

Larger NATO carries costs, risk to stability

By Heng Weili

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The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO is raising questions among experts on its economic cost to the United States and its impact on the global balance of power.

In a June 13 opinion piece on Fox News, Dan Caldwell and Russ Vought wrote that "our policy-making elite are doing the American people a disservice by rubber-stamping an expansion of America's security commitments through NATO during a period of economic turmoil at home and emerging security challenges in other parts of the world".

"It is not in the national interest of the United States, through NATO, to commit to defend two wealthy European welfare states whose neutrality has kept them safe and prosperous for more than 70 years," they wrote. Caldwell is the vice-president of foreign policy at Stand Together and a Marine Corps veteran of the Iraq War, while Vought is the president of the Center for Renewing America.

"The fact remains that new security guarantees will force trade-offs, consume more resources, and increase the likelihood of a confrontation with a nuclear-armed adversary."

The authors said admitting both nations to NATO could result in upfront expenses of more than \$8 billion and \$1.5 billion in additional annual costs.

They pointed out that neither Northern European country meets the 2 percent of the GDP defense-spending goal agreed to by NATO members.

"Just as in other parts of Europe, a security guarantee provided by the United States could encourage free-riding and disincentivize increased investment in defense capabilities in favor of more spending on politically popular social programs.

"At a time of record inflation and a \$30.5 trillion national debt, it is hard to justify spending more American tax dollars and committing more American troops to defend two wealthy European social democracies," Caldwell and Vought said.

"The lack of robust debate around this important topic and the smearing of those who dare to question the benefits of NATO expansion only raises the risk that the United States will become

overextended, or worse, potentially sleep-walk into a war with a nuclear-armed Russia," they said.

The US also announced an additional \$1.7 billion in aid to Ukraine on July 12, bringing the total sent to the non-NATO member to \$65 billion in weapons and civilian aid since the start of its military conflict with Russia in February.

Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, wrote that "the two countries' [Finland and Sweden] desire to join (NATO) appears to be an attempt to get an insurance policy at America's expense, expanding still further Washington's already lengthy list of defense dependents".

Bandow said that the US should shift responsibility for Europe's defense to Europe, in a piece for The American Conservative website on May 19.

"Today, Washington is hurtling toward insolvency. The national debt is 100 percent of GDP, nearing the record set after World War II. Even as the Covid-19 pandemic recedes, the US is running trillion-dollar annual deficits, with the red ink set to increase as the Baby Boomers continue to retire, inflating medical and retirement outlays."

Bandow wrote that Russia could further rely on nuclear weapons as a deterrent against NATO's northern expansion.

"It would be one thing to accept enhanced nuclear risks as a response to necessary defense measures. But should we do so because two more wealthy European countries desire a share of America's defense subsidy?" he asked.

NATO, "a self-declared 'defensive' military alliance" is operating in such a way so that "any country that refuses its dictates must, by definition, be an offensive military threat", wrote author Jonathan Cook for antiwar.com on July 11.

The Brussels-based organization is not looking only to protect its "North Atlantic" members but is adopting a global strategy.

NATO issued a new "strategic concept" document at its summit in Madrid late last month, declaring for the first time that China poses a "systemic challenge" to the alliance, alongside a primary "threat" from Russia.

"So how, Beijing might justifiably wonder, does China — on the other side of the globe — fit into NATO's historic defensive mission? ... How are Americans or Europeans suddenly under threat of military conquest from China?"

He said that "if anyone is subverting the 'rules-based international order' — a standard the West regularly invokes but never defines, it looks to be NATO itself — or the US, as the hand that wields the NATO hammer".

Cook said "the idea that China may invade Taiwan and then direct its military might towards California and Italy is in the realms of preposterous delusion".

NATO also invited four nations from the Asia-Pacific —Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea – to its summit for the first time.

Cook added: "In a unipolar world, Washington got to define who would be treated as a friend, and on what terms, and as a foe. NATO chiefly served as an alibi for US aggression, adding a veneer of multilateral legitimacy to its largely unilateral militarism."

He said the "rules-based international order" is maintained by US-controlled economic institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

"China is offering them an alternative, and in the process, it threatens to gradually erode US economic dominance. Russia's apparent ability to survive the West's economic sanctions, while those sanctions rebound on western economies, underscores the tenuousness of Washington's economic primacy," Cook said.

"Washington's greatest fear is that, as its economic muscle atrophies, Europe's vital trading links with China and Russia will see its economic interests — and eventually its ideological loyalties — shift eastwards.

"The question is: how far is the US willing to go to stop that? So far, it looks only too ready to drag NATO into a military sequel to the Cold War — and risk pushing the world to the brink of nuclear annihilation," Cook said.

"What NATO does these days is constantly attempt to remake the world in the image of 'liberal democracy', very loosely defined as whatever the organization's member regimes happen to want at any given moment," wrote Thomas Knapp, director, and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism, on antiwar.com on July 1.

"Characterizing NATO as a 'collective security' or 'defense' coalition these days is pure fiction. It's an alliance for global conquest and US/European hegemony, and that's all it is," Knapp wrote.

"The United States in particular has no conceivable legitimate interest in remaining a NATO member ... the only things it gets out of NATO membership are the kinds of foreign entanglements George Washington and Thomas Jefferson warned it against."

He said that if the European powers want to form a military alliance, they should "do it at their own expense and with their own military personnel, not with American blood and treasure at stake".