

Chris Hedges: NATO — The Most Dangerous Military Alliance on the Planet

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the arms industry that depends on it for billions in profits, has become the most aggressive and dangerous military alliance on the planet. Created in 1949 to thwart Soviet expansion into Eastern and Central Europe, it has evolved into a global war machine in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

NATO expanded its footprint, [violating promises](#) to Moscow, once [the Cold War ended](#), to incorporate [14 countries](#) in Eastern and Central Europe into the alliance. It will soon add Finland and Sweden. It bombed Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo. It launched wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya, resulting in close to [a million deaths and some 38 million people driven from their homes](#). It is building a military footprint in [Africa](#) and Asia. It invited Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, the so-called “Asia Pacific Four,” to its recent summit in Madrid at the end of June. It has expanded its reach into the Southern Hemisphere, [signing a military training](#) partnership agreement with Colombia, in December 2021. It has backed Turkey, with NATO’s second largest military, which has illegally [invaded](#) and occupied parts of Syria as well as Iraq. Turkish-backed [militias](#) are [engaged in](#) the ethnic cleansing of Syrian Kurds and other inhabitants of north and east Syria. The Turkish military has been accused of war crimes – including [multiple airstrikes](#) against a refugee camp and [chemical weapons](#) use – in northern Iraq. [In exchange](#) for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s permission for Finland and Sweden to join the alliance, the two Nordic countries [have agreed](#) to [expand](#) their domestic terror laws making it easier to crack down on Kurdish and other activists, lift their restrictions on selling arms to Turkey and deny support to the Kurdish-led movement for democratic autonomy in Syria.

It is quite a record for a military alliance that with the collapse of the Soviet Union was rendered obsolete and should have been dismantled. NATO and the militarists had no intention of embracing the “peace dividend,” fostering a world based on diplomacy, a

respect of spheres of influence and mutual cooperation. It was determined to stay in business. Its business is war. That meant expanding its war machine far beyond the border of Europe and engaging in ceaseless antagonism toward China and Russia.

NATO sees the future, as detailed in its "[NATO 2030: Unified for a New Era](#)," as a battle for hegemony with rival states, especially China, and calls for the preparation of prolonged global conflict.

"China has an increasingly global strategic agenda, supported by its economic and military heft," the NATO 2030 initiative warned. "It has proven its willingness to use force against its neighbors, as well as economic coercion and intimidatory diplomacy well beyond the Indo-Pacific region. Over the coming decade, China will likely also challenge NATO's ability to build collective resilience, safeguard critical infrastructure, address new and emerging technologies such as 5G and protect sensitive sectors of the economy including supply chains. Longer term, China is increasingly likely to project military power globally, including potentially in the Euro-Atlantic area."

The alliance has spurned the Cold War strategy that made sure Washington was closer to Moscow and Beijing than Moscow and Beijing were to each other. U.S. and NATO antagonism have turned Russia and China into close allies. Russia, rich in natural resources, including energy, minerals and grains, and China, a manufacturing and technological behemoth, are a potent combination. NATO no longer distinguishes between the two, announcing in its most recent [mission statement](#) that the "deepening strategic partnership" between Russian and China has resulted in "mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order that run counter to our values and interests."

On July 6, Christopher Wray, director of the FBI, and Ken McCallum, director general of Britain's MI5, held a [joint news conference](#) in London to announce that China was the "biggest long-term threat to our economic and national security." They accused China, like Russia, of interfering in U.S. and U.K. elections. Wray warned the business leaders they addressed that the Chinese government was "set on stealing your technology, whatever it is that makes your industry tick, and using it to undercut your business and dominate your market."

This inflammatory rhetoric presages an ominous future.

One cannot talk about war without talking about markets. The political and social turmoil in the U.S., coupled with its diminishing economic power, has led it to embrace NATO and its war machine as the antidote to its decline.

Washington and its European allies are terrified of China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) meant to connect an economic bloc of roughly 70 nations outside U.S. control. The initiative includes the construction of rail lines, roads and gas pipelines that will be integrated with Russia. Beijing is expected to commit [\\$1.3 trillion](#) to the BRI by 2027. China, which is on track to become the [world's largest economy](#) within a decade, has organized the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#), the world's largest trade pact of 15 East Asian and Pacific nations representing 30 percent of global trade. It [already accounts for](#) 28.7 percent of the Global Manufacturing Output, nearly double the 16.8 percent of the U.S.

China's rate of growth last year was an impressive [8.1 percent](#), although slowing to

around [5 percent](#) this year. By contrast, the U.S.'s growth rate in 2021 was [5.7 percent](#) — its highest since 1984 — but is predicted to [fall below 1 percent](#) this year, by the New York Federal Reserve.

If China, Russia, Iran, India and other nations free themselves from the tyranny of the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency and the international Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), a messaging network financial institutions use to send and receive information such as money transfer instructions, it will trigger a dramatic decline in the value of the dollar and a financial collapse in the U.S. The huge military expenditures, which have driven the U.S. debt to [\\$30 trillion](#), \$ 6 trillion more than the U.S.'s entire GDP, will become untenable. Servicing this debt costs \$300 billion a year. We spent more on the military in 2021, \$ 801 billion which amounted to 38 percent of total world expenditure on the military, than the next nine countries, including China and Russia, combined. The loss of the dollar as the world's reserve currency will force the U.S. to slash spending, shutter many of its 800 military bases overseas and cope with the inevitable social and political upheavals triggered by economic collapse. It is darkly ironic that NATO has accelerated this possibility.

Russia, in the eyes of NATO and U.S. strategists, is the appetizer. Its military, [NATO hopes](#), will get bogged down and degraded in Ukraine. Sanctions and diplomatic isolation, the plan goes, will thrust Vladimir Putin from power. A client regime that will do U.S. bidding will be installed in Moscow.

NATO has provided more than [\\$8 billion](#) in military aid to Ukraine, while the US has committed nearly [\\$54 billion](#) in military and humanitarian assistance to the country.

China, however, is the [main course](#). Unable to compete economically, the U.S. and NATO have turned to the blunt instrument of war to cripple their global competitor.

The provocation of China replicates the NATO baiting of Russia.

NATO expansion and the [2014 US-backed coup](#) in Kyiv led Russia to first occupy Crimea, in eastern Ukraine, with its large ethnic Russian population, and then to invade all of Ukraine to thwart the country's efforts to join NATO.

The same dance of death is being played with China over Taiwan, which China considers part of Chinese territory, and with NATO expansion in the Asia Pacific. China [flies warplanes](#) into Taiwan's air defense zone and the U.S. sends [naval ships](#) through the Taiwan Strait which connects the South and East China seas. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in May [called China](#) the most serious long-term challenge to the international order, citing its claims to Taiwan and efforts to dominate the [South China Sea](#). Taiwan's president, in a Zelensky-like publicity stunt, [recently posed](#) with an anti-tank rocket launcher in a government handout photo.

The conflict in Ukraine has been [a bonanza for the arms industry](#), which, given the humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan, needed a new conflict. Lockheed Martin's stock prices are up 12 percent. Northrop Grumman is up 20 percent. The war is being used by NATO to increase its military presence in [Eastern and Central Europe](#). The U.S. is building a [permanent military base](#) in Poland. The 40,000-strong NATO reaction force is being expanded to [300,000 troops](#). Billions of dollars in weapons are pouring into the region.

The conflict with Russia, however, is already backfiring. The ruble has [soared to a seven-year high](#) against the dollar. Europe is barreling towards a [recession](#) because of rising oil and gas prices and the fear that Russia could terminate supplies completely. The loss of Russian wheat, fertilizer, gas and oil, due to Western sanctions, is creating havoc in world markets and a [humanitarian crisis](#) in Africa and the Middle East. Soaring food and energy prices, along with shortages and crippling inflation, bring with them not only deprivation and hunger, but social upheaval and political instability. The climate emergency, the real existential threat, is being ignored to appease the gods of war.

The war makers are frighteningly cavalier about the threat of nuclear war. Putin warned NATO countries that they “will face consequences greater than any you have faced in history” if they intervened directly in Ukraine and ordered Russian nuclear forces to be put on [heightened alert status](#). The proximity to Russia of U.S. nuclear weapons based in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Turkey mean that any nuclear conflict would obliterate much of Europe. Russia and the United States control about [90 percent of the world’s nuclear warheads, with around 4,000 warheads each](#) in their military stockpiles, according to the Federation of American Scientists.

President Joe Biden [warned](#) that the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine would be “completely unacceptable” and “entail severe consequences,” without spelling out what those consequences would be. This is what U.S. strategists refer to as “deliberate ambiguity.”

The U.S. military, following its fiascos in the Middle East, has shifted its focus from fighting terrorism and asymmetrical warfare to confronting China and Russia. President Barack Obama’s national-security team in 2016 carried out a war game in which Russia invaded a NATO country in the Baltics and used a low-yield tactical nuclear weapon against NATO forces. Obama officials were split about how to respond.

“The National Security Council’s so-called Principals Committee—including Cabinet officers and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—decided that the United States had no choice but to retaliate with nuclear weapons,” Eric Schlosser writes in [The Atlantic](#). “Any other type of response, the committee argued, would show a lack of resolve, damage American credibility, and weaken the NATO alliance. Choosing a suitable nuclear target proved difficult, however. Hitting Russia’s invading force would kill innocent civilians in a NATO country. Striking targets inside Russia might escalate the conflict to an all-out nuclear war. In the end, the NSC Principals Committee recommended a nuclear attack on Belarus—a nation that had played no role whatsoever in the invasion of the NATO ally but had the misfortune of being a Russian ally.”

The Biden administration has formed a Tiger Team of national security officials to run war games on what to do if Russia uses a nuclear weapon, [according to The New York Times](#). The threat of nuclear war is minimized with discussions of “tactical nuclear weapons,” as if less powerful nuclear explosions are somehow more acceptable and won’t lead to the use of bigger bombs.

At no time, including the Cuban missile crisis, have we stood closer to the precipice of nuclear war.

“A [simulation](#) devised by experts at Princeton University starts with Moscow firing a nuclear warning shot; NATO responds with a small strike, and the ensuing war yields [more than 90](#)

[million casualties](#) in its first few hours," *The New York Times* reported.

The longer the war in Ukraine continues — and the U.S. and NATO seem determined to funnel billions of dollars of weapons into the conflict for months if not years — the more the unthinkable becomes thinkable. Flirting with Armageddon to profit the arms industry and carry out the futile quest to reclaim U.S. global hegemony is at best extremely reckless and at worst genocidal.

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