

## **Our alliance must remain strong militarily and politically across the globe**

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COVID-19 has shown that our world is more unpredictable than ever. The only thing we can be certain of is uncertainty itself — and we must learn to deal with it.

For NATO, this means we must remain ready to tackle any challenge, at any time, to keep our people safe — including during pandemics. Our militaries across the alliance have been playing a vital role in fighting the virus and saving lives.

As we enter a new year and allies start rolling out [COVID-19](#) vaccines, we can start to gradually recover from the health crisis. NATO has ensured that it did not turn into a security crisis. But we must continue to adapt to a rapidly changing security environment.



The [NATO 2030 initiative](#) is about preparing for the unexpected, by keeping NATO a strong military alliance, making it politically stronger and ensuring it takes a more global approach. To keep NATO militarily strong, our nations need to continue investing in defense so that we have the best militaries with the right capabilities. To keep our technological edge, allies should invest even more in cutting-edge capabilities like artificial intelligence, big data and quantum computing.

One of the reasons we need a strong military is for our fight against international terrorism, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, more than half of our troops in Afghanistan are from European allies and other partners. And while [nobody wants to stay in Afghanistan longer than necessary](#), early next year we will face a difficult dilemma: either stay and pay the price of a continued military engagement, or leave and risk that Afghanistan becomes once again a safe haven for international terrorists that can attack our homelands. Whatever we decide, it is important that we do it in an orderly and coordinated way.

We also need to use NATO even more as a platform for political consultations because this is the only place where North America and Europe meet every day to discuss, decide and act on our shared security. When we have [differences](#), we must bring them to the NATO table and discuss them openly so that we can work out common approaches.

One recent example is the military deconfliction mechanism developed at NATO to avoid [incidents and accidents in the Eastern Mediterranean](#) between [Greece and Turkey](#). I am committed to developing this mechanism further, not just because it can save lives but also because it can help to pave the way for political talks on the underlying issues.

And while NATO will remain a regional alliance, we must [take a more global approach](#) to deal with global challenges such as the [rise of China](#). China is not our adversary. Its rise on the global stage brings opportunities, but it also presents challenges. China has the second biggest defense budget in the world and continues to modernize its military at a rapid pace. At the same time, it undermines human rights and bullies other countries.

We are working more closely with partners, notably in the Asia-Pacific region, because as a community of likeminded democracies, we have a common interest in defending our shared values, bolstering the resilience of our societies, economies and institutions, and upholding the rules-based order.

We are also bolstering the resilience of our critical infrastructure — power grids, ports, airports, roads, railways and telecommunication systems, including 5G. And NATO will continue to strengthen our resilience requirements, encouraging allies to conduct thorough risk and vulnerability assessments, including to map foreign ownership, control or direct investment.

These are all important considerations as we prepare for the 2021 NATO summit in Brussels, where I will present my strategic-level recommendations on how we keep the alliance fit for the future. One thing is certain: We can only be strong if North America and Europe stand united. So I look forward to [working very closely with U.S. President-elect Joe Biden](#) and his administration to further strengthen our trans-Atlantic alliance and keep our nations safe in this unpredictable world.

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