

Washington's Grand Design: Draw NATO into Confronting Russia and China

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The December 3-4 summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in London resembles a family reunion after the acrimony over the issue of military spending by America's European allies.

The trend is up for defence spending across European Allies and Canada. Over \$100 billion is expected to be added to the member states' defence budgets by end-2020.

More importantly, the trend at the NATO foreign ministers' meeting at Brussels on November 19-20, in the run-up to the London summit, showed that despite growing differences within the alliance, member states closed ranks around three priority items in the US global agenda — escalation of the aggressive policy toward Russia, militarisation of space and countering China's rise.

The NATO will follow Washington's lead to establish a space command by officially regarding space as ["a new operational domain"](#). According to NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg, this decision "can allow NATO planners to make a request for allies to provide capabilities and services, such as satellite communications and data imagery."

Stoltenberg [said](#),

"Space is also essential to the alliance's deterrence and defence, including the ability to navigate, to gather intelligence, and to detect missile launches. Around 2,000 satellites orbit the Earth. And around half of them are owned by NATO countries."

Equally, Washington has been urging the NATO to officially identify China's rise as a long-term challenge. According to media reports, the Brussels meeting acceded to the US demand and decided to officially begin military surveillance of China.

The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [hit out at China](#) after the Brussels meeting:

"Finally, our alliance must address the current and potential long-term threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party. Seventy years ago, the founding nations of NATO came together for the cause of freedom and democracy. We cannot ignore the fundamental differences and beliefs in the – between our countries and those of the Chinese Communist Party."

So far so good. However, it remains to be seen if Washington's grand design to draw NATO

into its “Indo-Pacific strategy” (read containment of China) will gain traction. Clearly, the US intends to have a say in the European allies’ growing business and economic relations with China to delimit Chinese influence in Europe. The US campaign to block 5G technology from China met with rebuff from several European countries.

On the other hand, the European project has unravelled and the Franco-German axis that was its anchor sheet has become shaky. The rift between Paris and Berlin works to Washington’s advantage but, paradoxically, also hobbles the western alliance system.

The French President Emmanuel Macron annoyed Germany by his recent calls for better relations with Russia “to prevent the world from going up in a conflagration”; his brutally frank remarks about NATO being “brain dead” and the US policy on Russia being “governmental, political and historical hysteria”; and his repeated emphasis on a European military policy independent of the US.

The congruence of interests between Berlin and Washington vis-a-vis Macron manifested itself in the NATO’s endorsement of the US-led escalation against Russia and China, with France rather isolated. However, this congruence will be put to test very soon at the summit meeting of the Normandy format over Ukraine, which France is hosting on December 9, following the NATO’s London summit. France is helping Russia to negotiate a deal with Ukraine.

The recent [phone calls](#) between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky underscored the growing interest in Moscow and Kiev at the leadership level to improve relations between the two countries.

In the final analysis, the Franco-German relations are of pivotal importance to not only Europe’s strategic future but the western alliance system as such. If anyone was in doubt, the [French veto in October](#) means sudden death for the proposal on European Union accession of the Balkan state of North Macedonia, which NATO is inducting as its newest member. Berlin and Washington are livid, but a veto is a veto.

With NATO being set up by Washington for a confrontationist posture, Russia and China won’t let their guard down. Addressing a meeting of the Russian Federation Security Council on November 22, Putin [said](#),

“There are many uncertainty factors... competition and rivalry are growing stringer and morphing into new forms... The leading countries are actively developing their offensive weapons... the so-called ‘nuclear club’ is receiving new members, as we all know. We are also seriously concerned about the NATO infrastructure approaching our borders, as well as the attempts to militarise outer space.”

Putin stressed,

“In these conditions, it is important to make adequate and accurate forecasts, analyse the possible changes in the global situation, and to use the forecasts and conclusions to develop our military potential.”

The US-led military build-up against Russia and China will be on display in two big exercises

next year codenamed '[Defender 2020 in Europe](#)' and '[Defender 2020 in the Pacific](#)'.

Significantly, only four days before Putin made the above remarks, Chinese President Xi Jinping told him at a meeting in Brasilia on the sidelines of the BRICS summit that “the ongoing complex and profound changes in the current international situation with rising instability and uncertainty urge China and Russia to establish closer strategic coordination to jointly uphold the basic norms governing international relations, oppose unilateralism, bullying and interference in other countries’ affairs, safeguard the respective sovereignty and security, and create a fair and just international environment.”

Putin responded by saying that

“Russia and China have important consensus and common interests in maintaining global strategic security and stability. Under the current situation, the two sides should continue to maintain close strategic communication and firmly support each other in safeguarding sovereignty, security, and development rights.” ([Chinese MFA](#))

The Russian response is also visible on the ground. The share of modern weapons and equipment in the Russian Army and Navy has reached an impressive level of 70 percent. The first pilot batch of [next-generation T-14 Armata tanks will arrive](#) for the Russian troops in late 2019 – early 2020.

On November 26, Russian Defence Ministry stated that Moscow’s breakthrough Avangard missile system with the hypersonic boost-glide vehicle will be [deployed on combat duty](#) with the Strategic Missile Force in December.

For the first time, the electronic warfare systems at [Russia’s military base in Tajikistan](#) will be reinforced with the latest Pole-21 jamming station that can counter cruise missiles, drones and guided air bombs and precision weapon guidance systems. Moscow is guarding against the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan.

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Featured image: Moscow’s breakthrough Avangard missile system with the hypersonic boost-glide vehicle will be deployed on combat duty with the Strategic Missile Force in December 2019 (Source: Indian Punchline)

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