

Larger NATO carries costs, risk to stability

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Expanding commitments questioned amid US domestic economic pressures

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 policymaking 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 defending 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 Vought is the president of the Center for Renewing America.

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

"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 wrote.

The US is running trillion-dollar annual deficits, with the red ink set to increase as baby boomers continue to retire, inflating medical and retirement outlays.

On Wednesday, the consumer price index, or CPI, released by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, rose by 9.1 percent in June, the largest increase in more than four decades.

Besides economic pressure brought by a larger NATO, senior fellow Doug Bandow at the Cato Institute wrote that "the two countries' 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 wrote that Russia could further rely on nuclear weapons as a deterrent against NATO's northern expansion.

Furthermore, there are experts who believe that the constant NATO expansion is the real trigger of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Conflict trigger

In an interview with Xinhua News Agency, Columbia University professor Jeffrey Sachs pointed out that the US failed to acknowledge that its arrogance and provocative NATO policies raised tension and militarization in Ukraine, and it is now using the conflict in Ukraine as an excuse to expand NATO even further, which is "a terrible mistake and potential disaster".

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.

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

"This is a typical American strategy to try to divide the world," Sachs said.

Jonathan Cook, an author for Antiwar.com, recently wrote that NATO chiefly served as an alibi for US aggression, a "vener of multilateral legitimacy to its largely unilateral militarism".

"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.