



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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FOCUS EUROPE

This monthly publication analyses strategic developments in Europe and India's relations with the EU and major European powers and is authored by Amb. Ruchira Kamboj, Senior Fellow for International Security and Global Affairs and Awantika Singh Sengar, Research Associate, DPG. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to the author at ruchira@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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1. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and US President Donald Trump at the NATO Summit, 8 July 2026. Source: [White House](#)
2. Official logo of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
3. Heads of State pose for the official group photograph at the NATO Summit in Ankara, Türkiye, 8 July 2026. Source: [White House](#)

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The Ankara Summit and NATO's Future

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The Ankara Summit and NATO's Future

by

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj & Awantika Singh Sengar

Executive Summary

NATO was established as a collective defence alliance centred on Article 5 of the Washington Treaty: an attack on one is an attack on all. It was therefore not without reason that its first Secretary General described it as an effort 'to keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down'¹. Following the end of the Cold War, NATO broadened its concept of security to include emerging non-traditional threats, what the Clinton administration called the 'security challenges of the next century'². A marked turning point came with Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg put it, the Alliance was in the 'midst of the biggest overhaul of our collective defence and deterrence since the Cold War'³, signalling a return to its traditional posture of deterrence, collective defence, and territorial security.

With the changing nature of US foreign policy toward Europe, NATO is undergoing yet another transformation: 'a stronger Europe within a stronger NATO.' NATO has long survived by reinventing itself, but the shift from a crisis-management coalition to 'NATO 3.0' forces an uncomfortable question: Can the Alliance remain tethered to Washington while Europe grows up strategically?

The Ankara Summit brought into clear light the transformation taking place within the Alliance. The focus was on delivery over strategy: continued military support to Ukraine, an evolving deterrence posture, a greater European role in defence, and reinforcing Alliance cohesion in an uncertain geopolitical environment. More than a planning meeting, the summit served as a test both for eastern and southern defence and for the structural limits of transatlantic unity.

Therein lies a paradox. As NATO faces the demands of a multipolar world, its push toward operational self-sufficiency risks exposing deep structural friction with the United States. Equally important is the internal European challenge. Can thirty-two allies, each with distinct strategic cultures, historical experiences and security priorities, maintain cohesion as Europe becomes more capable and more independent?

¹Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/ten-best-ten-worst-us-foreign-policy-decisions/creation-of-nato/>

²Strengthening NATO and European Security, The White House archives
<https://clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/EOP/NSC/html/nsc-05.html>

³Dan Sabbagh, "Nato to Put 300,000 Troops on High Alert in Response to Russia Threat," *The Guardian*, June 27, 2022.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/27/nato-300000-troops-high-alert-russia-threat-ukraine>

NATO has continually reinvented itself. Founded in 1949 as a collective defence alliance, it shifted after the Cold War toward crisis management and cooperative security, then returned to deterrence and collective defence following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It now appears to be entering a new phase marked by stronger European leadership within a transatlantic framework. Yet NATO has always had a dual role: guaranteeing collective defence under Article 5 while underpinning the US-led liberal international order. The two roles usually reinforce each other, but they are not the same.

The real test, however, lies ahead. Can a more autonomous and strategically confident Europe coexist with continued American leadership, or will the very process of strengthening NATO gradually redefine the transatlantic bargain on which it has rested for more than seven decades?

Origins and Formation

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a political-military alliance⁴ established with the signature of the Washington Treaty on 4 April, 1949, by 12 founding members. Its main purpose was "to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means"⁵. The end of the Second World War marked the transition from a multipolar balance of power to a bipolar international order centered on the United States & the Soviet Union. The fear of Soviet expansionism and the spread of Communism in Europe encouraged the US to intervene in Europe. First came the Truman Doctrine, where the US, for the first time, declared itself to be the global defender of democracy against communism⁶. To support this foreign policy initiative, Washington launched the Marshall Plan (aka the European Recovery Program) that allocated \$12 billion to rebuild Europe⁷. The United States of America, therefore, has played a pivotal role in the creation of NATO, binding North America and Europe into a common defence framework.

NATO follows an "open-door" policy based on Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, which deals with enlargement. Article 10 states that membership is open to any "European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area"⁸. Since 1949, there have been ten rounds of enlargement, increasing the number of members from 12 to 32, with the latest additions being Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024).

⁴NATO. *What is NATO?* The North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Available at: <https://www.nato.int/en/what-is-nato.htm>

⁵Ibid.

⁶Council on Foreign Relations.

<https://www.cfr.org/ten-best-ten-worst-us-foreign-policy-decisions/creation-of-nato/>

⁷NATO. *A Short History of NATO*. <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/nato-history/a-short-history-of-nato>

⁸North Atlantic Treaty 1949.

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty>

The alliance introduced the Membership Action Plan (MAP)⁹ in 1999 to prepare aspiring nations for membership. Currently, there are three nations on the waiting list: Georgia, Ukraine, and Bosnia & Herzegovina. At the Bucharest Summit in 2008¹⁰, NATO made the political commitment that Georgia and Ukraine would become members in the future, however, they have never entered the MAP, instead using Annual National Programmes. As for Bosnia, its MAP was activated in 2018 but remains stalled due to unresolved domestic reforms.

At the heart of the Alliance lies Article 5¹¹ of the Washington Treaty, which enshrines the principle of collective defence: an armed attack against one member is considered an attack against all. Article 5 is consistent with the UN Charter's Article 51¹², which recognises that "a state that is a victim of an armed attack has the right to individual or collective self-defence and may request other states to come to its assistance." In NATO's context, Article 5 translates this "right" of self-defence into a mutual assistance "obligation"¹³. Notably, Article 5 has been invoked only once, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Consensus based decision-making is another bedrock rule of NATO. This principle of consensus is applied at every committee level, meaning all NATO decisions are made collectively by its member countries¹⁴.

Governance and Structure

The North Atlantic Council (NAC) is the principal political decision-making body of the Alliance. It is chaired by the Secretary General. The NAC is the only body established by the Washington Treaty of 1949 and the only one that has the power to establish subsidiary bodies¹⁵. All member states are represented in the council, and all decisions are taken by consensus, irrespective of a nation's economic or military strength.

Another important body within the alliance is the Nuclear Policy Group (NPG), established in 1966, which is a forum to discuss, debate, consult and decide on all issues related to NATO's nuclear deterrence¹⁶. Headed by the Secretary General, it

⁹Enlargement and Article 10. NATO website.

<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/enlargement-and-article-10>

¹⁰Bucharest Summit Declaration 2008

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2008/04/03/bucharest-summit-declaration>

¹¹North Atlantic Treaty 1949.

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty>

¹²Article 51 of the UN Charter. UN Website. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

¹³NATO. *Collective Defence and Article 5*. NATO Website.

<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/collective-defence-and-article-5>

¹⁴NATO. *Consensus decision-making at NATO*. NATO website.

<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/consensus-decision-making-at-nato>

¹⁵NATO Structure. NATO Website.

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/nato-structure/north-atlantic-council-nac>

¹⁶Nuclear Policy Group, NATO.

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/nato-structure/nuclear-planning-group-npg>

addresses the overall effectiveness, safety and security of NATO's nuclear weapons and the corresponding consultation, command and control systems.

Militarily, strategic direction is provided by the Military Committee, where all countries are represented by their permanent Military Representatives (MILREPs) acting on behalf of their respective Chiefs of Defence. The Allied Command Operations (ACO) is one of NATO's two strategic commands, headquartered at SHAPE in Mons, Belgium. It is responsible for the planning and execution of all Alliance military operations and is led by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). The other strategic command is Allied Command Transformation (ACT), based in Norfolk, Virginia, USA. It is responsible for the transformation of NATO's military structures, forces, capabilities and doctrine and is led by the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT).¹⁷

NATO was established as a Cold War alliance, but it has continuously adapted its structure, missions and aims to evolving geopolitical realities. The most recent development was the establishment of the NATO Force Model in 2022 in response to the Russia-Ukraine war, which significantly expanded the number of high-readiness forces and follow-on forces available to NATO commanders¹⁸. NATO also adopts Strategic Concepts¹⁹ which set NATO's core tasks and principles, its values in response to the evolving security environment, and its strategic objectives for the next decade. There have been eight concepts since 1949, the most recent being the 2022 Strategic Concept²⁰, which was adopted at the 2022 Madrid summit. However, NATO now operates in a far more complex security environment, confronting hybrid warfare, cyber and space threats, emerging technologies, and challenges across its northern, eastern, and southern flanks.

Funding

NATO uses a mixed funding model based on direct and indirect contributions from member states.

Common Funding covers costs shared by all allies and is divided into three parts. The Civil Budget funds NATO Headquarters in Brussels, including staff, administration, and diplomacy : €528.2 million for 2026. The Military Budget supports the integrated command structure, including SHAPE, joint exercises, and operations : €2.42 billion for 2026. The NATO Security Investment Programme, NSIP, pays for shared infrastructure such as airfields, bases, pipelines, radar, and missile defence. Total

¹⁷A new NATO command structure. *Atlantic Council*.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/a-new-nato-command-structure/>

¹⁸Building Defence Capacity in Europe, *IISS*.

<https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/introduction-how-ready/>

¹⁹Strategic Concepts. NATO Website. <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/strategic-concepts>

²⁰NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept. PDF:

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/strategic-concepts/nato-2022-strategic-concept>

common funding for 2026 is €5.3 billion. Contributions are based on each country's Gross National Income, ensuring a negotiated form of burden-sharing²¹.

National Defence Spending is the largest source of NATO resources and remains the responsibility of each member state. At the Hague Summit in 2025²², allies committed to invest 5% of GDP annually on defence: 3.5% on core military capabilities by 2035 and 1.5% on critical infrastructure and civil preparedness. This marks a sharp rise from the 2% target set in 2014, when average spending was only 1.4% of GDP. Today the average is about 2.3%. Frontline states lead the increase, with Poland at 4.3%, Lithuania at 4.0%, and Latvia at 3.7%, all moving toward the new 5% goal²³.

The Ankara Summit 2026

The 2026 NATO Summit in Ankara signalled a shift in the Alliance's strategic focus. Positioned at the crossroads of the Black Sea, Mediterranean, and Middle East, Turkey links NATO's eastern, southern, and maritime theatres. Hosting the summit in Ankara also reflected NATO's recognition that Euro-Atlantic security now extends beyond deterring Russia to addressing interconnected regional and cross-domain challenges, reinforcing its evolving 360-degree approach and Turkey's growing strategic relevance within the Alliance. More importantly, Ankara marked a departure from previous summits that were largely characterised by political declarations and emergency responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While the Washington²⁴ and the Hague²⁵ summits focused on strengthening deterrence through new commitments and higher defence spending targets, Ankara shifted the conversation towards delivery, prioritising industrial production, logistics, resilience, and operational readiness over new political pledges. This shift was reflected in tangible commitments such as €70 billion in military assistance for Ukraine, over €50 billion in defence procurement, €27 billion to upgrade fuel infrastructure, and renewed efforts to implement the 5 per cent GDP defence investment pledge by 2035²⁶.

However, turning financial commitments into real military capability remains NATO's biggest challenge. Meeting the objectives of the NATO Force Model requires stronger defence production, resilient supply chains, efficient logistics, and greater

²¹Funding NATO. NATO website. <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/funding-nato>

²²Hague Summit Declaration 2025

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/06/25/the-hague-summit-declaration>

²³Anthony Reuben, "How much do NATO members spend on defence?" BBC, May 2026.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyz4nq91wpo>

²⁴Washington Summit Declaration 2024

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2024/07/10/washington-summit-declaration>

²⁵Hague Summit Declaration 2025

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/06/25/the-hague-summit-declaration>

²⁶Ankara Summit Declaration 2026.

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2026/07/08/the-ankara-summit-declaration>

interoperability among Allied forces²⁷. At the same time problems such as defence inflation, production bottlenecks, and domestic political and fiscal pressures could slow implementation, raising concerns that some European nations may struggle to fulfil their commitments. In the final count, therefore, the Ankara summit will be judged not by the promises it made but by NATO's ability to deliver tangible military capability and readiness.

NATO 3.0 and the Europeanisation Paradox

The quiet Europeanisation of NATO is already underway. European states are raising defence spending at a pace not seen in decades. Canada is aligning more closely with Europe through new financing vehicles like the Defence, Security & Resilience Bank²⁸. And the EU itself has set an industrial target with ReArm Europe / Readiness 2030²⁹, a plan to mobilise €800 billion by 2030. At the Ankara Summit, 11 Allies announced a joint procurement of Saab GlobalEye³⁰ aircraft from Sweden to serve as NATO's next-generation AWACS, replacing part of the ageing E-3 fleet. It marks the first time NATO's shared airborne surveillance capability will be centered on a European system rather than a US aircraft.

Taken together, these steps point to a Europe that is beginning to carry more of the alliance's weight.

Going forward, the biggest challenge NATO and Europe face is the perceived reorientation of US priorities. With new crises such as the war with Iran and China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific, Washington has seemingly shifted focus toward these theatres, forcing Europe to do more for its own defence. This creates a fundamental paradox. Senior US officials have urged European allies to assume greater responsibility for continental defence, even as decades of NATO planning have been built around American capabilities.

Europe remains deeply dependent on the US for strategic enablers: military command, intelligence, strategic lift, missile defence, and the nuclear umbrella. The fact that SACEUR³¹ has always been a US four-star general reflects this reality. The US maintains approximately 80,000 troops in Europe under USEUCOM³². According to

²⁷Progress and Pitfalls in Europe's Defence 2025, IISS.

<https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/progress-and-shortfalls-in-europes-defence-an-assessment/conclusion--towards-a-road-map--for-european-defence/>

²⁸M. Greenacr, "How a new multilateral defence bank could boost innovation". *Science Business*. 16 June 2026.

<https://sciencebusiness.net/news/international-news/how-new-multilateral-defence-bank-could-boost-innovation>

²⁹Readiness 2030. European Parliament. PDF:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/769566/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)769566_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/769566/EPRS_BRI(2025)769566_EN.pdf)

³⁰NATO's AWACS.

<https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/07/07/natos-new-airborne-warning-and-control-system-is-announced>

³¹SACEUR. NATO Website.

<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/organization/nato-structure/supreme-allied-commander-europe-saceur>

³²US European Command, 2025. PDF:

<https://www.eucom.mil/document/43164/2025-useucom-posture-statement---hascpdf>

SIPRI, from 2021 to 2025, 58% of arms imported by European NATO members came from the US³³. Washington also stations tactical nuclear weapons at six bases across five countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey³⁴. In short, European security still relies on US assets in ISR, space, and key hardware such as the F-35.

As well, there are two additional challenges that NATO must contend with. The one, external and the other, internal. While American figures demand Europe carry its own weight, Washington may be psychologically and structurally unready for a truly independent, self-directing European pillar within NATO. The second challenge is within Europe itself. Can European states align on capabilities, industry, and strategy without fracturing? The failure of the FCAS³⁵ (Future Combat Air System) exposes the deep fragmentation within the European defence industrial base. Launched in 2017, the project aimed to build a 6th-generation fighter jet. Plagued by work-share disputes, the \$100 billion project remains frozen in 2026, raising questions about Europe's ability to deliver strategic autonomy together.

The Wider Geopolitical Mirror: EU Autonomy and Global Diversification

NATO's transformation is happening alongside the broader changes taking place globally, and especially in Europe and the European Union. The Russia-Ukraine war, wider geopolitical competition and the changing nature of US foreign policy towards Europe have forced the continent to rethink its own security, allies and foreign policy. Threats by the US President to withdraw American troops from Europe: 'We could remove all of our soldiers out of Europe³⁶', and references to Greenland have reinforced Europe's concerns about its security dependence on the United States. It has therefore launched several projects and initiatives, such as the ReArm 2030, the SAFE (Security Action For Europe) fund and the European Defence Industrial Strategy³⁷ to strengthen Europe's capacity and security. At the same time, it is deepening engagement across Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, India and Southeast Asia. The outreach to the IP4 is reflective of this reality. Another significant development was the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's first committee visit to India in March 2026³⁸, reflecting NATO's recognition of India as a key strategic partner and the growing interconnection between Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security. This

³³SIPRI, *Trends in International Arms Transfers*, 2025. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/fs_2603_at_2025.pdf

³⁴CFR, 30 March 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/nuclear-weapons-europe-mapping-us-and-russian-deployments>

³⁵Müller and Issel, "Why the Franco-German FCAS project failed?" *Euronews*, June 9, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/06/09/why-the-franco-german-fcas-fighter-jet-project-has-failed>

³⁶Liptak and Holmes, 7 July 2026, "Trump Mused About Cutting Troops in Europe." *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/07/07/politics/trump-nato-troops-europe>

³⁷EDIS, European Commission. <https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/333faee1-a851-44a6-965b-713247515d39en>

³⁸NATO Parliamentary Assembly. <https://www.nato-pa.int/news/building-bridges-nato-parliamentary-assemblies-landmark-visit-india>

reorientation is also emblematic of a Europe trying to emerge as an independent player on the world stage and not just as an echo of US foreign policy.

Conclusion: The Sword Arm or a True Shield?

Even after seventy-five years of existence, NATO's identity remains questionable: is it a true security shield for Europe, or is it a "sword arm" of the US-led global order? While Article 5 of the Washington Treaty grants collective defence and the US's nuclear umbrella to Europe, NATO has also 'helped' the US to project power in the Euro-Atlantic region and beyond.

American foreign policy after World War II sought to make the US a dominant global power. To do so, Washington anchored Western Europe within its sphere, contained communism, rebuilt European economies as markets for US exports, and projected American power through a strong transatlantic alliance. Today, the US still needs NATO to lend international legitimacy to its actions and to project power globally, as no rival, whether China or Russia, commands a security alliance that spans two continents. This partnership has also enabled the US to establish 31 permanent bases on European soil. According to John Ikenberry³⁹, a political scientist, NATO is the cornerstone of the American-led liberal world order, embedding American power within multilateral institutions to enhance its legitimacy. In this sense, NATO has always served a dual purpose: providing collective defence under Article 5 while simultaneously acting as a principal pillar of the US-led liberal international order. Those two roles have generally complemented one another, but they are not always identical.

The 2026 Ankara Summit highlighted NATO's changing priorities: from declarations and promises to working towards delivering results. Secretary-General Mark Rutte's⁴⁰ remark, "We are rebalancing our security for the better, and that is what NATO 3.0 is about," captures how Europe is playing a more proactive role in strengthening the alliance and improving its own security. This has initiated a transformation within the alliance. The real test, however, lies ahead. Can a more autonomous and strategically confident Europe coexist with American leadership, or will the very process of strengthening NATO gradually redefine the transatlantic bargain on which it has rested for more than seven decades?

³⁹John Ikenberry, *After Victory*, pp. 50-53.

⁴⁰Secretary-General on the Ankara Summit, 8 July 2026.

<https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/07/08/secretary-general-on-the-ankara-summit-nato-delivers>



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