# Against NATO: The Other Side of the Argument

Since 1989-1991 when every country in the USSR or the Warsaw Pact (save Russia) jumped ship at the earliest opportunity, reasonable people have asked the question: why does the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) still exist? This essay represents an attempt to understand basic criticisms that exist across the Western and non-Western political spectrum—to take them at face value, and examine them in good faith. The author of this essay believes in the necessity of NATO—its goodness, in fact—so it is an attempt to see things from another perspective.

Speaking with people on the right and left who argue against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, one encounters two different critical methodologies that arrive at the same conclusion. This is how Americans who support former candidate for US President [Bernie Sanders](#) or current presidential candidate Dr. Jill Stein could find common ground with Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson, Republican candidate [Donald Trump](#) ([and former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates](#)). It's also how Americans can find common ground with Russian nationalists, Chinese nationalists, and far-right groups across Europe.

Jumping into a comparision between the two groups' methodologies requires some minor simplification. I don't think this veers into oversimplification, but then, as I view both arguments against NATO as insufficient, that shouldn't be surprising. The motives of the left and the right are very different. As such, their criticisms have different moral

weight, and require different types of justification to make sense. The left and right are not "the same" for reaching similar conclusions about why one should not support a European Cold War alliance, but their conclusions do happen to agree. That's important.

Conservative NATO skeptics tend to bring two types of criticism against the organization. The first draws on skepticism over globalization and alliance, and is not unlike the "States Rights" argument one often encounters among this type of thinker. These people view NATO membership as a concession of US sovereignty and agency. Taking part in a mutual defense pact means the US having to defend *other countries* in ways that run contrary to its own interests. The US loses more than it gains from a military alliance with Europe*.* The second describes the problem in financial terms: the US cannot afford to spend the money it does on NATO, that money would be better spent almost anywhere else. This second source of concern is similar to the first in that it assumes that the US is somehow being cheated by participating in the alliance—out of sovereignty, agency, or money.
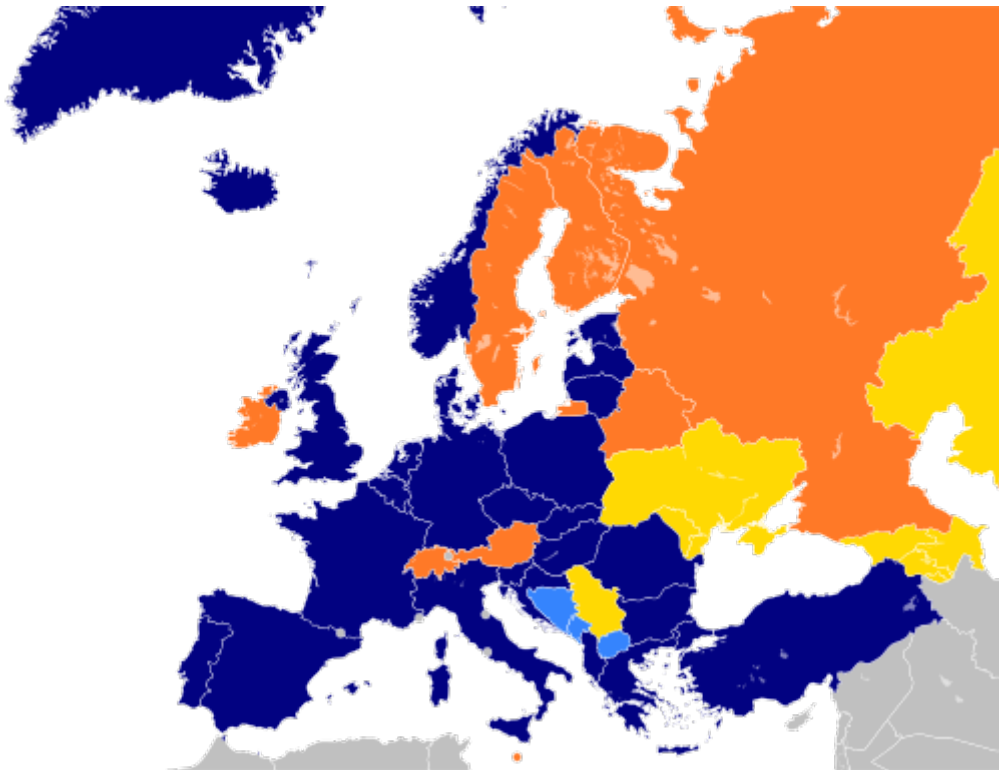
NATO as of this article's writing, from Wikipedia (NATO countries in blue)

NATO skeptics on the American left are less concerned about advancing "US" interests, and more interested in expanding a world where people can live free from war. To this type of thinking, the US is itself a source of much or the dominant piece of aggression in the world, and as NATO is subservient to US influence, it should be diminished. The hypothesis here is that a smaller or non-existent NATO would inevitably lead to a more peaceful world. People tend to live harmoniously with one another, much moreso than nations, and reducing any nation-state agency is to the good. This type of thinking also leads people to advocate for the reduction or outright destruction of all nuclear weapons. From this point of view—the humanist or humanitarian—the stronger and larger NATO is, the more likely war becomes.

Leftist criticism of NATO spending resembles conservative criticisms, with both claiming that the money spent on defense could go elsewhere. Whereas conservatives tend to prefer that

money spent on alliance flow instead to grow US military capability, liberals or progressives would prefer that money to be invested in education, infrastructure, and science, both domestically and overseas. This leftist tends to believe that lack of education or transportation leads to misunderstanding and violence, and that were everyone to have the same basis of understanding and knowledge, wars could be prevented.

Another possible anti-NATO stance comes from countries hostile to Europe. Countries that would prosper from NATO's wane (China, Russia, etc.), which correctly assess that a militarily unified Europe checks their own territorial or economic ambitions, are natural enemies of NATO. These countries view any alliance of which they are not a part as something to be diminished or destroyed. In a few cases, like that of Serbia, whose territorial ambition NATO buried in the 1990s, hostility could also represent lingering resentment toward having suffered military defeat. It is worth pointing out that people who refer to Serbia as "Yugoslavia" are, as a rule, almost always anti-NATO along these lines.

The final perspective hostile to NATO comes from within the US military establishment. This criticism tends toward the conservative: defense industry spending is a zero-sum game. A country only accumulates so much capital, and conservatives believe that investing in alliance or partnership wastes that capital. While the motivation in this case is financial, the criticism manifests itself as political: these skeptics focus on the [possibility of fighting war at the tactical level](), independent of strategic considerations, or the diplomatic minutia of whether Russia was somehow [tricked or deceived by]() NATO's expansion. In all cases, the argument by people like Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-48) ends up being reduced support for NATO. This amounts to tacit or explicit acceptance

of non-Western agendas.

Across the spectrum, people who have criticisms of NATO should not be viewed as necessarily hostile to American, European, or Western interests. While that is certainly the case in a few circumstances, for the most part, criticisms of NATO end up being reflections of the West's failure to translate its prosperity into a model that is sustainable in the rest of the world. As few places outside the US and Europe have experienced lasting prosperity under Western models, it's difficult for the West to dismiss criticisms out of hand.

In the US and in Europe, hostility toward NATO should be viewed as a failure on the part of NATO to communicate its purpose effectively. If NATO and the US were able to describe how and why, specifically, Europeans and North American participants benefit from the security arrangement, it seems unlikely that any morally and logically humanistic citizens of Western countries would see meaningful opposition to NATO, save on the absolute fringe. On the fringe left, people wish to weaken the US and Europe following the hypothesis that strengthening all non-European countries would lead to an increase in global justice. On the fringe right, people wish for there to be absolute US or European power, and see alliances between the two as contrary to the interests of each.

If you believe that peace and prosperity for all humans require a weaker Europe and USA, you see NATO as a problem. If, on the other hand, you believe the USA or Europe should be absolutely powerful, NATO appears wasteful at best, and a threat to your sovereignty at worst. I think you're wrong—but I understand your position.

Thoughts on the Zombie Apocalypse

A piece about who finds zombie narratives compelling and why.