overall system surrounding procurement. While the US is seen as pragmatic in its approach to capability development, which prioritizes “lightning fast” speed and innovation cycles,<sup>28</sup> the more deliberative approach in some European countries that centers on finding the perfect solution was cited as a potential impediment. While the latter approach can produce high-quality fuses and other materiel or weapons platforms such as Leopard 2 tanks, the increasing sense of urgency since the invasion of Ukraine requires a greater emphasis on speed moving forward. It will also be important for countries to minimize unnecessary legal or other barriers to their industrial sectors’ ability to produce the necessary tools based on how the Allies want and need to fight. As an example, consider the current political and legal situation between German industry and the German government, which has resulted in a stalemate. The industry is unable to commence production of items such as 155-millimeter munitions as it is against the law, while the leadership is waiting for the Parliament’s decision or hoping that the industry will quickly ramp up production in case of an immediate need—even though it would take three to four years to achieve the production targets. Procurement must become more agile and dynamic. NATO’s Support and Procurement Agency provides an example of this kind of agility; it has already worked on common acquisition to support a coalition of Allies, including Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, and Spain, for procurement of up to 1,000 Patriot missiles (see also NATO, 2024).

### Insufficient numbers of personnel

The third challenge is insufficient numbers of personnel in comparison to adversaries. Many countries are now reconsidering the tradeoff between quality and quantity and are considering reintroducing the conscription model, focusing more on numbers and small munitions than on high-end technologies. The US and Allies are, in the case of Russia, competing against an adversary that readily commits high numbers of its forces, allowing it to *throw bodies at the problem* using what it views as a “disposable infantry” composed of inmates, remote ethnic groups, and foreigners alongside native Russians. Russia may not yet have a “second army to come and to threaten NATO,” but it will likely have one in five to seven years, cautioned one expert. This contrasts with the Allies, which have volunteer, professional forces. There is not only a lack of active personnel but also insufficient reserves, which means that professional forces cannot reconstitute to cover their casualties and thus cannot sustain a long-term war. Active-duty personnel are retiring every day without adequate replacement, and there is no longer a system in place for drafting civilians and quickly training them, nor are there stored weapons available to equip them. Without conscription, the US and other Allies will lack the millions of personnel that were available during earlier conflicts such as WWI and WWII. The conflict in Ukraine has brought the quantity-quality tradeoff once again to the forefront, and the lesson some are deriving is that conscription may be necessary moving forward. This shift in orientation and priorities could introduce another area of disagreement among Allies, which might affect overall cohesion. These ongoing discussions are another area where US leadership, presence, and reassurance of Allies may be required (see themes 3 and 5).

The experts had somewhat mixed views on whether the imbalance in personnel compared with our competitors can be bridged by technology and innovation. One expert argued that maintaining technological supremacy will be critical and emphasized that we must also reduce reliance on peer

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<sup>28</sup> One expert noted that the US speed of innovation may make it difficult to maintain interoperability (and interchangeability) as Allies strive to ensure they can fight together.

competitors for critical technology. Another expert noted that being advanced technologically and increasing firepower alone may not be enough to rectify the imbalance; doing so might require having a complete, managed system for air, ground, the ocean surface, and below it. However, he underscored that this invokes deep ethical and legal issues involved in the use of autonomous systems as well as highlights the constraints that the US and other Allies—but not their competitors—believe are necessary based on their system of values.

Nonetheless, without a return to conscription, it may be necessary in the near-term to explore technological solutions to compensate for small militaries and balance the strength equation. When combined with highly trained, professional forces, superior technology (going beyond firepower alone) can still prevail against all would-be challengers. To achieve this goal, doctrine must also account for the fact that we no longer have large populations, large armies, and sufficient personnel to cover entire fronts as in the world war period, one expert emphasized. He also underscored that this approach would require the US and its Allies to relearn how to “fight isolated without having a manned front covering the rear end” and provide their own cell defense. It would also necessitate tight collaboration with industry to produce the essential tools (see discussions in this theme on procurement speed and system, as well as military industries not being on a wartime footing). Finally, as noted above, the situation in Ukraine has also underscored that the defense is generally stronger than the offense and “technology favors the defender.” Inherent in this point is an emphasis on deterrence by denial. But deterrence by denial can be achieved not only by the military or through military means, but also through a prepared and resilient society and societal structures (see theme 7).

### Lack of personnel with required expertise

A fourth challenge is one of required expertise, with one expert noting that we have lost our “suitably qualified and experienced personnel...[that] know how to do deterrence.” Deterrence knowledge can be rebuilt through training, education, and exercises, with the NATO Defense College playing a key role. The most effective way to increase people’s *deterrence IQ* is to add deterrence elements to training, planning processes, exercises, or routine meetings that are already established, as this avoids having to build something new and minimizes the time investment required of already “overstretched” people. Re-examining the exercise program, which emphasizes types of deterrence, can highlight where exercises could be expanded to cover integrated deterrence (e.g., by covering non-military instruments).

### Military industries are not on a wartime footing

The fifth challenge is that European countries’ military industries lack the capacity to produce large quantities of ammunition or other needed resources during wartime. It is unlikely that Europe will be able to build its capabilities sufficiently within the next five to seven years to face a full-scale, high-intensity, long-term war. US and European resources, including storage, have been largely depleted to support Ukraine, and there has been a shortfall in some critical munitions (e.g., difficulty fulfilling and supplying Ukraine with one million 155-millimeter artillery rounds). This difficulty has cast some doubt on whether European defense industries can meet the defense needs of Allied nations. To support emerging production demand for required capabilities, European countries will need to develop new factories and new military industries, which can benefit from economies of scale. This will require a significant increase in funding as well as the political will to help countries’ defense industries achieve necessary goals.

### Insufficient infrastructure

The sixth challenge is the need for improved or increased infrastructure to support capabilities. One expert gave Germany as an example, stating that in a worst-case crisis scenario, the country may be

unable to function as a hub due to the required infrastructure repairs. The hub would need to be capable of moving a large number of goods, people, and materiel and enabling care for the wounded using the civilian network. Thinking creatively about where and how countries are best positioned to contribute capabilities may guide the US and Allies toward a solution to this type of capability challenge. For example, one expert noted that land in the Romanian countryside that could be used for necessary infrastructure is less expensive than in the center of some towns in Germany, and energy is also sufficient and available at a reasonable cost. Countries such as Romania, Czechia, and Poland also have significant automotive industries, which can facilitate some capability development. Common investment into shared capabilities may reduce the timeframe required for building factories and developing the capabilities necessary for long-term high-intensity war. Allies can all contribute ideas for how best to develop such common capabilities and how to best leverage each Ally nation's strengths. This will require discussion and resolution of issues surrounding states' preservation of their individual capabilities and autonomy to act, defense industry considerations, export restrictions (such as ITAR), and beyond. While not without political, bureaucratic, or other barriers to achievement, such coordination may be a powerful way to leverage Allies' collective strength against competitors.

To effectively address all these capabilities challenges and provide a way forward, it is imperative for the US and its allies to communicate clearly about their national needs, tap into the trust among them, and work to achieve a reasonable method of collectively developing and using resources. One expert recommended that the US take its allies' national needs surrounding industry and capability development into greater account and urged that the US not confuse inter-operability with the assimilation of European industry. Building up European capabilities will not only make individual states more useful allies but will also help countries obtain support from their populations, as building capabilities creates jobs (see theme 7).

## Theme #7: Shift mindset, invoking whole-of-society efforts and proactive campaigning



Effective Allied coordination toward integrated deterrence requires a shift in both elites and populations from a peacetime mindset to one that fully comprehends the new security environment and is prepared for potential conflict.

Future conflicts may no longer be low-risk as in the past 30 or so years, but instead may be full-scale, high-intensity, high-casualty, and long-term conflicts that require whole-of-society commitment and efforts to build resilience and integrated deterrence in this new *infinite game*. The capabilities required in conventional war are understood to include things like traditional artillery, long-range precision strike, drones, and ammunition—but “intangible factors” such as these are also important and often underappreciated.

There are many obstacles to persuading both politicians and the public that a shift in mindset and accompanying behaviors is required. Political elites may lack the appropriate strategic-level understanding or awareness of military and security issues (see theme 1) and may come into office with preconceived notions about international politics. They tend to focus on the short-term and elections, and war is unpopular. For these reasons, it is difficult to convince politicians of the importance of thinking in 10- to 20-year time horizons and focusing on threats that may be temporally further away (as in the threat that China presents in Europe). Several obstacles also prevent the public from shifting their mindset and making contributions to deterrence through increased resilience. The first is a lack of awareness and even interest in the key issues surrounding deterrence. Most people are not immersed in,

*“We have conducted a long process to forget about warfare and to isolate warfare from the rest of society. And we succeeded. So now we think that warfare is a problem of the armies. And this is not true. It's a problem of the society.”*

aware of, or particularly concerned about geopolitical issues or foreign policy. The lack of conscription and focus on professional forces in many countries also means that active conflicts and their key issues do not touch the daily lives of most members of the public. US and Ally societies thus no longer understand the need for, nor are they prepared to support, high-intensity, high-casualty conflict. The second obstacle is societal fatigue resulting from ongoing sacrifice. For example, small Baltic countries are paying the price for standing up to Russia by taking in Ukrainian refugees, and both Finland and Estonia have faced economic challenges, given their high degree of economic dependence on Russia. For these reasons, it may be difficult for political elites in Europe to persuade their populace of the need to focus on deterrence issues or support increased national investment in defense. But public support will be necessary to sustain the prolonged engagement required to effectively compete against opponents that have long been using asymmetric means to undermine the security and unity of the US and Allied countries. These opponents have capitalized on the openness within democratic societies and focused on the public as a relatively soft target.

One expert, citing Clausewitz, noted that war as a continuation of politics means that the solution must be a political, not a military one. We must convince politicians and their publics that the US and its allies and partners must stay unified in the face of competitors such as Russia and China. This begins by increasing their awareness of the threats that democratic societies collectively face and the gravity of the situation, as well as encouraging them to shift their mindset to one that supports increased resilience and other contributions to integrated deterrence. Those who have lived under Soviet or other authoritarian rule can help to explain what it was like and underscore how important it is that our shared democratic values endure. NATO's goals and the goals of individual states are becoming more aligned as mindsets have begun to shift following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Yet, within many European countries, there may be an underdeveloped appreciation of the threats that we collectively face, especially from China. In its leadership role, it will be crucial for the US to communicate its vision and understanding of these threats, as well as underscore that the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters are intricately interconnected. One expert further underscored that it is crucial to communicate that the economic and social welfare of populations is reinforced by our "capabilities to defend ourselves and to deter by having strong armies." Countries should also be encouraged to reduce their vulnerability by enhancing "hygiene" in specific sectors (e.g., critical infrastructure) and domains (e.g., information).

A shift in politicians' mindset requires education in strategic studies and strategic culture to increase their understanding of competitor behaviors and the overarching strategic goals that they serve (see theme 2). One set of experts argued that it is incumbent on practitioners and scholars whose work focuses on strategic issues to describe to their political elites how the international environment and security situation has changed since the end of the Cold War. It will also be essential to understand who within each country drives the strategic conversation; in countries with deeper expertise, this will not be limited to government personnel but will incorporate other sources of expertise, including civil society. The experts also emphasized the importance of raising awareness at the individual level through education about the geopolitical situation, whether through the media, academia, student exchanges, or otherwise. This includes increasing citizens' understanding of the use of disinformation and how it has been leveraged by competitors to divide societies. Individuals must be encouraged to take personal responsibility for educating themselves about these issues and decreasing their susceptibility to competitors' attempts to influence them through multiple routes or platforms. Increasing citizen resilience effectively reduces the *attack surface* and may reduce the deterrence burden within the information domain. A more resilient society can change competitors' decision calculi, as they will not pursue activities that they do not feel will be effective. Greater unity on these issues will also help increase internal societal support for the kinds of actions required in the face of acute threats and enable the Alliance to quickly make gains when competitors make mistakes.

## Proactive campaigning

Several experts underscored the importance of “proactive campaigning”: thinking about deterrence as an active and dynamic effort that is engaged in daily and adapted regularly to shape and influence competitors’ decision calculi, so they are less likely to take undesirable actions. As the threat is always changing and “shapeshifting,” the US and Ally approach needs to be agile. This can include strategic communications, the combined exercise program, conferences, procurement, and other actions—but every action should have in mind its intended effect on potential adversaries, as well as third-party observers, neutral states, and others. The development of a new NATO security concept is also important to account for shifting and various threats. This would help to establish a state of vigilance halfway between peacetime and wartime, with appropriate personnel and capabilities that could be scaled up quickly if needed. This might involve a move toward building armies that are ready to defend territory in the context of higher-intensity, longer-term war. This increased capability would bolster the credibility of deterrence for individual countries and could be developed as needed among allies. However, the window of opportunity for the US and its allies to make the necessary changes to increase agility is short.

Effective integration of deterrence across the US and its allies and partners—using military, political, and other instruments—is more important than it was in the past, and the experts cautioned that only the US among all NATO members is currently “ready to address any threat coming from almost any direction and by any means.” This stands in stark contrast to the end of the Cold War when there were “seven fully combat-ready, corps-level entities along the border between East and West Germany.” Moreover, NATO has had some difficulty adapting to Russia’s move to focus beyond hard power, leaving it unable to tackle the variety or complexity of challenges that it faces in the current operating environment. One expert offered Japan as an example of a US ally that has been working to shift its mindset and explore a more offensive use of defense forces, which would better prepare them to work alongside the US to combat emerging threats.

Beyond political elites and populations, a shift in mindset must also encompass countries’ militaries and other agencies, ministries, and departments. Each organization within the respective government must know its role in contributing to national security and deterrence (i.e., what are the critical functions, who oversees each of them, and how will they be protected). As one expert reasoned, strategy is often built from the bottom up based on the apparently small but, in fact, significant decisions that are made every day when implementing top-down guidance. Different agencies and ministries may lack even a basic understanding of what is going on elsewhere in their own governments and will need to increase awareness and communication to coordinate effectively with one another to provide integrated solutions. To be effective, these collective efforts will also need to be properly resourced.

## Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this study was two-fold: To determine how USEUCOM can deter with and through allies and partners as part of integrated deterrence and consider the optimal balance of US and ally commitment and capability to maintain an effective deterrent to aggression in Europe. Contextualizing the study to a three-peer deterrence problem also enabled exploration of European Allies’ perceptions regarding China and how the Allies might contribute to the continued credibility of deterrence in Europe by increasing their burden-sharing while freeing up some US bandwidth and resources to address any developing threats in the Indo-Pacific theater.

*“Defense is far beyond the military. It involves the whole society, and it has to involve everybody for the country to be successful.”*



The themes that emerged from this study speak directly to these issues. Themes 1-3 detail three prerequisites for the US to work effectively with its allies and partners to integrate deterrence. In short: They must speak the same strategic language, deeply understand their competitors and each another, and ensure that US strategic leadership and sufficient resources remain in place to ensure the credibility of deterrence. Themes 4-6 explore several barriers or challenges to, and recommendations for, effective integration with allies and partners. Theme 4 recommendations include harnessing new platforms and well-designed divisions of labor to achieve specific goals that complement NATO activities and involve increased responsibilities and an increased, active role in integrated deterrence for European nations. Theme 5 emphasizes the continued importance of NATO Alliance cohesion, which can be strengthened by emphasizing shared values. Theme 6 focuses on the use of shared capabilities and the potential for cross-theater synergy, identifying several key challenges that must be overcome but which also suggest a roadmap for the way forward. Finally, theme 7 underscores that the US and its allies must invoke the whole of their societies to build resilience and integrated deterrence in the new infinite game that characterizes great power competition. This includes proactive campaigning by all government departments and agencies in a dynamic effort that is engaged in daily and adapted regularly to influence competitors' decision calculi and deter aggression.

While many of the issues surrounding integrated deterrence raised in this study have been ongoing points of discussion or debate, almost all experts agreed that the necessary prerequisites and activities are either not being accomplished or not being executed sufficiently. This underscores a call to action, where the US can lead with vision as a convening authority and coalescing force that motivates US, ally, and partner commitment and action to truly integrate deterrence in the evolving operating environment.

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## Appendix: Full List of Study Questions Asked of Participants

### Integrated Deterrence: Credible Resolve and Capability

- How might we most effectively communicate US, ally, and partner resolve and capability to deter aggression in Europe?
- What are the opportunities for integrating deterrence signaling and operations both *within* and *outside of* NATO?

### Challenges and Solutions

- What are the main challenges to establishing and demonstrating US, ally, and partner resolve and/or capability to deter aggression? What are possible solutions to these challenges?
- What bureaucratic, economic, logistic, political, socio-historical, terminological, communications, or other barriers could impede effective coordination among allies and partners?
- What might preclude consensus within NATO in the context of a three-peer deterrence problem?

### Required Resources

- What are the time, money, personnel, or other required resources to effectively deter aggression in Europe and overcome any barriers?