

NATO's Indo-Pacific expansion lacks legality and common sense

by Jan Oberg,* Sweden



Jan Oberg. (Picture <https://oberg.life>)

South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand sent their defence ministers to a NATO meeting on 24 October 2024. While their heads of state and others have attended before, this was the first time these countries' defence ministers joined.

This more military-operative attendance signals that NATO is serious about its expansion into this region. From a politico-psychological angle, it also shows that expansion for the sake of expansion has become the *raison d'être* of the once-defensive alliance. NATO has been searching for such a reason to exist ever since the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact dissolved about 35 years ago, and, by all logic, it ought to have been closed down, too.

The expansion happens in violation of NATO's Treaty of 1949. That Treaty is a copy of the UN Charter, refers disputes to the UN and states (Art 5) that members of the alliance are obliged to support any member should it be attacked from the outside.

Today, NATO has 32 members, but—incrementally and virtually without international attention—it has added 38 partner countries worldwide, including the four above-mentioned [and Switzerland, see box, CH-S].

The category “partner” does not exist in NATO's Treaty – neither, by the way, do things like nuclear weapons and first-use of them, interventions or bombings in non-member states like Yugoslavia at the time, Kosovo, Libya, Ukraine, etc. These

activities have no legal basis in NATO's Treaty; they are out-of-area and out-of-treaty operations.

One common sense and legal question arises: How far can an organisation deviate from its legal foundation without being investigated for possible illegal conduct – and which institution has the authority to investigate?

Here is how NATO motivates its creeping expansion on its homepage: “To enhance (their) mutual situational awareness of security developments in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the *People's Republic of China's* (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies in various domains, the deepening strategic partnership between the PRC and Russia, and the security situation on the Korean Peninsula ...”. “Partnership network strengthens security out-

“Swiss National Armaments Director takes part in the Conference of National Armaments Directors of NATO”¹

(CH-S) What was the Swiss national armaments director *Urs Loher* doing at the NATO meeting in Brussels on 24 October 2024, where, among other things, the expansion of NATO into the Indo-Pacific region was discussed? The fact is that our country has been participating in such meetings with 37 other NATO “partner” countries from around the world for many years.²

The federal government's press release on this meeting leaves no doubt that Switzerland has not “only” been involved in NATO activities since 1996 as part of the so-called *Partnership for Peace* (PfP), but also works together with representatives of the *European Union*, the *European Defence Agency* and the Directorate-General for *Defence Industry and Space*. – This is further evidence of the accelerated erosion of Swiss neutrality, which must be counteracted by supporting the federal popular initiative “Preservation of Swiss neutrality”.

Source 1: <https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases.msg-id-102894.html>

Source 2: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52129.htm

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side NATO territory, which makes NATO itself safer.”

Regrettably, NATO’s homepage does not contain any rational, empirically solid, multi-dimensional analysis that substantiates that China is a threat or “challenge” to NATO’s members. The alliance today runs on postulates and outdated offensive deterrence and defence thinking. China is a problem because it has different values and interests. It sounds increasingly like sermons to a church congregation.

According to a June 2023 report by the US Congressional Research Service about US infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific, “the United States maintains and uses at least 66 significant defense sites spread across the region.” (China has one military base worldwide in Djibouti). In addition, the costs of Western permanent – increasing – naval presence and the tremendous costs of AUKUS, the trilateral partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have increased.

AUKUS Pillar 1 is about Australia acquiring nuclear-powered attack submarines and hosting such submarines from the US and UK. Pillar 2 is about intensified collaboration in these high-tech areas: undersea capabilities, quantum technologies, AI and autonomy, advanced cyber, hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities and electronic warfare.

But the costs of upholding a worldwide militarist empire are unimaginably high and self-destructive:

US military expenditures are 916 billion US dollars (at least, lots of items are not in the Pentagon budget) that is 3.4% of its *Gross domestic product* (GDP). It is roughly as large as the next 9 top-ranking countries combined:

China

296 billion US dollars is 1.7% of GDP;

Russia

130 billion US dollars is 6.3% of GDP;

India

84 billion US dollars is 2.4% of GDP;

Saudi Arabia

76 billion US dollars is 7.1% of GDP;

Great Britain

75 billion US dollars are 2.3% of GDP;

Germany

67 billion US dollars are 1.5% of GDP;

Ukraine

65 billion US dollars are 37% of GDP;

France

61 billion US dollars are 2.1% of GDP and



Japan

50 billion US dollars are 1.2% of GDP;

(All data according to SIPRI, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute)

Given these facts and the fact that it is the US that builds up tension against China and not the other way around – nobody threatens the West! – it is impossible to find any empirically solid reason for the US/NATO postulate that China is a threat or “challenge”. It seems, rather, to be pathological – a psycho-political paranoia growing out of a) the subconscious but denied sense of relative decline and b) the permanent need for enemies to legitimise the existence of the out-of-democratic control MIMAC – *Military-Industrial-Media-Academic Complex* that the US has or, rather, is.

Macro historical studies of empire decline point to causes such as over-militarisation, shrinking legitimacy in the eyes of others, decline on all other power dimensions but the military and – of special importance – over-extension: the empire grows beyond management/control with a declining economic carrying capacity.

Since the US/NATO has already lost in more than one way in Ukraine (and all wars since Vietnam), the US may leave it (to the Europeans) and engage in yet another futile war in the Middle East – and then try to “pivot” to Taiwan/China.

But by then, the Empire and NATO will have dissolved – like its Western brother, the Soviet Union – due to self-destructive, delusional policies and emotionalism devoid of vision, rational foreign policies and diplomacy. That is – overextension, militarism and hubris.

And that’s when we can hope to create a much better, peaceful and cooperative world. Remember, over the rainbow, skies are still blue. So, too, in the Indo-Pacific.

Source: <https://transnational.live/2024/11/03/natos-indo-pacific-expansion-lacks-legality-and-common-sense/>, 3 November 2024