QUO VADIS EUROPE? SCENARIO-BASED PATHWAYS FOR DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE AND EURO-ATLANTIC COHESION UNDER HYBRID PRESSURE

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Abstract: Europe's security environment is being reshaped by sustained influence operations, episodic sabotage and coercive signaling, and deepening political polarization. This paper asks how EU–NATO cohesion and democratic resilience can be preserved during prolonged grey-zone competition without eroding the rights and freedoms they are meant to defend. Drawing

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on a structured horizon scan of open sources and a foresight-based scenario method, the study identifies key drivers of change: Alliance cohesion, institutional trust, polarization dynamics, technological disruption, and escalation management. It then develops a set of plausible Euro-Atlantic scenarios for 2026–2030. For each scenario, the paper traces likely effects on (1) counter-influence efforts and public trust, (2) crisis decision-making and civil–military coordination, and (3) the resilience of critical infrastructure and continuity of governance, with particular attention to maritime connectivity and energy corridors. The paper concludes with cross-scenario implications for policymakers and professional military education: what to prioritize, what to avoid, and what capabilities and decision skills should be exercised under information pressure.

Keywords: EU, NATO; democratic resilience; hybrid threats; influence operations; strategic foresight; critical infrastructure.

Introduction: Quo Vadis Europe?

The post-Cold War security order, which once underpinned European stability, is increasingly under pressure. The resurgence of great-power competition, the erosion of multilateral norms, and the instability of transatlantic relations have exposed the limitations of Europe's reliance on external security guarantees. In this context, the European Union (EU) is emerging as a defence actor, not to replace NATO, but to complement and strengthen it through a more autonomous and strategically coherent posture. The EU is undergoing a significant transformation in its approach to security and defence. Traditionally perceived as a civilian power, the EU is now actively developing its military capacities.[1]The institutional, operational, and strategic

capacities required to function as a credible defence actor within the broader Euro-Atlantic security architecture are now being actively developed by the EU.[2]

Despite numerous challenges and divergent views regarding the evolution of the EU as a defense community, its progress and adaptation to contemporary geopolitical realities are undeniable. Several converging factors have catalyzed the EU's shift toward a more assertive defense role, including growing geopolitical instability in its neighborhood, from Russia's aggression against Ukraine to persistent insecurity in the Sahel and the Eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, technological disruptions, emerging technologies, and increasing dependence on digital services have highlighted the need to protect critical infrastructure, secure supply chains, and strengthen digital sovereignty.[3]Although these developments have generated different and sometimes competing perspectives among member states, they have overall reinforced efforts aimed at strategic autonomy and deeper defense integration. As a result, defense has increasingly been reframed not merely as a national prerogative, but as a shared European responsibility.[4]

Europe's Strategic Dilemma

The growing debate on European strategic autonomy reflects a broader transition from the EU's traditional identity as a normative power toward a more

[1] François Duchêne, "Europe's Role in World Peace," in Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead, ed. Richard Mayne (London: Fontana, 1972).

[2] European External Action Service (EEAS), A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (Brussels: European Union, 2022).

[3] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Countering Hybrid Threats," 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/countering-hybrid-threats_en.

[4] European Council, "Hybrid Threats," https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/hybrid-threats/.

comprehensive understanding of security that integrates military, economic, technological, and societal dimensions. As Biscop argues, strategic autonomy should not be understood as isolation from transatlantic partners but as the ability of Europe to take responsibility for its own security and contribute more effectively to collective defence[5]. The emergence of hybrid threats and intensified geopolitical competition has reinforced the perception that resilience, defence capabilities, and political cohesion constitute mutually reinforcing pillars of European security.

It is undeniable that the European Union stands at a turning point in its geopolitical evolution. From its origins as a peace project grounded in economic integration and supranational cooperation, epitomized by the concept of *Pax Europaea*, the EU has gradually transformed into an actor seeking to safeguard both its internal stability and external security. This transformation, particularly evident through initiatives such as the Strategic Compass, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and the European Defence Fund (EDF), reflects the growing need for greater strategic autonomy and resilience in an increasingly unstable international environment.[6]

Nevertheless, the transition toward a "Fortress Europe" is not without controversy. It raises fundamental questions regarding the balance between openness and protection, solidarity and sovereignty, and the future of multilateralism itself. While the European Union has not yet become a geopolitical actor in the traditional sense of major powers, its capacity to act as a coherent and

[5] Sven Biscop, European Strategy in the 21st Century: New Future for Old Power (London: Routledge, 2019), 89-101.

[6] European External Action Service (EEAS), A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (Brussels: European Union, 2022).

credible security actor continues to grow. Scholars increasingly argue that the Union's comparative strengths lie not only in military capabilities but also in its ability to combine regulatory power, economic influence, democratic governance, and resilience-building mechanisms.[7]Despite internal divisions and external challenges, the Union is steadily moving toward the consolidation of its own geopolitical role, one likely to prove essential for the future of both European and global security.

Although "Fortress Europe" remains far from fully realized, it is being built day by day, stone by stone, weaving into its foundations the vision of the generations that created a united Europe while simultaneously adapting that vision to twenty-first-century geopolitical realities.

Literature Review: Between Resilience and Fragmentation

Understanding the future of Euro-Atlantic security requires engagement with three overlapping strands of scholarship: studies of the European Union as a security actor, literature on hybrid threats and grey-zone competition, and the emerging field of democratic resilience. Collectively, these debates reflect a broader shift in security studies away from traditional military threats toward more complex and multidimensional forms of strategic competition.

The traditional literature on the European Union's international role has largely portrayed the EU as a civilian or normative power. François Duchêne famously argued that European integration represented a novel form of international influence based on economic

[7] Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" Journal of Common Market Studies 40, no. 2 (2002): 235-258

interdependence, diplomacy, and political cooperation rather than military force.[8] Building upon this tradition, Ian Manners conceptualized the EU as a normative power, emphasizing its ability to diffuse values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law through attraction and socialization rather than coercion.[9]

However, the strategic environment of the twenty-first century has increasingly challenged assumptions that security can be separated from broader political, economic, technological, and informational dynamics. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, growing geopolitical rivalry, and the proliferation of cyber-enabled influence activities have reinforced scholarly and policy interest in non-conventional forms of competition operating below the threshold of war. This has generated a substantial body of literature on hybrid threats and grey-zone competition. These concepts describe the coordinated use of political, informational, economic, cyber, diplomatic, and, where necessary, military instruments designed to exploit vulnerabilities while avoiding overt armed confrontation.[10]

A central feature of the hybrid-threat literature is the recognition that contemporary adversaries increasingly seek to influence perceptions and undermine institutions rather than achieve conventional battlefield

[8] François Duchêne, "Europe's Role in World Peace," in *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, ed. Richard Mayne (London: Fontana, 1972), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45084425

[9] Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235-258, accessed September 10, 2026, https://forskning.ruc.dk/en/publications/normative-power-europe-a-contradiction-in-terms/.

[10] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Countering Hybrid Threats" (Brussels: European Union, 2024); NATO, "Countering Hybrid Threats" (Brussels: NATO, 2024), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/countering-hybrid-threats_en.

victories. Hybrid campaigns frequently target public trust, democratic processes, social cohesion, critical infrastructure, and governmental decision-making mechanisms. Consequently, societal vulnerabilities have become as strategically significant as military capabilities.

This shift has contributed to the rise of democratic resilience as a major analytical concept within contemporary security studies. While resilience initially emerged within disaster management and systems theory, it has increasingly been applied to governance, security, and democratic institutions. In the European context, resilience is understood as the ability of societies, institutions, and governments to anticipate, withstand, adapt to, and recover from disruptions while preserving democratic legitimacy and functionality.[11]Democratic resilience therefore extends beyond physical security to include public trust, social cohesion, media literacy, institutional effectiveness, and continuity of governance.

Recent European policy and academic debates increasingly frame resilience as a whole-of-society endeavour. According to the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, effective protection against hybrid threats requires cooperation among governments, civil society, private-sector actors, academia, and citizens. Such an approach recognizes that influence operations and disinformation campaigns often exploit existing social and political divisions rather than create them independently.[12]

[11] European Commission Joint Research Centre, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), accessed September 10, 2026, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC123305.

[12] European Commission Joint Research Centre, "Strengthening EU Resilience: Hybrid Threats and Critical Entities" (2025) accessed September 10, 2026, https://joint-research-

Another significant theme in the literature concerns the evolving relationship between the European Union and NATO. Contemporary security challenges rarely fit neatly within traditional distinctions between civilian and military domains. Consequently, scholars and policymakers increasingly regard EU-NATO cooperation as essential for countering hybrid threats. The NATO-EU Joint Declaration emphasized cooperation in strategic communication, cyber security, resilience, information-sharing, crisis response, and the management of hybrid threats.[13] Subsequent studies suggest that the EU's comparative advantages in regulation, governance, and societal resilience complement NATO's expertise in collective defence and military deterrence.[14]

Nevertheless, the literature also identifies persistent sources of fragmentation. Differences among member states regarding threat perceptions, strategic priorities, and domestic political dynamics continue to complicate coordinated action. States located on NATO's eastern flank often prioritize territorial defence and deterrence, while others focus on migration pressures, economic security, energy resilience, or technological competition. Moreover, growing political polarization within democratic societies creates opportunities for hostile actors to amplify societal divisions and erode institutional trust.

centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/strengthening-eu-resilience-hybrid-threats-and-critical-entities_en.

[13] European Council and NATO, *Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (Warsaw, 8 July 2016), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21481/nato-eu-declaration-8-july-en-final.pdf.

[14] NATO and European Union, *EU-NATO Cooperation Factsheet*, 2023, accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm.

Technological transformation further complicates these dynamics. Emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, digital platforms, algorithmic information systems, and cyber capabilities have fundamentally altered the nature of contemporary strategic competition. Scholars increasingly warn that information environments have become contested domains in which public opinion, political legitimacy, and societal cohesion themselves constitute strategic targets.[15]Consequently, resilience is increasingly evaluated not only in terms of infrastructure protection but also in relation to cognitive security, information integrity, and institutional adaptability.[16]

The protection of critical infrastructure represents another rapidly expanding area of inquiry. Energy networks, communication systems, transportation corridors, maritime infrastructure, and digital services are increasingly viewed as both economic assets and strategic vulnerabilities. Recent incidents of sabotage, cyberattacks, and coercive interference have highlighted the interdependence between infrastructure resilience and national security. Contemporary resilience frameworks therefore emphasize continuity of governance, redundancy, preparedness, and cross-sector coordination as essential components of democratic security.[17]

[15] Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2013), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.routledge.com/Strategic-Narratives-Communication-Power-and-the-New-World-Order/Miskimmon-OLoughlin-Roselle/p/book/9780415717386.

[16] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Countering Hybrid Threats," 2024, accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/countering-hybrid-threats_en; European Commission Joint Research Centre, "Strengthening EU Resilience: Hybrid Threats and Critical Entities," 2025, accessed September 10, 2026, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/strengthening-eu-resilience-hybrid-threats-and-critical-entities_en.

[17] NATO, "Resilience, Civil Preparedness and Article 3," 2024, accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm; European Commission Joint

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Despite a rapidly expanding literature, an important analytical gap remains. Existing studies frequently examine hybrid threats, democratic resilience, technological disruption, or EU-NATO cooperation in isolation. Less attention has been devoted to understanding how these variables interact under conditions of prolonged grey-zone competition and strategic uncertainty. Furthermore, relatively few studies employ foresight-based methodologies to explore multiple plausible futures instead of relying predominantly on linear projections.

This paper seeks to address that gap by integrating insights from the literature on hybrid threats, democratic resilience, and Euro-Atlantic security cooperation within a structured scenario-based framework. By examining alternative pathways between 2026 and 2030, it aims to identify robust policy options and institutional capabilities capable of strengthening democratic resilience and preserving EU-NATO cohesion under sustained hybrid pressure.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative strategic foresight approach combined with scenario-based analysis to explore plausible pathways for democratic resilience and Euro-Atlantic cohesion under conditions of sustained hybrid pressure. Strategic foresight is particularly suitable for examining complex security environments characterized by uncertainty, rapid

Research Centre, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), accessed September 10, 2026, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC123305.

technological change, and evolving forms of political and informational competition.[18]

Rather than predicting specific future events, the study seeks to identify key dynamics that may shape the Euro-Atlantic security environment between 2026 and 2030 and assess their potential implications for democratic resilience and collective security. The objective is therefore to support strategic awareness and preparedness rather than produce forecasts.[19]

Implications for Democratic Resilience and Euro-Atlantic Cohesion

Democratic Resilience as a Strategic Capability

The preceding analysis suggests that democratic resilience should no longer be viewed solely as a defensive mechanism designed to absorb shocks and recover from crises. In an era of persistent hybrid competition, resilience constitutes a strategic capability that directly contributes to deterrence, societal cohesion, and political stability. A resilient society is less vulnerable to influence operations, disinformation campaigns, political manipulation, and coercive pressure because it possesses the institutional capacity and societal trust necessary to withstand external interference.[20]

[18] Peter Bishop, Andy Hines, and Terry Collins, "The Current State of Scenario Development: An Overview of Techniques," *Foresight* 9, no. 1 (2007): 5-25, accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/14636680710727516/full/html.

[19] Peter Bishop, Andy Hines, and Terry Collins, "The Current State of Scenario Development: An Overview of Techniques," *Foresight* 9, no. 1 (2007): 5-25.

[20] European Commission Joint Research Centre, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), accessed September 10, 2026, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC123305.

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Moreover, resilience enhances strategic competitiveness. Adversaries are less likely to target societies that demonstrate strong governance, information integrity, and institutional legitimacy. Democratic resilience therefore acts as both a protective and deterrent mechanism by increasing the costs and reducing the effectiveness of hybrid activities. Rather than being treated as a secondary component of security policy, resilience should be considered a core element of national and collective security strategies.[21]

Implications for the European Union

For the European Union, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening resilience as a central pillar of European security. Future efforts should prioritize the preservation of institutional trust and democratic legitimacy. Since hybrid threats frequently seek to exploit societal divisions and undermine confidence in governance, maintaining public trust becomes a strategic imperative rather than merely a political objective.[22]

The EU should also continue strengthening democratic safeguards, particularly in relation to election security, information integrity, rule-of-law mechanisms, and protection against foreign information manipulation and interference. Equally important is the development of strategic communication capabilities capable of

[21] NATO, "Resilience, Civil Preparedness and Article 3," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm; European External Action Service (EEAS), "Countering Hybrid Threats," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/countering-hybrid-threats_en.

[22] European Commission Joint Research Centre, "Strengthening EU Resilience: Hybrid Threats and Critical Entities," accessed September 10, 2026, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/strengthening-eu-resilience-hybrid-threats-and-critical-entities_en.

countering hostile narratives while preserving democratic freedoms and media pluralism.[23]

Finally, resilience governance requires a more integrated approach that links security policy with infrastructure protection, cybersecurity, public administration, and societal preparedness. Such an approach recognizes that resilience is not confined to the security sector but extends across the entire democratic ecosystem.[24]

Implications for NATO

For NATO, the analysis reinforces the growing importance of resilience as an essential component of collective defence. While deterrence remains central to the Alliance's mission, hybrid threats increasingly target civilian systems and societal vulnerabilities. Consequently, civil preparedness must remain a priority within NATO's broader security framework. Particular attention should be devoted to the implementation and continuous adaptation of NATO's baseline resilience requirements, including the protection of critical infrastructure, secure communications, energy security, and continuity of government functions. These measures improve the Alliance's ability to operate effectively during crises and reduce vulnerabilities that may be exploited by adversaries.[25]

The findings also highlight the necessity of developing collective responses to hybrid threats. Since many

[23] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Countering Hybrid Threats," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/countering-hybrid-threats_en.

[24] . European External Action Service (EEAS), *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (Brussels: European Union, 2022), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en.

[25] NATO, "Resilience, Civil Preparedness and Article 3," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm.

hybrid activities fall below the threshold of armed attack, effective responses require improved information-sharing mechanisms, enhanced situational awareness, and closer cooperation among Allies. Hybrid resilience should therefore be understood as a collective responsibility rather than solely a national task.[26]

Implications for National Governments

At the national level, governments remain the first line of defence against hybrid threats. The analysis suggests that effective resilience requires a whole-of-government approach that integrates security institutions, public administration, private-sector stakeholders, critical infrastructure operators, academia, and civil society actors.[27]

Protection of critical infrastructure should remain a strategic priority as digital networks, transportation systems, energy corridors, and communication platforms increasingly represent potential targets of disruption and coercion. Governments must therefore invest not only in physical security measures but also in redundancy, preparedness, and rapid recovery capabilities.[28]

In addition, national authorities should strengthen strategic communication capabilities to improve crisis communication, counter disinformation, and sustain

[26] NATO, "Countering Hybrid Threats," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm.

[27] European Commission Joint Research Centre, "Strengthening EU Resilience: Hybrid Threats and Critical Entities," accessed September 10, 2026, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/strengthening-eu-resilience-hybrid-threats-and-critical-entities_en.

[28] European Commission Joint Research Centre, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), accessed September 10, 2026, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC123305.

public trust during periods of uncertainty. Equally important is the modernization of crisis-management systems capable of coordinating responses across institutional boundaries and maintaining continuity of governance under conditions of sustained pressure.[29]

Implications for EU-NATO Cooperation

One of the most significant findings of this study is that democratic resilience and Euro-Atlantic security depend increasingly on effective cooperation between the European Union and NATO. Hybrid threats operate simultaneously across political, economic, technological, informational, and military domains, making purely institutional responses insufficient.[30]

Future EU-NATO cooperation should prioritize interoperability, particularly in areas related to resilience planning, crisis management, and hybrid-threat response. Joint situational-awareness mechanisms can improve the ability of both organizations to detect emerging threats and share assessments in a timely manner.[31]

Information sharing represents another critical area for cooperation. The rapid exchange of intelligence, threat assessments, and best practices can significantly improve institutional responsiveness and reduce strategic surprise. Furthermore, coordinated responses to hybrid threats can increase credibility, reduce

[29] . European External Action Service (EEAS), "Countering Hybrid Threats," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/countering-hybrid-threats_en.

[30] European Council and NATO, *Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (Warsaw, 8 July 2016), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21481/nato-eu-declaration-8-july-en-final.pdf.

[31] NATO and European Union, *EU-NATO Cooperation Factsheet* (2023), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm.

duplication of effort, and strengthen collective deterrence.[32]

Ultimately, the capacity of the EU and NATO to function as complementary rather than competing actors will remain a decisive factor in preserving democratic resilience and maintaining the cohesion of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Implications for Professional Military Education

The evolving character of hybrid competition also has important implications for professional military education. Military leaders must increasingly operate in environments where information operations, technological disruption, political ambiguity, and societal vulnerabilities interact with traditional security challenges.[33]

Professional military education should therefore place greater emphasis on strategic foresight literacy and the ability to anticipate emerging security dynamics. Rather than preparing leaders solely for conventional military operations, educational institutions should foster the capacity to think critically about uncertainty, complexity, and long-term strategic change.[34]

Decision-making under uncertainty should constitute a central component of leader development. Future

[32] European Council and NATO, *Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (Warsaw, 8 July 2016), accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21481/nato-eu-declaration-8-july-en-final.pdf.

[33] NATO, "Countering Hybrid Threats," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm.

[34] Peter Bishop, Andy Hines, and Terry Collins, "The Current State of Scenario Development: An Overview of Techniques," *Foresight* 9, no. 1 (2007): 5-25, accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/14636680710727516/full/html.

military professionals will be required to make rapid decisions in information-rich but often ambiguous environments characterized by incomplete information and competing narratives.

Further priorities include hybrid-threat analysis, resilience planning, cognitive security, and civil-military cooperation. Understanding how influence operations shape perceptions and public behaviour is becoming increasingly important for military effectiveness. Likewise, cooperation with civilian authorities, private-sector actors, and international organizations will remain essential for managing crises that extend beyond the military domain.[35]

Ultimately, military education must prepare future leaders not only to prevail in armed conflict but also to operate effectively in contested information environments where strategic influence, societal resilience, and institutional legitimacy are increasingly important components of security.

Conclusion

The Euro-Atlantic security environment is changing in ways that challenge some of our traditional assumptions about security. Today, threats are often aimed not only at states and institutions, but also at public trust, social cohesion, information systems, and critical infrastructure. In this context, democratic resilience has become a key element of security. The ability of societies to withstand, adapt to, and recover from disruption is increasingly as important as conventional defence capabilities.

[35] European External Action Service (EEAS), "Countering Hybrid Threats," accessed September 10, 2026, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/countering-hybrid-threats_en.

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This study has shown that resilience is not simply about protection. It is a strategic capability that strengthens institutions, enhances public confidence, and limits the effectiveness of hostile influence operations. It also highlights the complementary roles of the European Union and NATO. While NATO remains the cornerstone of collective defence, the EU provides many of the regulatory, technological, economic, and governance tools needed to strengthen societal resilience. The future strength of the Euro-Atlantic community will therefore depend on both military preparedness and effective EU-NATO cooperation.

Several plausible futures emerge for the period between 2026 and 2030.

In an **Optimistic Resilience Scenario**, the EU and NATO deepen cooperation, strengthen critical infrastructure protection, and build higher levels of public trust. Hybrid threats persist, but their impact is limited by resilient institutions and informed societies.

A **Managed Competition Scenario** represents a more moderate future. Hybrid threats continue to grow, but governments and institutions gradually adapt. Crises remain frequent, yet they are generally contained through cooperation and resilience measures.

In a **Fragmented Resilience Scenario**, political polarization and declining public trust create opportunities for adversaries to exploit existing divisions. Although cooperation continues, growing resilience gaps weaken collective responses.

The most concerning outcome is a **Democratic Erosion Scenario**, where sustained hybrid pressure contributes to declining institutional legitimacy, deeper societal divisions, and reduced capacity for collective action.

These scenarios are not predictions, but illustrations of possible pathways. Ultimately, the future of Euro-Atlantic security will be shaped by decisions made today. Investing in democratic resilience, protecting critical infrastructure, strengthening strategic communication, and deepening EU-NATO cooperation will be essential for preserving security, stability, and democratic values in an increasingly contested strategic environment.

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