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# Security Snapshot

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## The NATO Summit: more money, more Europe... more unity?

*Dr Beatrice Gorawantschy, Tom Körner, Meike Lenzner*

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***The shortest-ever communiqué after the shortest-ever summit shows the alliance adapting to the new US Administration, all the while tackling the geopolitical threat situation imposed by Russia. The central theme and message were more defence spending and more responsibility for European allies within NATO. In an EU-context, it becomes clear that the EU and its member states must work on their own unity and prove to be a credible and equal partner.***

**Context:** The 76<sup>th</sup> NATO Summit took place in The Hague, Netherlands, against the backdrop of a worsening security landscape. Russia's continued war against Ukraine and its hybrid activities against NATO members persist, making it the primary outside threat to the alliance, "in particular (in) the long-term"<sup>1</sup>, as the final summit declaration puts it. Next to Russia's actions, the last months saw further violent escalations in other parts of the world. In this context, the war between Israel and Iran stood out due to the US intervening on the side of Israel by bombarding Iranian nuclear facilities in the night of 22 June. At the summit in The Hague, two days later, it was less of a topic because a ceasefire

had already been announced by then. Most of the talks revolved around the alliance's unity, US commitment to the Article 5 mutual defence clause<sup>2</sup>, and the increase in allies' defence spending, particularly for NATO's European members. Other focal points were cybersecurity, terrorism, Ukraine, and strategic competition, which hints at China. Shortly before the leaders' meeting in The Hague, Canada and the EU signed a new security and defence pact, committing to closer cooperation in response to continued US threats against its allies.

**Unity of the alliance:** Since the re-election of Trump as US President in November 2024, worries about the US commitment to the alliance have been increasing. He and his team have repeatedly put in question the mutual defence clause and whether the US would come to help of other allies in need. In the past, Trump went as far as to say he would "encourage" the aggressor "to do whatever the hell they want"<sup>3</sup>. Asked on his way to the summit about the US commitment to Article 5, he still avoided a clear, positive answer by mentioning different definitions of what the article meant in reality. NATO allies, however, appear

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<sup>1</sup> [NATO - Official text: The Hague Summit Declaration issued by NATO Heads of State and Government \(2025\), 25-Jun.-2025](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NATO - Topic: Collective defence and Article 5](#)

<sup>3</sup> [BBC: Trump says he would 'encourage' Russia to attack Nato allies who do not pay their bills](#)

increasingly used to the US Administration's rhetorical changes and pushed for unity during this summit. Rutte urged European allies to stop worrying and start focusing on increasing their defence spending, while the final communiqué declares an "ironclad commitment to collective defence". Many leaders, especially from Eastern Flank states, gave similar statements on the sidelines of the summit. Indeed, latest developments, like the new appointment of a SACEUR<sup>4</sup> by the US, appear to give credibility to the continued US backing of NATO structures in Europe. Other potential conflicts among NATO allies, such as heating tensions between Greece and Turkey, were not discussed at the summit, which seemed centred around appeasing Trump and keeping the US committed to European security. The ongoing trade conflict between the US and its NATO allies was pointed out as hampering the common military build-up by French President Emmanuel Macron, but was not discussed officially.<sup>5</sup>

**Finances and burden sharing:** The essence of the NATO Summit was what Secretary-General Mark Rutte presented as "The Hague Defence Investment Plan" at the press conference.<sup>6</sup> In line with the debate in the run-up to the summit, it came as no surprise that allies agreed on the 5% of GDP annual spending target in core defence capabilities. The final declaration concretizes that it is composed by 3.5% allocated to core defence requirements to meet NATO Capability Targets, and the remaining 1.5% can be allocated to defence related investments, e.g., critical infrastructure. This target must be met by 2035, while the trajectory and balance of spending will be reviewed in 2029.

Most notably, Spain negotiated an exemption to only spend 2.1% instead of 3.5%, which trig-

gered mixed reactions. While the US representatives denounced it as "unfair" and threatened Spain with increased tariffs, SG Rutte trusts in Spain's commitment, yet wants to closely watch it. Belgium, in turn, regards 3,5% spending highly unrealistic for itself as well and hence sees in the Spanish example a potential way out in meeting only capability targets without spending targets.<sup>7</sup>

This increase from 2 to 5% is quite remarkable, also considering that most allies have not even met 2%, or merely because of restocking donated defence material to Ukraine. This sharp increase on the one hand is due to the increasing Russian threat, exacerbated by an accelerating Russian military build-up, that would potentially enable it to attack NATO in three years. On the other hand, it is due to the immense US pressure on the other allies to live up to its own standards of already spending close to 3.5%. Rutte additionally tied the agreement to the persona of President Trump, that "no other US President could achieve this", despite all predecessors had called for it as well.<sup>8</sup> Before the summit, however, the German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, put this US pressure into perspective and emphasized the Russian threat: "We are not doing this, as is sometimes claimed, to do the United States and its president a favour. We are doing this from our own point of view and conviction, because Russia in particular is actively and aggressively threatening the security and freedom of the entire Euro-Atlantic area."<sup>9</sup>

**Support for Ukraine:** The final communiqué holds that "allies reaffirm their enduring sovereign commitments to provide to Ukraine" and that Ukraine's security contributes to NATO's. The latter hence means that any military aid to

<sup>4</sup> SACEUR = Supreme Allied Commander Europe, historically always a US General, who commands NATO's European forces

<sup>5</sup> [LIVE: NATO leaders strike deal on spending targets at The Hague summit dominated by Trump - Euractiv](#)

<sup>6</sup> [NATO - Live streaming - NATO Summit in The Hague, 25-Jun.-2025](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Liveblog: Trump heads home a winner after landing NATO spending deal at summit - Euractiv](#)

<sup>8</sup> [NATO - Live streaming - NATO Summit in The Hague, 25-Jun.-2025](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Friedrich Merz](#)

Ukraine will be counted as a contribution to allies' new 5% defence spending targets. During the press conference, SG Rutte emphasized an "unwavering support of Ukraine" and that it was NATO's goal to keep Ukraine in the fight today in view of its "irreversible path" to NATO membership. The numbers underpin this support: just before the summit, NATO announced that Canadian and European allies have stepped up their additional security assistance from €20bn to €35bn until now in 2025.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, despite this strong signalling of financial support to Ukraine, it should not be forgotten that, in contrast to preceding NATO summits, Ukraine was not the centre of attention. There was no separate section on Ukraine and potential security guarantees in the final declaration. President Zelenskyy met leaders at the sidelines, but did not participate in the official meeting of heads of states.

### What does this mean...

#### ... for EU Defence Policy?

Although European allies tried their best to demonstrate unity vis-à-vis the US during the summit, it became evident that European allies view defence priorities differently. The opt-out case of Spain to meet the 5% target shows this most drastically. Countries like Spain or Belgium do not seem to see the same need for increased defence capabilities as for instance Estonia, which is already spending 5% of its GDP. Therefore, it will be important to better align EU member states for a successful EU Defence Policy.

The fact that NATO allies want to leverage partnerships to promote defence industrial cooperation, as the communiqué holds, presents a

window of opportunity to support European efforts to streamline and boost defence industry capabilities.

The fact that the decisions of the NATO summit did not root its increased defence efforts as fiercely in the threat of Russia's war in Ukraine as the EU Defence Policy does, see White Paper on Defence, means that it is upon the EU to continue to give Ukraine and support of Ukraine maximum visibility.

#### ... for the future of transatlantic security cooperation?

First, the NATO summit could achieve its main goal: demonstrate unity and keep the Americans in. The big fear of a fall-out or President Trump unanticipatedly stepping out of line did not materialize. However, it should not be overlooked how European allies were tiptoeing around not to upset Trump, first and foremost Secretary General Mark Rutte, who was fiercely criticized for overtly "praising" Donald Trump. This shows that the US and particularly the US President will continue to decide the fate of transatlantic cooperation.

Second, the weakened US-support of Ukraine, engagement with Russia, and previous statements by Trump and his team had made allies uncertain. The NATO summit could now give European allies reassurance that the US is still truly committed to the alliance – at least, this is how several statements by European heads of state indicate: "Article 5 is absolutely working"<sup>11</sup> said Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal.

Third, this week has demonstrated a strengthened EU-Canada security cooperation, starting at the EU-Canada summit. This connection also becomes evident within as the EU and Canada

<sup>10</sup> [NATO - Opinion: Pre-summit press conference by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte ahead of the NATO Summit in The Hague, 23-Jun.-2025](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Frontline NATO countries put on brave face as Trump casts doubt on collective defense – POLITICO](#)

remain equally committed to Ukraine. Both regard Ukraine at the centre of Europe's security, while the joint NATO communiqué, that also includes the US, commits to less strong language and boils down to a smaller common denominator. As such, from a European perspective, Canada will gain more visibility and importance as a transatlantic partner within NATO.

The summit can be seen as historic because of the biggest armament plan since the end of the Cold War. Although it was a success in terms of transatlantic cooperation, it still showed that

forming a new and sustainable transatlantic pact remains a difficult and unpredictable terrain to manoeuvre. For the EU, the consequence should be to work even harder on its own unity, collective security, and become a credible and equal partner to NATO. The question is to what extent these developments can now advance further European defence initiatives and lead to a real European Defence Union.

### Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

Dr. Beatrice Gorawantschy

Leiterin des Europabüros

Europabüro Brüssel

[www.kas.de/bruessel](http://www.kas.de/bruessel)

[beatrice.gorawantschy@kas.de](mailto:beatrice.gorawantschy@kas.de)



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