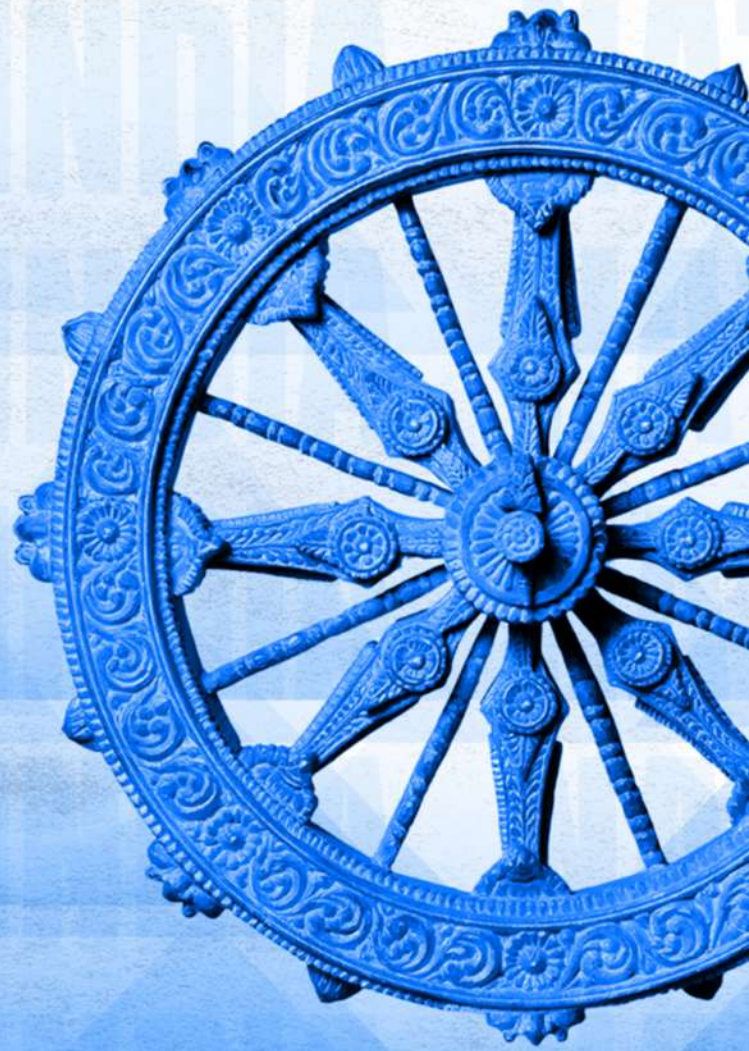




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Executive Summary

This report examines the role of NATO in global security, its historical development, and its growing strategic relationship with India in an evolving geopolitical landscape. Rooted in the realist perspective of international relations, it highlights how the pursuit of hegemony has driven global conflicts, from the World Wars to the Cold War. As a collective defense alliance, NATO played a crucial role in maintaining global stability through deterrence, crisis management, and military cooperation.

Over the past decade, India has strengthened its partnerships with key NATO members, engaging in defense collaborations, joint military exercises, and intelligence-sharing agreements. The report further delves into NATO's Strategic Foresight Analysis (SFA 2023), which outlines emerging global security challenges, including climate change, AI-driven technological disruptions, and cyber warfare. India's rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, space technology, and quantum computing offer a unique opportunity for greater NATO-India cooperation.

Finally, the report assesses the shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, now the focal point of global strategic competition. The growing alignment between India and NATO is not merely a possibility but a necessity in maintaining regional stability and countering shared threats. As great power rivalries intensify, deeper collaboration will be essential to ensure global security in the 21st century.



Necessity

NATO is not merely a possibility but a necessity in maintaining regional stability and countering shared threats. As great power rivalries intensify, deeper collaboration will be essential to ensure global security in the 21st century.

Introduction

“Only the dead have seen the end of war,” famously remarked General Douglas MacArthur, attributing this quotation to ancient Greek philosopher Plato in his farewell address to the graduating class of West Point in 1962, highlighting the intertwined nature of the growth of human civilisation and the inalienable role of conflict between humans.¹ The foundation of the realist school of international relations is augmented by this belief. Realists believe that the world as we live in functions as a state of anarchy in which the ultimate objective of any state is maximisation of its power capacities and attaining the status of what theoretical scholars call 'hegemon'.² Political scientist and international relations scholar, John Mearsheimer, in his pivotal work, 'The Tragedy of Great Power Politics,' charts out the course of history from this perspective, tracking down how the history of conflicts in modern times was the history of what he described as the quest for regional hegemony.³

This quest for hegemony can rightly be observed in the twentieth century, first during the first world war and then during the second world war and cold war. While during the First World War, British and French hegemony was challenged by Wilhelmine Germany and its hegemonic ambitions, the Second World War was the result of Germany's ambition to become a European hegemon and the failure of the global balance of power due to persisting multipolarity.⁴ However, nowhere is this quest for hegemony and balance of power more visible than during the Cold War, when both the then-great powers—the United States and the USSR—engaged each other in the global race to supremacy.

The genesis of the Cold War can be traced back to the end of the Second World War when allies turned against each other initially due to the ideological divergences and later due to the inception of nuclear weapons on the global stage, which further intensified the mutual security dilemmas. In a way, the emergence of Cold War was the example of what ancient Indian political thinker and strategist, Kautilya called a 'Mandala theory', in which he described how with the elimination of a common enemy, one competes with one's ally in order to maximise its chances of survival in the brutal balance of power game. Nazi Germany is a case in point.⁵



Hegemony

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At the global stage, the Cold War led to the formation of blocks, with the United States leading one and its ideological competitor and adversary, the USSR, leading the other. The emergence of many multinational and transnational organisations, some of which are heavily active today, can be traced back to this era. The most important of these organisations was the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This report aims to highlight the contribution of NATO in maintaining peace and security during the Cold War and after. The following sections will cover the historical and theoretical underpinnings for the establishment of NATO and its relevance and necessity in maintaining global peace while simultaneously also highlighting the converging interests of NATO countries and India in terms of security cooperation.



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Historical Background Behind the Establishment of NATO

“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent... In front of the Iron Curtain, which lies across Europe, are other causes for anxiety,” were the famous utterances by Winston Churchill on March 5, 1946, at Westminster College in Fulton, which not only highlighted the emergence of the era of conflict in the second half of the twentieth century but also shaped the next fifty years of geopolitical complexities.⁶ Out of those geopolitical and strategic predicaments, NATO was born.

After due deliberations between the capitalist bloc, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington D.C. in April 1949 and thus established the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). With reaffirming principles of the United Nations Charter, NATO aimed at securing long-lasting peace and security in the world in addition to seeking to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.⁷

Since then, especially during the Cold War, NATO has profoundly contributed to maintaining peace through collective defence in addition to promoting dialogue and cooperation and deterring aggression. Further, it also engages in various crisis-management operations, both independently and in cooperation with other countries and organisations.

One of the most unique features of the North Atlantic Treaty is its Article 5, which strengthens the organisation's collective defence capabilities. It explicitly mentions that an attack on one country by the adversary will lead to counter-responses by all the member countries. This provision of collective defence has played an important role in defeating extremist forces during the Global War on Terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks.



1949

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NATO-India: From Non-alignment to Strategic Alignment

After India got its independence in 1947 from the UK, it had to face the twin challenges of maintaining peace at home amid the brutal partition of the subcontinent and manoeuvring with caution in the realm of foreign policy amid the then-great power politics. Under the stewardship of Prime Minister Nehru, India decided on non-pursuance of block politics on the international level along with newly independent countries.

The role of Prime Minister Nehru was pivotal in organising the Bandung Conference in 1955 in Indonesia, which laid the key foundations of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War. While two of India's adversaries, Pakistan and China, decided to support the USA and the USSR, respectively, India proved to be a leader in guiding the path to developing countries to follow the path of development and growth without aligning themselves with any superpower.

While the brutal realism of the day drove policies of both superpowers, strategic paranoia guided India's foreign policy decisions. With the end of the Cold War, however, there was a flux in the global balance of power with shifting power realities. India too had to make a strategic realignment with one of its biggest ideological supporters, the USSR, being wiped out of existence. On the economic front, India opened its economy and unlocked the potential of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (LPG). On the strategic front, it has started the process to integrate itself with the only remaining superpower on the earth—the United States of America.



Bandung

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Along with economic factors, India's strategic pivot was influenced by two other significant factors. Primarily, it was due to the shifting regional balance of power in Asia, the U.S.-China hostilities and the rise of China as an economic power reshaped India's views towards the West in its domestic and political milieu. Since the 1990s, India's engagement with NATO countries strengthened, first gradually and after 2014 exponentially. India, the world's largest democracy, has close strategic relations with major NATO countries—France, Germany, the UK, and the United States, to name a few. India and key NATO countries collaborate on many geostrategic and military affairs, be it joint manufacturing of weapons technology, collaborative military exercises, or intelligence and data sharing.



Collaboration

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NATO: Strategic Foresight Analysis and India

Since 2017, NATO's Strategic Foresight Branch has started conducting strategic foresight analysis of specific areas and domains of importance to the Alliance. The purpose of these reports is to contribute to a better visualisation and understanding of the forthcoming security environment in domains concerning Euro-Atlantic security.⁸ The latest of these reports was published in the year 2023, which highlights the assessment of major drivers and relevant implications of the evolving security environment tentatively until 2043.⁹

The Strategic Foresight Analysis 2023, or SFA 2023, explains the transition of the international order by means of seven drivers of change, which include climate breakdown and loss of biodiversity, resource scarcity driving instabilities, the age of AI—emerging and disruptive technologies converging, geoeconomics enabling polarisation, and human networks empowered scramble for the 'commons'. All of the aforementioned drivers hold immense potential for joint collaboration between NATO countries and India.

The SFA 2023 recognises the fact that allied power capabilities will undergo rapid transformation due to various factors affecting these drivers. It further examines the need for collaboration with like-minded democracies in order to maintain the status quo in terms of power distribution in the world.

One of the prime focus areas for NATO in this digital age is countering non-kinetic threats, especially in the non-geographical domain, especially in the domains of cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Last year in 2024, the Cabinet of India approved the IndiaAI Mission with an outlay of over Rs 10,300 crore that will empower AI startups and expand computer infrastructure access across the country.¹⁰ Further, India has also organised the Global INDIAai Summit 2024, which saw the participation from 12,000 global AI experts and practitioners which also included the delegates from 50 countries.¹¹ Most recently, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi co-chaired the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron, which was held at the Grand Palais in Paris, France, from 10 to 11 February 2025.¹²



Cybersecurity

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As the first allied conference organised last year in Helsinki between 10 and 12 June talks about developing strategies to manage the risks and opportunities presented by technologies used both for civilian and military purposes, India's pioneering of emerging and disruptive technologies, be it artificial intelligence or in the domain of quantum computing, paves the way for greater geostrategic collaboration in deterring common adversaries.¹³

Space is another such domain in which the potentiality of cooperation between NATO countries and India is unparalleled due to India's growing space capabilities both in terms of civilian and military spheres. As NATO aims at improving resilience against cyber attacks and integrating cyber operations into broader military strategies along with securing space assets to ensure the ability to operate effectively in this domain, India's growing cyber and tech clout provides an opportunity for greater cooperation.¹⁴

*Space*

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Twenty-first century Great-Power Rivalries and Way Forward

If European theatre was the central locus of twentieth-century great power competition, in the aftermath of decoloniality and the shifting balance of power, the Indo-Pacific is going to be the geopolitical juncture for the emerging great power politics. War seems inevitable when the emerging superpower challenges the status quo favouring the established superpower, as outlined by the American political scientist Graham T. Allison in expounding his hypothesis of the Thucydides trap.¹⁵

"Si vis pacem, para bellum" (If you want peace, prepare for war), ancient Romans used to say. Whether the inevitability of war is questionable or not depends on the multiple geopolitical factors, but the path to peace passes through all-out preparation for war amid the twenty-first century great power politics. The centrality of the Indo-Pacific in the current global situation, along with the aforementioned domains of commonalities, makes NATO-India Geostrategic Convergence predestined and inescapable.



Indo-Pacific

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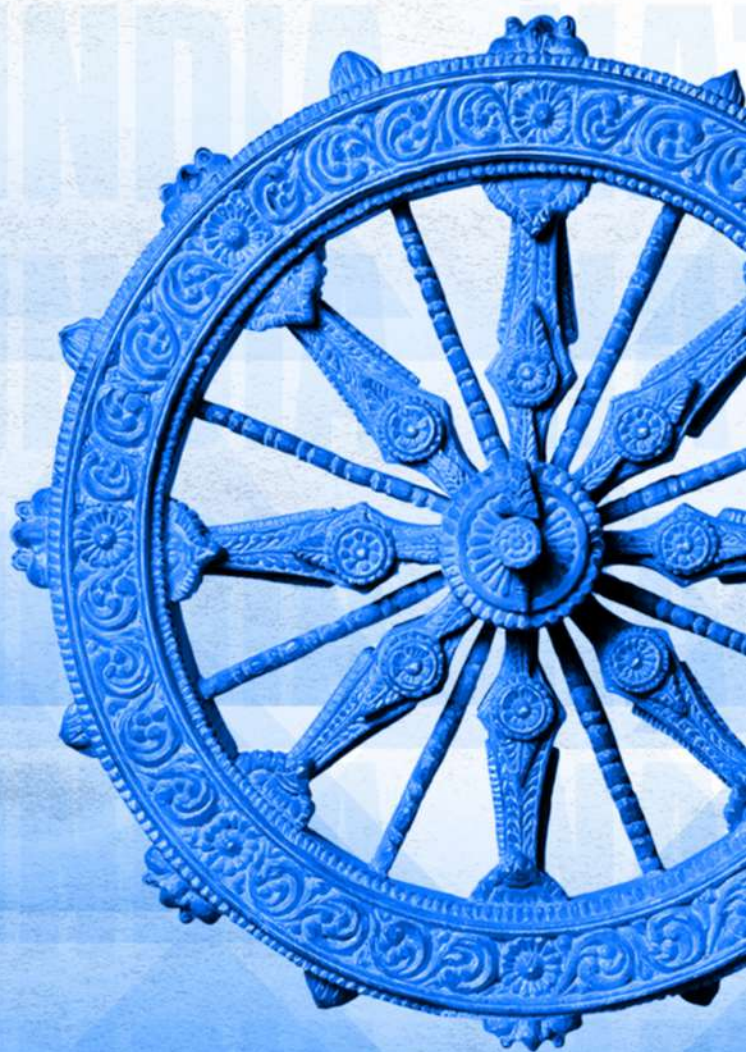
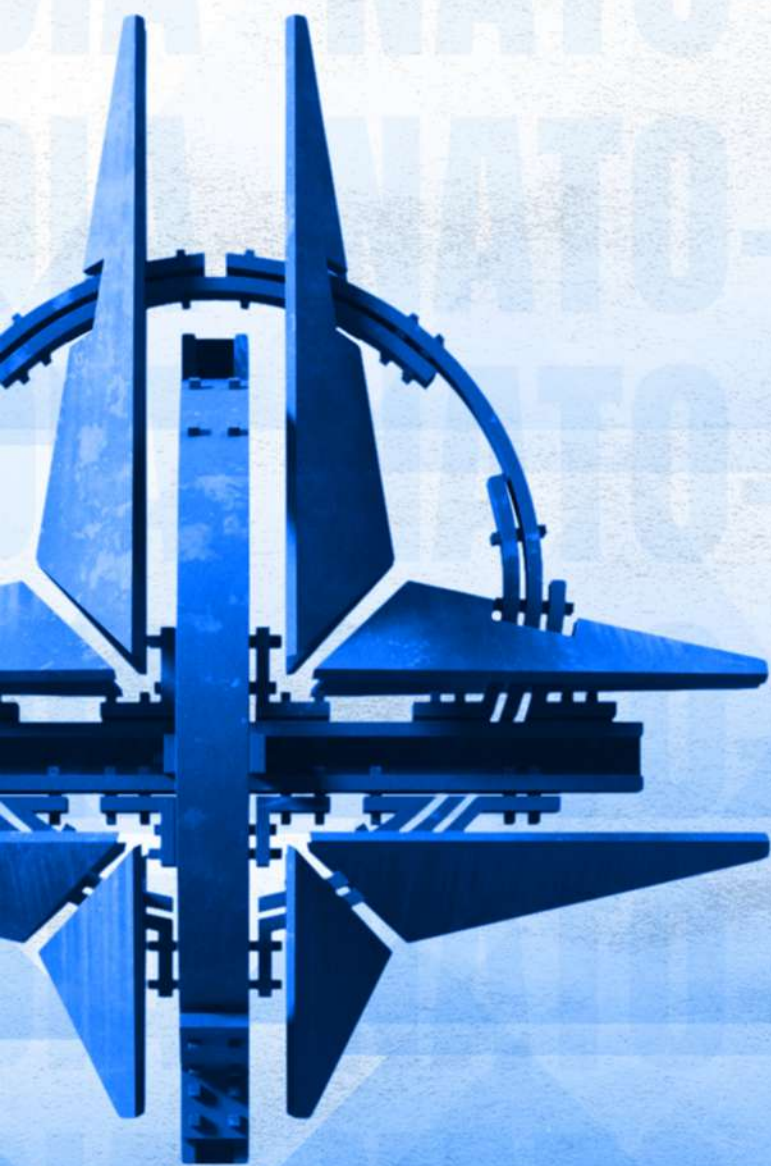
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