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NATO after the Ankara Summit: Deepening the Europeanisation of the Alliance amid Persistent Instability

The NATO Summit in Ankara, held on 7–8 July 2026, should be regarded as a moderate success. The principal directions of NATO's evolution were maintained, with the gradual Europeanisation of the Alliance remaining the central element of this process. At the same time, the meeting confirmed that NATO continues to face structural challenges – both internal and external – that complicate efforts to preserve cohesion and further adapt the Alliance to the long-term threat posed by Russia.

The Ankara Summit and NATO's Political Unity. In analyses of NATO, the success of recent summits has increasingly been measured by the level of diplomatic tensions observable during the meetings. This has become particularly significant following Donald Trump's return to the US presidency, as his administration has adopted a firm, and at times even confrontational, approach towards the Allies in an effort to induce them to undertake specific actions (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1492](#); ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1515](#); ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1547](#)). The fact that the level of tensions has become one of the principal indicators of the Alliance's condition tends to overshadow other important issues, including the development of the Allies' actual capabilities and the division of responsibilities in implementing defence plans. This does not mean, however, that political considerations are insignificant. On the contrary, they reveal much about perceptions of NATO's trajectory and, in the case of the United States, about the degree of satisfaction with the fulfilment of demands previously addressed to the Allies.

In this respect, the NATO Summit in Ankara confirmed the Alliance's unity and demonstrated that its principal trajectory of development is not being fundamentally challenged. At the same time, the meeting also exposed persistent diplomatic tensions affecting NATO's cohesion. These were particularly evident in the statements of D. Trump, who accused Spain of being slow – or even unwilling – to increase defence spending and threatened it with consequences. The US President also reiterated his desire to assume control over Greenland. Differences among the Allies were likewise apparent in the context of policy towards Ukraine. Although the summit declaration provides for financial support for that country (discussed in greater detail below), the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary declined to participate in this form of allied action (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1651](#)). The Dutch Minister of Defence, Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius, additionally stated that the Netherlands had exhausted its capacity for further direct military assistance to Ukraine. Although this was not presented as a manifestation of a lack of political will, the timing of the decision is nevertheless noteworthy.

It should be borne in mind that maintaining the unity of the Pact among all 32 members and across all dimensions of its activities is practically impossible, given their divergent interests and geopolitical circumstances, differing threat perceptions, and varying domestic conditions. Historically, this was not achievable even when the Alliance had considerably fewer members.

Expansion of Military and Industrial Capabilities. *NATO Capabilities.* During the summit, as well as immediately before and after it, a number of decisions were taken that will contribute to the development of the military and industrial capabilities of NATO member states and of the defence systems employed by the Alliance. Secretary General Mark Rutte announced the replacement of part of the Alliance's fleet of airborne early-warning aircraft (AWACS–Airborne Warning and Control System), transitioning from the Boeing E-3 Sentry to the Saab GlobalEye, as well as the procurement of Airbus A330 MRTT (Multi Role Tanker Transport) aerial refuelling aircraft.



The choice of these suppliers represents another manifestation of the Europeanisation¹ of the Alliance. In addition, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Norway will finance the procurement of five MQ-4C Triton intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) drones manufactured by the US company Northrop Grumman.

Investment by the US Defence Industry in Europe. US defence manufacturers also concluded a number of agreements with European industrial partners, indicating a shift in the export model employed by American companies. These developments form part of the broader process of expanding the conventional capabilities of NATO's European members. Lockheed Martin and Rheinmetall signed an agreement to produce ATACMS tactical ballistic missiles in Germany. Anduril Industries and PGZ formalised a contract providing for the production of Barracuda-500 cruise missiles in Poland. Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden signed an agreement with the United States concerning the servicing of PAC-3 missiles in Europe. The relocation of part of their production to Europe by US companies is a response to several challenges. First, US industry is struggling to keep pace with rising demand, necessitating an expansion of production capacity. This may also reflect an effort to restore the reputation of the United States as a reliable supplier, which was undermined by Operation Epic Fury against Iran. Following the extensive use of various types of missiles by the United States and its regional allies, concerns emerged that replenishing US stocks could affect deliveries of systems previously contracted for by other customers ([“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 1542](#)). Second, this development responds to the requirements of the European theatre, where shortening supply chains and locating the production, servicing, and distribution of weapons systems close to the area in which they may potentially be employed is increasingly important. This directly enhances the effectiveness of deterrence. Third, it constitutes a response to the increasingly assertive position adopted by European states regarding defence procurement. This is reflected in a preference for European suppliers and restrictions on the use of financial instruments for the procurement of “non-European” systems, as in the case of the SAFE programme. These factors encourage US companies to locate production facilities in Europe.

The United States Is Providing Europe with Critical Capabilities. During the summit, the United States and Germany also concluded an agreement concerning the sale of long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles. Germany had already expressed interest in such a procurement the previous year, describing the missiles as a gap-filler. The Tomahawks are intended to provide essential strike capabilities until a European missile with comparable characteristics can be developed and its production launched in Europe.² The acquisition of this system is crucial to the development of a European component of deterrence against Russia. Germany is expected to become the third European operator of these missiles, after the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and the first to possess a land-based launch capability. This represents a clear signal of the United States' political willingness to equip its European Allies with conventional capabilities for deterring Russia and to make Germany a pillar of this strategy, in line with the concept of the model ally.

US–Turkish Rapprochement. The summit also produced a significant breakthrough in US–Turkish relations, although at this stage it remains primarily declaratory. During his meeting with the summit host, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, D. Trump declared his readiness to lift the sanctions imposed on Turkey in 2020 following Ankara's acquisition of the Russian S-400 air-defence system. One of the most consequential repercussions at the time was Turkey's exclusion from the F-35 procurement programme. According to press reports, Turkey was prepared to sell the S-400 system, which could pave the way for the acquisition of US fighter aircrafts. Turkey remains a key US ally not only within NATO but also in the Middle East. Given its importance for the stabilisation and control of several strategically significant areas, the United States clearly has little interest in losing an ally or encouraging its further strategic autonomy. It is also possible that the renewed discussion of

¹ When using the term Europeanisation, it should be borne in mind that Canada also participates in the process whereby the Alliance's non-US members assume greater responsibility for NATO. The acquisition of the GlobalEye platform illustrates this point, as Saab's Swedish radars are installed on Canadian Bombardier aircraft.

² A multinational programme aimed at developing such capabilities is currently being implemented in Europe: the European Long-Range Strike Approach (ELSA).



the F-35 programme is influenced by US policy towards Israel. US–Israeli relations remain strained due to differences over how to bring military operations against Iran to an end. Israel has also undertaken actions in recent months that have directly affected Turkish interests. A potential decision to allow Turkey to rejoin the F-35 programme could therefore stem both from a desire to exert pressure on Israel and from broader tensions in US–Israeli relations.

Other Agreements. A number of other agreements were concluded and announced during the NATO Summit, confirming the existence of a broad consensus within the Alliance in favour of strengthening military and industrial capabilities. Belgium, Croatia, France, Spain, Poland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom signed a letter of intent concerning the development of airlift capabilities. Work was announced on the establishment of a multinational A400M fleet involving joint procurement, operation, financing, maintenance, training, and coordination of air transport capabilities.³ Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Spain, Canada, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, and Italy announced an initiative concerning the joint procurement, stockpiling, and transportation of critical raw materials, as well as the recycling of materials for the defence industry.

Further Adaptation of NATO Structures. Significant changes have also affected NATO's military structures. Most of these, however, are not a direct consequence of the Ankara Summit but rather the result of the Alliance's ongoing adaptation policy. The summit merely provided an opportunity for their formal announcement. Finland, France, and Sweden joined the NATO Flight Training Europe initiative, which aims to enhance interoperability through specially established training centres. France announced that it would deploy a combat ground unit to form part of NATO Forward Land Forces in Finland. The nature of the allied mission responsible for protecting the airspace of the Baltic states has also undergone a fundamental transformation: the mission has been converted from air policing into a defensive mission. From a military perspective, this increases operational freedom of action and streamlines the decision-making process.

Expansion of the Fuel Pipeline System. During the summit, Secretary General M. Rutte also announced a decision to expand NATO's Central European Pipeline System (CEPS) and allocate €27 billion for this purpose. This constitutes one of the most concrete and significant achievements of the Ankara meeting. CEPS is a dual-use underground fuel pipeline system. Until now, NATO's eastern flank has remained outside the system's reach, despite its critical importance for the logistics of air and ground operations. The effects of this investment will become apparent only in several years, but the decision itself clearly demonstrates that NATO is developing conventional deterrence capabilities and preparing for the possibility of precisely such a confrontation.

Support for Ukraine. The summit declaration also announced tangible financial assistance for Ukraine. NATO committed to providing Ukraine with €70 billion in assistance "in military equipment, support and training".⁴ The announcement of this initiative for another consecutive year confirms NATO's gradual transition from an *ad hoc* model of assistance towards a more structured and continuous approach. Ukraine is therefore regarded by the Alliance as an important component of a policy aimed at reducing the threat posed by Russia. It should be noted that, to date, NATO member states and other external donors have had limited ability to control how funds transferred to Ukraine are spent. Establishing such a mechanism could constitute an important lever in relations with Ukraine and potentially contribute to reducing corrupt practices.

A departure from the narrative concerning Ukraine's prospective NATO membership is also increasingly visible. A similar trend can be observed in Ukraine's relations with the European Union, where approaches to enlargement based on an assessment of candidates' progress (merit-based enlargement) or concepts of "reverse membership" are beginning to gain prominence (["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 1655](#)). This results from a number of factors, most notably the practical infeasibility of both objectives, at least under current conditions. The absence of membership commitments may also be interpreted as evidence that this argument has ceased to play a significant role in Ukraine's negotiations with Western states and has lost much of its persuasive force. It is also

³ The selection of Airbus constitutes another example of NATO's Europeanisation.

⁴ Point 4 of the Summit Declaration: NATO Summit Declaration, 8 July 2026 [10 July 2026].



possible that avoiding the issue of Ukrainian membership – while not constituting explicit opposition to it – is being used by some NATO members as a bargaining instrument in negotiations with Russia.

During the summit, D. Trump announced his willingness to support the establishment of PAC-3 missile production capabilities in Ukraine. Given, however, the strategic importance of this system to US military capabilities and Washington's broader reluctance to allow its Allies and partners to emancipate themselves strategically, this announcement should be treated with caution. Outside the United States, these missiles are currently produced only in Japan. The summit nevertheless produced important decisions concerning Ukrainian air defence. Denmark, Canada, Germany, and Norway announced a joint procurement of PAC-3 missiles for Ukraine. Some of these missiles are expected to come from the states' existing stocks in order to minimise delivery times. Shortly before the summit, Ukraine also concluded a bilateral agreement with Sweden to acquire 16 Saab JAS 39 Gripen fighter aircraft.

Conclusions. The NATO Summit in Ankara primarily confirmed the Allies' implementation of previously undertaken commitments, the continued adaptation of defence plans, and the development of an industrial base capable of providing the resources necessary for effective deterrence and, if required, the implementation of these plans. US defence companies are increasingly establishing joint ventures with their European counterparts and expanding production capabilities in Europe, which may indicate a shift in the prevailing export model. European Allies, for their part, are pooling their efforts in the production, procurement, and joint operation of systems whose acquisition and maintenance could impose excessive burdens on individual states. These measures are necessary to partially compensate for the capabilities being withdrawn by the United States that had been assigned to NATO defence plans under the NATO Force Model, including airlift and aerial refuelling capabilities. It should nevertheless be noted that Europeanised capabilities may possess comparatively lower deterrence potential. For Russia, the United States remains the principal point of reference in its policy towards NATO, although the growth of European military capabilities represents a negative trend from Moscow's perspective.

In many respects, the US withdrawal from Europe has taken an evolutionary rather than abrupt form. This does not alter the fact that, at the present stage, transatlantic relations are characterised more by burden shifting than by genuine burden sharing. The process has achieved a degree of stabilisation, although concerns remain regarding the expected announcement by the Department of War of a Global Posture Review. At this stage, a reduction in the overall US conventional commitment to Europe appears likely, alongside the maintenance of a presence on the eastern flank. It remains unclear, however, whether this presence will also encompass the Baltic states, which are among those most exposed to Russian pressure.

European NATO Allies have accepted the premises of what has been termed the NATO 3.0 concept. The consistent strengthening of their defence capabilities could reduce their dependence on US security support, diminish their status as security recipients, and increase their political autonomy. This is a risk that the United States is assuming by compelling its Allies in different regions to take greater responsibility for their own security. The development of autonomous defence capabilities necessarily entails a reduced dependence on external security providers.

Although the threats currently generated by Russia are predominantly sub-threshold in nature, NATO's adaptation process is preparing the Alliance for conventional warfare. This is evident both in the scale of the NATO Force Model – which has been expanded to 800,000 troops – and in the development of regional commands and the plan to expand the fuel pipeline infrastructure.

The next NATO Summit will be held in Tirana, although it has not yet been determined whether it will take place a year from now. This uncertain timetable may indicate that NATO has, for the time being, adjusted to the new security environment, including the enduring threat posed by Russia and the continuing Europeanisation of the Alliance in accordance with the assumptions underlying the NATO 3.0 concept.