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Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC)

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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- AI and Digital Security: Coordinating military AI use and cyber resilience
 - Conflict prevention and mediation in an era of global change
 - Security Beyond NATO's Borders: Cooperation with Partner Countries



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Introduction to the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council

The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) is a multilateral forum consisting of 50 nations (currently 48 as Belarus and Russia are suspended), established to facilitate dialogue and consultation on political and security-related issues across the Euro-Atlantic region. It provides NATO with a political framework for cooperation with partner countries under the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, allowing for both strategic coordination and practical collaboration.

The EAPC was established in 1997, succeeding the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). This transition reflected NATO's desire to create a forum that supported a more operationally engaged and politically nuanced partnership, in line with increasingly complex relationships with partner nations. Through the EAPC, member states exchange views on current political and security challenges, including ongoing situations such as the security issues in Kosovo, as well as longer-term cooperation in areas like arms control and non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, civil preparedness, and emergency response.

The EAPC serves as a unique platform where all member nations (both NATO members and partners) can engage in dialogue, share best practices, and coordinate joint responses to regional and global security challenges. Its flexible structure allows it to adapt to emerging threats while maintaining core tenets of consultation, transparency, and cooperative security.

Topic A: AI and Digital Security: Coordinating military AI use and cyber resilience

Introduction

Artificial intelligence and digital technologies are reshaping the security environment, influencing everything from military decision-making to the protection of critical infrastructure. As advancements accelerate, the question is how will states responsibly integrate AI into their security and defence sectors. This topic is being discussed now because the stakes continue to rise: AI has the potential to enable more efficient operations, support faster analysis, and strengthen situational awareness, yet it also introduces risks related to misuse, accountability, and the erosion of trust. For the EAPC and NATO partner countries, responsible integration is essential to maintaining stability and ensuring that technological innovation aligns with shared values.

The issue sits at the intersection of political alignment, technological capability, and ethical responsibility. States across the Euro-Atlantic community are adopting AI at different speeds, guided by different national priorities and capacities. This creates uneven progress and leaves gaps in collective resilience. At the same time, adversarial actors are adapting quickly, exploiting digital systems, testing vulnerabilities, and accelerating their own AI-enabled capabilities. The combination of these dynamics makes AI governance a priority for the EAPC, not simply as a matter of modernization but as a matter of long-term security.

The discussion also reflects a growing recognition that AI cannot be approached solely from a technical standpoint. It demands clarity on standards, transparency, and safeguards. Without shared principles, cooperation risks becoming fragmented, and misaligned approaches could undermine both interoperability and trust among partners. This is why the conversation extends beyond innovation and focuses on responsible integration, ensuring that the benefits of AI do not create new vulnerabilities within the Euro-Atlantic space. For the EAPC, the goal is to reinforce political cohesion, facilitate coordination, and support partner countries in navigating the strategic implications of AI adoption.

NATO's Role

NATO's interest in this topic stems from its broader responsibility to support stability and security among Allies and partners. While the Alliance recognizes the potential that AI offers, it also acknowledges that responsible use is essential to maintaining credibility and safeguarding shared values. Within this context, NATO's role focuses on encouraging dialogue, building common understanding, and promoting approaches that reflect the principles of transparency, accountability, and reliability. These efforts demonstrate NATO's intention to help partner countries integrate AI in ways that strengthen rather than destabilize the Euro-Atlantic security environment.

NATO's engagement functions primarily through political guidance, cooperative initiatives, and

the reinforcement of shared expectations about responsible technological adoption. The Alliance emphasizes the importance of aligning national efforts with broader security objectives and understanding how domestic developments influence regional resilience. While NATO does not impose binding requirements on partners, it provides a structured forum for discussing emerging risks and identifying areas where coordination can reduce vulnerability. This collaborative environment helps ensure that AI integration remains consistent with long-term stability, even as technological capacities continue to evolve.

The relevance of this topic to NATO lies in the convergence of digital innovation and collective defence. The Alliance's ability to respond to emerging threats depends increasingly on digital preparedness and the responsible use of advanced technologies. Through its relationship with the EAPC, NATO supports partner countries as they navigate ethical considerations, implementation challenges, and the political implications of AI-enabled capabilities. By framing responsible AI as a strategic priority, NATO reinforces its commitment to ensuring that technological change enhances, not complicates, the Alliance's collective security posture.

Current Challenges

Despite the significant attention given to responsible AI integration, the EAPC and NATO partners continue to face complex challenges. One of the most pressing is the widening gap in technological development across the Euro-Atlantic area, which results in uneven adoption of AI-enabled systems and leaves collective defences vulnerable to exploitation. Political hesitation around intelligence sharing further complicates matters, as states remain cautious about exposing internal vulnerabilities or compromising strategic autonomy. This hesitancy weakens early-warning mechanisms and limits the ability to coordinate effectively against fast-moving digital threats.

At the same time, the pace of technological change means that existing governance structures can quickly become outdated, making it difficult to maintain consistent safeguards or ensure that partner nations are working with compatible systems. These challenges underscore an ongoing struggle to balance technological advancement with political cohesion and operational reliability.

NATO's Current Actions and Limitations

NATO has taken several steps to address these issues by accelerating responsible AI adoption and strengthening digital resilience. The Alliance's work began with the 2021 AI Strategy and evolved with the Revised AI Strategy released in July 2024, which reflects rapid advances in generative AI and the need to mainstream emerging technologies across the organization. Central to this strategy are the Principles of Responsible Use: lawfulness, responsibility and accountability, explainability and traceability, reliability, governability, and bias mitigation. NATO is currently working to translate these principles into a practical responsible AI certification standard focused on governability, traceability, and reliability. Alongside this

normative work, the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the NATO Innovation Fund support the development and scaling of dual-use and AI-related technologies that can enhance deterrence and resilience.

NATO has also expanded its efforts in cyber defence. Since declaring cyberspace a domain of operations in 2016, the Alliance has integrated AI-enabled systems into its broader digital architecture. Tools such as AI FELIX, which automates the processing and classification of communications during cyber incidents, and AI AIDA, which accelerates intelligence analysis across NATO documents, reflect the organization's attempt to operationalize AI in real-world scenarios. The Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) continues to anchor doctrine development and training, particularly through the Locked Shields exercise, which emphasizes AI-enabled threat detection, deepfake disinformation, and synthetic identity manipulation. The Revised AI Strategy also highlights concerns around adversarial AI, including AI-driven disinformation and gender-based online violence, reinforcing the need for stronger protections.

However, despite these initiatives, NATO's ability to drive uniform progress across the EAPC remains constrained. The Alliance can set standards and encourage best practices, but it cannot compel partner countries to adopt them. Implementation therefore depends heavily on national political will, resource availability, and domestic priorities. Technological disparities persist, leaving some states unable to meet interoperability expectations or participate fully in joint digital defence efforts. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of AI means regulatory frameworks risk becoming obsolete before they are fully implemented. Attribution of AI-enabled cyberattacks remains unclear, and without standardized Verification, Validation, and Accreditation processes, interoperability challenges will continue to hinder multinational coordination.

Conclusion and Further Research

Moving forward, the EAPC and NATO partner countries will need to consider how responsible AI integration can be strengthened through sustained coordination, clearer expectations, and a deeper understanding of the risks posed by uneven adoption. The future of this topic hinges on the ability of states to balance innovation with caution and to ensure that technological progress does not compromise long-term stability. Delegates should examine how existing cooperation can be expanded, where political and institutional barriers may hinder progress, and what steps are necessary to maintain coherence as technologies continue to evolve. The challenge will be to ensure that responsible integration becomes a continuous process rather than a one-time adjustment.

The path ahead will require confronting both structural limitations and strategic uncertainties. As partner countries develop AI capabilities at different speeds, the risk of fragmentation grows. Addressing this will require not only political commitment but also an understanding of how domestic constraints shape national choices. Delegates should also consider how to reinforce trust and cross-system functionality, especially in a landscape where technological

advancement does not always move in parallel. Ultimately, the question is how the EAPC can help ensure that AI strengthens the Euro-Atlantic community rather than introducing new vulnerabilities.

Guiding Questions:

- How should the EAPC balance the need for rapid technological adoption with the ethical, legal, and strategic risks of deploying AI in military and security settings?
- What mechanisms could be developed to ensure accountability when AI-enabled systems fail, misinterpret data, or produce harmful outcomes during security operations?
- How can NATO and partner countries create transparent processes for auditing AI decision-making without compromising national security or classified information?
- In what ways might the increasing use of generative AI reshape information warfare, and how should the EAPC adapt its strategies to counter these emerging threats?
- What frameworks could help partner countries coordinate attribution of AI-enabled cyberattacks more quickly and consistently during a crisis?

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Topic B: Conflict prevention and mediation in an era of global change

Introduction

The Euro Atlantic Partnership Council, often referred to as the EAPC, serves as a central forum for dialogue, cooperation, and political consultation between NATO Allies and partner states across Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Established in 1997 following the earlier North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the EAPC was designed to provide a more flexible and inclusive space for states to discuss security challenges in a cooperative framework. It complements the practical programs offered by the Partnership for Peace and creates a platform where collective efforts in conflict prevention, crisis management, and post conflict stabilization can be developed.

As Europe and Eurasia continue to experience shifting security dynamics, the EAPC is increasingly expected to support early warning, mediation, and conflict prevention. Regional volatility in the South Caucasus, the Western Balkans, and the Baltic region has demonstrated that unresolved disputes and great power pressures can quickly escalate into crises. Given the complexity of modern threats, which often combine military, political, economic, and informational elements, conflict prevention now requires deeper cooperation, more consistent political dialogue, and stronger engagement between NATO and its partner states. The purpose of this committee is to explore how the EAPC can strengthen its role in anticipating instability and supporting diplomatic efforts before violence occurs.

Historical Context

The EAPC emerged at a moment of significant transformation in the Euro Atlantic security architecture. Following the end of the Cold War, NATO sought to redefine its mission by engaging with newly independent states and building relationships across Central and Eastern Europe. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council was the first major initiative aimed at opening dialogue with former Warsaw Pact members and Soviet republics. However, the Council was limited in scope and structure, and in 1997 NATO members agreed to transition to a more comprehensive framework through the creation of the EAPC.

In the early years, the EAPC and the Partnership for Peace offered guidance to partner states during periods of political transition and provided opportunities for joint training and confidence building. These mechanisms were particularly important in regions such as the Balkans, where the dissolution of Yugoslavia created severe instability. While NATO ultimately engaged in military operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, the experience demonstrated that early political dialogue and shared situational awareness are essential for preventing conflict. Lessons from the 1990s and early 2000s contributed to NATO's recognition that long term security requires both military readiness and sustained diplomatic engagement among diverse partners.

Over time, regional tensions reemerged in several areas. The war between Georgia and Russia in 2008, rising instability in Ukraine beginning in 2014, and ongoing disputes in the South

Caucasus have shown that the post Cold War security order remains contested. Although the EAPC's ability to directly influence great powers is limited, its platform for dialogue, information sharing, and consensus building among partner states has become increasingly valuable.

Current Challenges

Today, the Euro Atlantic region faces interconnected challenges that place new demands on the EAPC. Political divisions, unresolved territorial disputes, hybrid activities, and foreign influence operations continue to shape the security landscape. Many partner states, particularly those in the Western Balkans, the South Caucasus, and Eastern Europe, remain vulnerable to shifting power dynamics and external pressures.

Climate impacts, energy vulnerabilities, cyber disruptions, and disinformation campaigns have blurred the line between peace and crisis. These challenges require a coordinated approach that links national, regional, and international efforts. The EAPC is uniquely positioned to facilitate this type of cooperation because it brings together NATO Allies and partner states in a politically inclusive environment that encourages dialogue and joint planning.

However, the EAPC also faces internal constraints. Its consensus-based decision making can slow progress, and not all partner states share the same priorities or strategic interests. Additionally, deteriorating relations between NATO and Russia have reduced opportunities for direct engagement. Understanding these dynamics is essential as delegates consider how the EAPC can support conflict prevention and mediation in the years ahead.

Key Issues

1. Strengthening Early Warning and Recognition Systems

One of the most significant challenges facing the EAPC is the need for reliable early warning systems. Conflicts rarely emerge without warning. Instead, they develop through identifiable patterns of political tension, military activity, or social disruption. Many partner states lack the capacity to analyze these signals, while others hesitate to share sensitive information. A coordinated recognition system within the EAPC would allow members and partners to identify and verify early signs of instability. This could include joint analysis units, regional monitoring teams, confidence building exchanges, and structured information sharing. Strengthened early warning mechanisms would not only improve crisis preparedness but also help guide diplomatic interventions before conflict escalates.

2. Enhancing Mediation and Preventive Diplomacy

The EAPC has the potential to serve as a platform for formal and informal mediation among partner states. Disputes in the Western Balkans, tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and political divisions in Georgia and Moldova highlight the need for sustained preventive diplomacy. Mediation efforts can take many forms, including facilitated dialogue, technical consultations, joint training for peace negotiators, and partnerships with the Organization for

Security and Cooperation in Europe or the United Nations. Strengthening the EAPC's mediation tools will help prevent local disputes from expanding into wider regional crises.

3. Managing Relations with Great Powers

Delegates must consider how the EAPC can indirectly manage relations with major powers such as Russia and China. While neither state participates in the EAPC, their strategic interests heavily influence regional security. Historically, NATO and Russia maintained cooperative channels through mechanisms such as the Permanent Joint Council and the NATO Russia Council. These bodies created opportunities for information sharing and crisis consultation, although cooperation declined sharply after events in Georgia and Ukraine. The gradual rise of Chinese influence through infrastructure investments, political relationships, and economic partnerships has also introduced new uncertainties into the European and Eurasian security environment. In regions such as the South Caucasus and the Western Balkans, Chinese economic activity often intersects with existing political tensions, while Russian involvement continues to shape local behavior.

The EAPC can support the creation of a shared recognition system that helps members and partners identify signals of great power competition that may destabilize local conditions. These signals may include sudden shifts in diplomatic engagement, expanded foreign military presence, intensified disinformation efforts, or new patterns of political and economic pressure. By adopting common indicators across the EAPC, partner states can coordinate assessments more effectively, reduce the risks of misinterpretation, and alert NATO to emerging challenges before they escalate.

4. Building Institutional Resilience

Many EAPC partner states face internal vulnerabilities that make them more susceptible to external influence or domestic instability. Weak governance structures, corruption, limited oversight mechanisms, and fragile democratic institutions can create conditions that allow political crises to deepen. The EAPC can support resilience by encouraging reforms in defence governance, civilian oversight, rule of law, and crisis management planning. Institutional resilience is essential for preventing conflicts that arise from governance failures, contested elections, or unresolved constitutional issues. Strengthening these institutions will increase regional stability and support long term peace in vulnerable states.

Conclusion

The EAPC remains one of the most inclusive political forums in the Euro Atlantic security architecture. As regions across Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia continue to face instability, the need for coordinated conflict prevention has never been greater. By improving early warning mechanisms, enhancing mediation tools, strengthening state resilience, and providing structured assessments of great power dynamics, the EAPC can play a meaningful role in preventing future conflicts. Delegates are encouraged to think creatively, consider the historical evolution of the partnership, and explore pragmatic ways to strengthen one of NATO's most important political consultation frameworks.

Guiding Questions

- What should be the limits of the EAPC's involvement in conflict prevention and mediation? Should the Council adopt a more proactive role, or should it remain primarily a forum for dialogue?
- How can the EAPC encourage partners to share early warning data while addressing concerns about sovereignty and political sensitivity?
- What indicators should be included in a coordinated early warning system for identifying rising tensions in regions such as the South Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Baltic?
- How can the EAPC support regional mediation efforts led by other institutions such as the United Nations or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe without duplicating their roles?
- In what ways can the EAPC help partner states increase societal resilience and reduce the impact of hybrid threats?
- How should the EAPC approach issues related to great power competition. Should it focus solely on internal coordination among partners, or should it seek new channels for structured communication with Russia or China?
- How can smaller partner states use the EAPC to elevate concerns about early warning signs or external influence without escalating tensions or creating political backlash?
- What concrete reforms would make the EAPC a more effective platform for preventing conflicts before they escalate?

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Topic C: Security Beyond NATO's Borders: Cooperation with Partner Countries

Introduction

In today's era of renewed great-power competition, NATO faces the challenge of projecting security beyond its traditional borders. While the Alliance was originally founded to ensure collective defence among its member states, evolving geopolitical dynamics have prompted NATO to engage with partner countries in regions such as Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the Balkan Peninsula. These engagements are increasingly focused on building resilience, enabling local capacities, and coordinating across conventional, digital, infrastructure, and energy security domains.¹

The concept of "security beyond borders" reflects a shift from traditional military deployments to a more comprehensive understanding of cooperative security. In this context, NATO seeks not to assume sovereignty over partner states but to support them in developing transparent, accountable, and interoperable defence institutions, enhancing cyber and infrastructure resilience, and fostering regional stability. Central Asia and the South Caucasus, for instance, are areas where NATO's interests intersect with those of major powers, primarily Russia and China.² Cooperation in these regions often includes capacity-building, border security assistance, defence reform, and initiatives such as NATO's Virtual Silk Highway, which strengthens digital connectivity.³

The Balkans continue to be strategically significant due to their history of NATO operations, ongoing geopolitical contestation, and the presence of critical infrastructure and energy networks.⁴ NATO's engagement in these regions demonstrates a dual focus: ensuring post-conflict stability and fostering resilience to emerging security threats.

Delegates should consider the balance between providing assistance and respecting the sovereignty of partner states. NATO's interventions must strengthen local legitimacy while enhancing collective and regional security. Additionally, great-power competition, especially from Russia and China, adds complexity, requiring careful navigation of political sensitivities. The challenge for NATO is to implement cooperative frameworks that are effective, sustainable, and aligned with the priorities of partner states while advancing the Alliance's broader strategic objectives.

¹ "NATO's partnerships," updated May 12, 2025. <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/natos-partnerships>

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⁴ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO and the Western Balkans," June 29, 2011. <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2011/06/29/nato-and-the-western-balkans>

The following sections outline NATO's past actions, current policies, and potential future directions in supporting partner countries, providing a foundation for delegates to develop informed recommendations and resolutions.

NATO's Role

NATO's engagement with partner countries is guided primarily by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. These frameworks allow non-member states to cooperate with NATO on security-related initiatives, emphasising resilience, interoperability, and institution-building rather than traditional defence commitments. The PfP program has been instrumental in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the Balkans, providing a platform for dialogue, joint exercises, and tailored assistance.

In Central Asia, NATO's focus intensified after the September 11, 2001, attacks, when Afghanistan's security and logistical linkages drew the region into the Alliance's strategic agenda.⁵ NATO's initiatives in Central Asia include defence institution reform, capacity-building, and border security cooperation. The Virtual Silk Highway project, launched in the early 2000s, exemplifies NATO's approach to non-traditional security, strengthening digital infrastructure to enable resilient communications and early-warning systems.⁶

The South Caucasus also remains a priority due to its geopolitical positioning and history of regional conflict. NATO has engaged with countries in the region through joint training programs, civil-military cooperation initiatives, and exercises designed to enhance interoperability and operational readiness. Cooperation is carefully structured to respect partner sovereignty while building long-term institutional capacities.⁷

In the Balkans, NATO's role has evolved from post-conflict peacekeeping and stabilisation efforts to supporting resilient governance and infrastructure protection.⁸ Legacy operations such as the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) and Kosovo Force (KFOR) have laid the groundwork for ongoing partnership activities, including capacity-building in defence planning, crisis management, and regional cooperation.⁹

⁵ Richard Weitz, "Renewing Central Asian Partnerships," Hudson Institute, Nov. 17, 2006.

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⁸ "NATO reaffirms its commitment to Western Balkans stability, as Secretary General Rutte wraps up visits to Sarajevo and Pristina." <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2025/03/12/nato-reaffirms-its-commitment-to-western-balkans-stability-as-secretary-general-rutte-wraps-up-visits-to-sarajevo-and-pristina#:~:text=Together%20with%20the%20NATO%20Deputy,longest%20and%20currently%20largest%20mission.>

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⁹ Valentina Chabert, "The Balkans beyond KFOR," *NATO Defense College* (June 2024).

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Official NATO documents, including annual reports, communiqués from summits, and specific PfP guidelines, emphasise the Alliance’s commitment to strengthening cooperative security and enabling partner nations to address both conventional and non-traditional threats. By fostering interoperability and resilience, NATO seeks to create security networks that extend beyond member states, enhancing collective stability in regions where direct NATO intervention is not feasible.

Delegates should note that NATO’s approach is comprehensive, integrating conventional defence, infrastructure security, energy resilience, and cyber capabilities into cooperative frameworks. NATO’s policies highlight the importance of local ownership, legitimacy, and respect for sovereignty as essential components of sustainable partnership.

Conclusion and Further Research

Looking forward, NATO faces both opportunities and challenges in extending security beyond its borders. Future engagement will likely involve deepening cooperation in digital and infrastructure security, strengthening defence institutions, and enhancing joint training and interoperability in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the Balkans.¹⁰ Delegates should explore how NATO can balance conventional military engagement with non-traditional security initiatives, creating comprehensive strategies that address both immediate and long-term threats.¹¹

One significant challenge is navigating the geopolitical sensitivities of partner states. The influence of Russia and China, both of which maintain substantial political, economic, and military ties to these regions, requires NATO to carefully calibrate its actions to avoid being perceived as undermining sovereignty or escalating tensions. Similarly, internal political dynamics within partner countries may affect the pace and scope of reforms or cooperation programs.¹²

Another consideration is measuring the effectiveness of partnership initiatives. Delegates should examine metrics for assessing progress in resilience, reform, and interoperability, ensuring that programs produce tangible security outcomes without creating dependency. Establishing benchmarks for digital, infrastructure, and energy security capacity is particularly relevant given the rising threats of cyberattacks, hybrid warfare, and critical infrastructure disruption.

Further research for delegates could include: the evolving role of NATO in Central Asia post-Afghanistan; lessons from NATO’s Balkan operations and their applicability to new partner engagements; strategies for fostering multilateral cooperation in cyber and infrastructure resilience; and comparative analysis of NATO partnership models in regions with varying levels

¹⁰ “NATO’s partnerships.”

¹¹ Chabert, “The Balkans beyond KFOR.”

¹² Weitz, “Renewing Central Asian Partnerships.”

of geopolitical risk.

Guiding Questions:

- How can NATO help partner countries in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the Balkans build resilient defence institutions while ensuring these initiatives respect local sovereignty and political legitimacy?
- What strategies can NATO use to enhance partner countries' conventional and non-traditional security capacities (training, exercises, infrastructure protection) without creating dependency on the Alliance?
- How should NATO measure progress in resilience, interoperability, and security outcomes in partner states, and what benchmarks are most effective for sustainable capacity-building?

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