

# Countdown to the Washington NATO Summit: Priorities and Expectations in 2024



# Introduction

NATO leaders will meet in Washington, D.C. in July 2024 – 75 years after the signature of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949.

After seventy-five years, NATO remains vital to European and Euro-Atlantic security. With Russia's illegal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine, now in its third year, NATO has a significant and instrumental role in determining how the Western liberal order survives and shapes the revamped European Security Architecture. Now a family of 32 member states, NATO's mission continues to be defence and deterrence, in particular deterring Russia from threatening the sovereign states in its vicinity.

NATO leaders will address transatlantic security as viewed through the lens of this year's high stakes elections.

In this EPC compendium, authors discuss and analyse the key issues to be addressed in the Summit's priorities, such as: Ukraine's path into the Alliance and security guarantees; defence and deterrence on the Eastern Flank; the defence spending pledge; nuclear deterrence; NATO-EU relations; Black Sea security; open-door policy; NATO's stance on Indo-Pacific and China; the future of the Alliance with 32 members; the appointment of the next Secretary General, and recommended outcomes.

# The NATO Summit at a glance



**Benedetta Berti**, Head of Policy Planning at the Office of the Secretary General at NATO; Senior Adviser on Strategic Planning, Security and Defence Policy, European Policy Centre

NATO leaders will meet in Washington, D.C. in July to celebrate the Alliance's 75th anniversary and recognise the enduring importance of a strong transatlantic bond for the security of both Europe and North America. They will also take stock of the profound strategic adaptation NATO has undertaken in the past decade, and the important decisions needed to continue preparing the transatlantic community for a world of growing strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks. At the Summit, NATO leaders will take steps to continue strengthening and modernising NATO's deterrence and defence posture to ensure the Alliance has the forces, capabilities and enablers needed to execute its regional defence plans. They will also recognise the tremendous progress made over the past ten years to increase Allied defence spending, going from only 3 Allies spending two percent of their GDP on defence in 2014 to 23 Allies in 2024, and reaffirm their commitment to continuing in this upward trajectory.

In the same vein, Allies will also decide to energise the transatlantic defence industrial base further and support the ramping up of production needed for the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture and support Ukraine as it resists Russian aggression. Strengthening support for Ukraine will be another key priority of the Washington Summit. Allies will continue to bring Ukraine closer to NATO politically and militarily. This includes the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine, through which NATO will coordinate training and equipment for Ukraine and provide support to the long-term development of Ukraine's Armed Forces.

In Washington, the Allies will also welcome, for the third consecutive year, NATO's partners from the Indo-Pacific region (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea) to continue strengthening political dialogue and practical cooperation to address common security challenges and boost resilience against authoritarian coercion. This is especially important given the close security interlinkages between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres and the growing strategic alignment and concerted actions of Russia, the People's Republic of China, Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In addition, Allies will take decisions on a range of other critical issues, from resilience, to cyber-security, and from climate change to the security of critical undersea infrastructure. By doing so, they will again signal that NATO can effectively operate in a world where threats and challenges are global and interconnected and where both military and non-military tactics are simultaneously utilised by strategic competitors and adversaries to seek to undermine Allied security.

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# Nuclear deterrence is back, but arms control certainly is not



**Jamie Shea**, Senior Adviser on Strategic Planning,  
Security and Defence Policy, European Policy Centre

Nuclear deterrence is back, but arms control certainly is not – at least for now. The NATO Summit Declaration will focus more on the condemnation of Russia’s nuclear threats, and posturing and the rapid pace of Chinese nuclear modernisation.

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Deterrence without accompanying arms control measures is a much riskier business as NATO is now experiencing its new bout of confrontation with Russia. The demise of treaties like INF, CFE and Open Skies, the collapse of talks on military transparency and confidence building in the OSCE in Vienna, and the paralysis in the US-Russia dialogue on nuclear stability as the New START agreement is about to expire, have plunged the Alliance into darkness about Moscow’s capabilities and strategic intentions. The guardrails making it difficult for Russia to mass its forces or launch a surprise attack, which could prevent dangerous military behaviour or misread exercises from spiralling out of control, have largely disappeared. Without arms control and non-proliferation agreements, deterrence is based more on guesswork, shaky intelligence and the tendency to over-compensate for uncertainty by stockpiling ever-larger arsenals of weapons. This is not a recipe for successful crisis management in the tense NATO-Russia relationship produced by Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.

Yet, apart from bemoaning the collapse of arms control and disarmament and putting the blame once again on Moscow for its past violations of the principal agreements, there is little that the Alliance can do at

the Washington Summit apart from re-stressing the importance of arms control to international security more generally, and wait for better times. Poland has even suggested that some of NATO’s air-delivered sub-strategic nuclear weapons could be deployed on its territory, and President Macron has launched a debate on extending France’s national nuclear deterrent to cover other EU member states. The Netherlands has recently taken delivery of the first European nuclear capable F35 as the Alliance begins the modernisation of its sub-strategic nuclear deterrent. Russia has also deployed short-range nuclear missiles in Belarus. So maximum flexibility, not restraint, is the name of the game here.

However, this does not mean NATO is silent on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation issues. As often in the past, the Allies will want to add their weight to calls on North Korea to stop its prohibited missile tests, particularly of long-range ICBMs and its satellite launches, and to respect its UN and NPT obligations. The changes that Pyongyang has recently made to its nuclear doctrine will also worry the Allies, as do the large number of missiles that North Korea has given Moscow for use in Ukraine. No doubt there will be condemnations of Iran, too, for its covert and accelerating nuclear programme, also in defiance of its UN obligations, and its recent large-scale missile attack on Israel. Together with Putin’s constant missile and drone strikes against Ukraine, this attack will underscore the urgency for NATO to upgrade its own missile, air defence and early warning systems and to welcome Germany’s Sky Shield Initiative, as well as the recent Polish-Greek proposal to give the EU an integrated missile defence along its eastern borders. No doubt, there will be calls on China to stop its covert supply of advanced electronics and weapons components to Russia and to engage more fully in international efforts to limit nuclear proliferation and join the future nuclear disarmament negotiations.

# The NATO-EU conundrum at the Washington Summit



**Thierry Tardy**, Associate Researcher, Jacques Delors Institute and Visiting Professor at the College of Europe

The NATO-EU relationship will not be a priority of the forthcoming Washington Summit. As in Madrid, in 2022 and in Vilnius last year, the EU will be portrayed as an essential partner of the Alliance, and the good cooperation that the two institutions have no doubt established in the context of the war in Ukraine will be praised. What the EU has done in terms of financial and military support to Ukraine, and in the training of its armed forces, will also be commended. After all, the Ukraine situation has, to a large degree, clarified the roles of the two organisations, and both have lived up to their respective expectations for the good of European security.

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The problem lies elsewhere. At the core, the issue at stake is how Europeans will increasingly take responsibility for their defence in a way that is compatible with what NATO will do. And here comes the elephant in the NATO Summit room, i.e. the scenario by which Donald Trump comes back to power in January 2025 and starts a process of slow transatlantic decoupling. For European Allies, be they in the EU or not, such a scenario will mean an inevitable reappraisal of their own defence posture and alliances, especially at a time when Putin concomitantly confronts the Ukrainians. The European pillar in NATO might be a way to reconcile the Alliance's centrality and a European aspiration to do more in defence, but only if NATO remains united in what brings us together. If the US commitment falters, the NATO-EU relationship will look very different from the one described in the three NATO-EU Joint Declarations (2016, 2018 and 2023) and most likely in the Washington Summit Final communiqué.

# How effective has NATO been since the war in Ukraine began?



**Paul Taylor**, Senior Visiting Fellow in the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

NATO's 2008 Bucharest declaration that Ukraine and Georgia would one day become members - without saying when or how - conferred none of the benefits of membership but all the risks of being on an indefinite waiting list. Small wonder that they became targets of Russia's pre-emptive aggression - first in Georgia, then Ukraine. Yet NATO responded in slow motion.

After Moscow annexed Crimea and stirred war in Donbas in 2014, NATO raised defence spending targets and deployed tripwire forces in the Baltic states and Poland but did little to help Ukraine beyond training and exercises. It did not develop a coherent strategy for the Black Sea.

After Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion, NATO's reflex was to reinforce its eastern flank but not to get involved in halting or defeating Russia, since Ukraine was not a member. NATO quietly withdrew naval vessels from the Black Sea in 2021. They have not returned.

Following the United States' cautious lead, Allies decided NATO would provide only non-lethal aid. Volodymyr Zelenskyy's plea for NATO to police a no-fly zone over Ukraine was rebuffed to avoid a direct clash with Russia. Military assistance was channelled bilaterally, and coordinated by the US.

Not all Allies implemented sanctions. Türkiye refused. Hungary slowed and obstructed EU sanctions. Both delayed Sweden's and Finland's accession to the alliance.

NATO made no new commitment to Ukrainian membership at its 2023 Vilnius Summit. Allies have failed to produce or supply sufficient ammunition or air defence systems. The US and a group of European and Arab partners helped Israel intercept and neutralise a missile and drone attack by Iran and its proxies in April 2024. NATO allies should consider similar offshore missile defence cover for western Ukrainian airspace to help protect critical infrastructure and population centres.

After two years of ducking direct involvement and shielding its members but failing to give Ukraine decisive assistance, NATO realises its efforts so far have been insufficient. "The world's most successful military alliance" overpromised and underdelivered and now faces possible failure. The damage to the credibility of NATO deterrence, if Russia prevails, would be severe.

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# NATO must make a credible commitment to Ukraine



**Amanda Paul**, Senior Policy Analyst and Deputy Head of the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

At the upcoming NATO Washington Summit, the Alliance must make good on its 2008 commitment to Ukraine by offering Kyiv an effective road map to the Alliance.

At the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, the Allies promised Ukraine (and Georgia) a seat at the Alliance's table. Yet, this commitment came without a date or roadmap, proving to be an empty promise and leaving both countries dangerously vulnerable. Without a doubt, the failure to live up to the promise in Bucharest contributed to Russian President Vladimir Putin invading Georgia in 2008 before moving to annex, occupy, and subsequently militarise Crimea in 2014, and finally launching his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

While NATO Allies have given Ukraine crucial support to defend itself against Russian aggression and liberate its territories, a clear membership perspective has remained off the cards. At the 2023 Vilnius Summit, the US and France [blocked](#) efforts to issue a membership invitation to Kyiv. However, the Alliance did reaffirm its Bucharest commitments, agreed on a substantial package of expanded political and practical support, and [established the NATO-Ukraine Council](#).

In Washington, the Allies must go further. They should offer Ukraine a clear and credible roadmap to membership – or, as US State Secretary Antony Blinken recently termed it, “a bridge”. Although the final date of membership will be determined once NATO member states agree that the security situation in the country is acceptable, making it clear that Ukraine's destination is inside the Alliance will send a powerful message.

This should include gradual integration, starting with granting Ukraine observer status at the North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO's decision-making body. This will offer Ukraine important hands-on experience inside the Alliance. Furthermore, institutionalising Ukraine's accession will demonstrate that the Alliance is a credible partner.

As the Alliance celebrates its 75th anniversary, it should make history. The outcome of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine will establish the security and geopolitical environment of the entire Eurasia region. A secure, independent, and strong Ukraine is crucial for a secure and sustainable postwar peace. More empty promises or half-hearted commitments would be devastating for Kyiv and music to Putin's ears, discrediting NATO and undermining transatlantic security.

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# Transforming NATO's leadership in aid for Ukraine



**Lev Zinchenko**, Programme Assistant in the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

The upcoming Washington Summit aims to establish a long-term mechanism of coordination for arms deliveries to Ukraine, and train Ukrainian soldiers, thereby taking over the task from the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG).

NATO and its Allies recognise the crucial role UDCG plays in coordinating aid to Ukraine, but it lacks the necessary institutional tools to deliver effectively. NATO has proven its ability to coordinate aid, including securing artillery and missile contracts to replenish Allies' stocks following ammunition transfers to Ukraine. This makes the Alliance a reliable actor to carry out future military coordination.

However, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's proposal for a €100 billion military fund for Ukraine has stalled, with uncertainty surrounding what NATO countries will be willing to contribute to the initiative, on what basis, and whether political "proofing" will be established. Nevertheless, options for contributions could be made through national commitments, guarantees for NATO loans, or possibly by utilising frozen Russian assets. If the plan is still being reviewed, the Allies must expedite decisions on their procedures before this year's Summit, as Ukraine may shortly run out of essential military support. Any further delays could undermine the political momentum of the process, especially with regard to the upcoming elections in major NATO member states.

NATO's proven capabilities in coordinating aid and defence planning will enhance UDCG's established mechanisms. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, NATO has limited its support to non-lethal aid, with Allies committing over €640 million to Ukraine's urgent needs. However, the time has come to expand NATO's role to aid Ukraine beyond non-lethal engagement. As red lines against Russia have gradually diminished, NATO has transformed into a more impactful and institutionalised actor. The Washington Summit must solidify this transformation. This means that NATO will have the opportunity to alleviate the burden from the US and promote equitable contributions from the European Allies to help Ukraine defeat Russia on the battlefield.

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# NATO needs a long-term consolidated approach for the Black Sea region



**Mihai Chihaiia**, Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

[The 2023 Vilnius Summit Declaration](#) highlights the strategic importance of the Black Sea for the Alliance, it outlines NATO's aims to enhance situational awareness and forge closer cooperation with regional partners. This reaffirms the words of NATO's Strategic Concept, which also stresses the strategic relevance of the Black Sea.

NATO has constantly undertaken measures to strengthen defence and deterrence around the Black Sea, including, most recently, the decision to [expand NATO's military base](#) near the strategic port of Constanta.

However, a coherent, long-term strategic approach to the region that considers the multidimensional consequences of the Russian war against Ukraine and potential future dynamics are still missing. At the same time, the potential for EU-NATO cooperation remains untapped.

The EU is currently defining an upgraded approach towards the Black Sea, which aims to enhance the resilience of the Union and its partners, on the one hand, while, doubling down on regional development and cooperation potential. In this context, there is room to bolster EU-NATO cooperation on the Black Sea in areas such as maritime security, countering hybrid threats, military mobility, protecting critical infrastructure, and crisis management.

At the Washington Summit, the Allies should reflect on a long-term consolidated approach for the Black Sea region that takes into account current and the future strategic trends, the necessity of upgraded military capabilities and interoperability, the need for more resilient civil-military infrastructure, and enhanced EU-NATO cooperation. This strategic approach will require a clear action plan and concrete projects backed by financial resources.

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# A credible open-door policy means a clear roadmap and membership perspective for Georgia



**Iana Maisuradze**, Junior Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

At the NATO Summit in Washington D.C., the Alliance should recommit to the [2008 Bucharest Summit Decision](#) that Georgia (and Ukraine) will become NATO members. The commitment should translate into a clear roadmap and membership perspective. Furthermore, the Alliance should strengthen NATO's [tailored political and practical support](#) from the Madrid Summit Communiqué and deepen political dialogue and practical cooperation with Georgia as it combats Russian influence, hybrid threats, and illegal occupation of 20 per cent of its territory from Russia.

NATO must demonstrate that its open-door policy is not selective. With two new members joining the Alliance since February 2022 – Finland and Sweden – NATO has provided evidence that it is committed to its open-door policy. However, this is selective and shows double standards. Since 2008, Bucharest's commitment to Georgia and Ukraine, NATO enlarged four times.

Needless to say, Georgia (and Ukraine) has been left out of all enlargement waves, even when it fulfilled all the Alliance's reform targets, by spending two percent of its GDP on defence, substantially contributing to NATO operations, and showing commitment and capability to contribute to Euro-Atlantic security.

Integrating Finland and Sweden into NATO has fewer political and military risks compared to Georgia, but it also shows NATO's double standards towards leaving vulnerable countries on their own against Russia; this undermines NATO's objectives that were set out 75 years ago.

Giving Georgia a credible security guarantee, a clear membership roadmap and guidelines to adhere to in order to become a member will also show that Russia does not hold [a de facto veto right](#) in NATO's decision-making process. This will give more credibility to NATO's open-door policy. Georgia maintains its Euro-Atlantic integration as a strategic imperative, enshrined in the Georgian Constitution, to safeguard the country's sovereignty and independence, as about 80 percent of Georgian citizens support this. Allies paid a high price for continuing to approach Russia with a "friendly partnership" in [NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept](#),

even after Russia's 2008 war in Georgia. It took not one but two wars for NATO to call Russia the "most significant and direct threat" in its [Strategic Concept \(2022\)](#). If the lesson from Georgia had been learned and a politically effective strategy had been adopted towards Russia, the West would not be facing the war in Ukraine now.

Georgia is at a crossroads, and NATO needs Georgia to stay in its camp – security guarantees will be required to achieve this objective. Now that Georgia is in flux ahead of the elections and the EU and NATO are [suggesting a withdrawal of the new "foreign agents law"](#), it is the right time to ensure NATO gives Georgia credible commitments to prevent its enhanced opportunity partner from shifting in any way, shape, or form towards Russian orbit. Where NATO leaves a vacuum, Russia will fill it – especially when it comes to Georgia, given Russia's imperialistic ambition towards it.

Victory for Ukraine is in NATO's interest. Moreover, peace, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty are also in the interest of NATO, in forethought and foresight – because if Russia swallows Georgia, it will mean a political defeat for NATO.

At the Washington Summit, the Allies will look back and celebrate the past 75 years. However, for NATO to be bulletproof, it will need to anticipate the risks coming from Russia and eliminate the caveats that remain from past miscalculated decisions. The Alliance should not only recommit to the 2008 promise but also set a timeline and deliver on it by giving Georgia a clear roadmap and membership perspective. Both NATO and Georgia need each other.

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# The New UK Government's first act on the world stage



**Garvan Walshe**, Head of Communications, European Policy Centre

This year's NATO Summit will take place in just five days after Britain elects a new Prime Minister, Sir Kier Starmer, leader of the Labour Party. At what will be the first major international occasion on which he can present his government on to the world stage, Starmer must bear a domestic and international audience in mind. At home, he will use the NATO Summit to show how much he has moved the Labour Party away from the pacifism and neutralism of his predecessor, Jeremy Corbyn. Abroad, he must use it to show that his government will be fully committed to international institutions and will benefit from not being associated with Brexit.

Though post-Brexit Conservative governments sought to use NATO to prove that Brexit did not mean they were turning their back on the world, their responsibility for Brexit could not avoid instilling doubts in the minds of the rest of the world as to the Tories' commitment to the rules-based international order.

In contrast, European defence cooperation is an area ripe for initiatives allowing the new British government to demonstrate change in the UK's attitude without directly re-opening EU membership, a topic likely to remain off limits unless Labour wins a second term.

A Trump victory in the US would require the UK to consider how it can defend its security interests with limited, or even no, American help. In those circumstances, the longstanding UK reluctance to consider a "European pillar" within NATO, derived from fear that it would leave the US semi-detached, might begin to be set aside.

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# NATO should remain watchful of the Indo-Pacific but avoid overstretching its resources and commitments



**Ivano di Carlo**, Senior Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

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As NATO members assemble for their Summit in Washington, they confront crucial decisions about the strategic priorities, role and resource distribution of the Alliance. Despite an increasingly fragmented world, threats remain deeply interconnected; therefore, it should not be surprising if the Indo-Pacific region and China remain prominent on the agenda. Yet, this should not come at the expense of the Alliance's pressing issues.

Given the urgent support that Ukraine needs and the risk of escalation on the European continent, it is prudent for NATO to refrain from making symbolic commitments to regions like the Indo-Pacific. This could overstretch its resources and sow discord at a time when unity should not be taken for granted. This caution is especially pertinent given the uncertainty surrounding the upcoming US presidential elections. If the US suddenly redirected its resources and military assets from Europe to the Indo-Pacific, European NATO Allies would be compelled to shoulder a greater burden in deterring Russia. In light of this, the Alliance would benefit from focusing on immediate challenges that are within reach, avoiding internal friction and any diversion from its core mission.

However, the significance of international partnerships for NATO, including in the Indo-Pacific, is undeniable. NATO should enhance collaboration with selected partners in the Indo-Pacific through strategic interactions such as information sharing and knowledge exchanges and explore ways to enhance defence industrial cooperation with countries in the region.

This approach would promote unity and strategic coherence both within NATO and with partners in the Indo-Pacific without extending its presence.

There are distinct red lines that may trigger a more substantial NATO involvement in the Indo-Pacific. An increase in cooperation between China and Russia, which would profoundly impact Europe's security architecture, could compel NATO to become similarly involved in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, while NATO will have to remain adaptable to emerging challenges and global alignments, it should carefully measure its involvement and avoid strategic overreach that might dilute its immediate, urgent focus.

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# Innovation and partnerships: NATO's only strategy to face Russia's war economy



**Juraj Majcin**, Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

It has become a tradition for analysts to urge NATO Allies to increase defence spending ahead of Summits. These calls were often met with lukewarm responses until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Vladimir Putin's aggression has compelled key Western governments to acknowledge the end of the peace dividend era and the inevitability of ramping up defence spending.

Currently, 23 of NATO's 32 Allies spend 2 per cent or more of their GDP on defence, marking a significant increase from 2014, when only the United Kingdom, United States, and Greece made the grade. However, as NATO prepares for the upcoming Summit in Washington, D.C., the Alliance must focus on transforming its defence spending agenda in terms of both scope and quality.

Russia, a direct threat to the Alliance, has shifted its economy to a war footing, spending six percent of its GDP on defence and appointing an economist with no military background, Andrei Belousov, as Defence Minister. This signals Moscow's readiness for a prolonged confrontation with the West. In this regard, NATO Allies must view the two percent GDP defence spending pledge as a minimum, not a target.

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Unlike Putin, democratic governments are constrained by political considerations that prevent them from prioritising defence over other critical budgetary areas like healthcare and social programmes. NATO Allies are confronted with a challenging balancing act: addressing their citizens' legitimate concerns about the cost of living and environmental issues while simultaneously ramping up defence spending to counter Russia's war economy.

As in the Cold War era, NATO should prioritise technological advancement over mass. Alongside traditional weapons systems, Allies must invest in transformative technologies like artificial intelligence, unmanned systems, and cybersecurity, which have demonstrated their effectiveness, notably in Ukraine. Strengthening partnerships with the private sector through initiatives like the NATO Innovation Fund and the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) is crucial for fostering innovation and maintaining strategic superiority.

NATO should also seek synergies with the EU's defence initiatives outlined in the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) to optimise defence expenditures and coordinate joint procurement of defence capabilities. A robust NATO-EU partnership is essential to secure supply chains of critical raw materials for the defence industry.

At the Washington Summit, the Alliance must focus on strategic efficiency, technological innovation and partnerships to deliver a smarter defence.

# Mind the electronic warfare gap



**Chris Kremidas-Courtney**, Senior Visiting Fellow in the Europe in the World Programme, European Policy Centre

At NATO's Washington Summit, discussions will focus on lessons learned from the war in Ukraine. A clear-eyed assessment is necessary to ensure we learn the correct lessons.

Many weapons provided to Ukraine by NATO members have proven less effective than advertised, due to their vulnerabilities to Russian electronic warfare (EW) capabilities. After initial periods of success, precision-guided munitions, HIMARS missiles, and even kamikaze drones are being thwarted by Russian jamming, missing their targets and costing Ukrainian lives.

Russian electronic warfare (EW) has also disrupted commercial air and maritime traffic in Europe, affecting flights in the Baltic and maritime traffic in the Black Sea. As Europe debates investment in heavy weapons like tanks and aircraft versus cheaper drones, it is crucial to address the overarching impact of EW on their effectiveness, regardless of the balance we choose.

We are in an EW arms race, and we're woefully behind. Russia has invested in systems to seize the electromagnetic high ground, disrupting and weakening both military forces and transportation systems. As a result, Ukraine had to set aside some Western weapons and develop their own jam-proof systems and tactics. They have also been creating their own EW systems to counter Russian drones.

Although NATO has an Electromagnetic Spectrum Strategy, the performance of its weapon systems in Ukraine indicates that they are falling short of its EW standards. Future defence investments must focus on systems that are ready for the modern electromagnetic battlefield. Capabilities committed in the NATO force generation process should be validated and certified to updated standards to ensure they can be effective in a complex EW environment.

Additionally, existing Allied programmes must be accelerated to develop and deploy defensive EW systems to counter drone swarms and missile attacks. This will ensure the billions spent on new ships, planes, drones, and tanks are not wasted on ineffective future museum pieces.

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# An agenda for the next NATO Secretary General

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**Oana Lungescu**, Senior Adviser on Strategic Planning, Security and Defence Policy, European Policy Centre and Distinguished Fellow, The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)

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On 1 October, Mark Rutte must hit the ground running as the new NATO Secretary-General, when he takes over from Jens Stoltenberg and his decade-long tenure. The Alliance has fundamentally transformed – with greater military readiness to face an aggressive Russia, with more members, and a new focus on China. The position requires being fast and firm in implementing the decisions taken at the Washington Summit amid a challenging situation in Ukraine and political volatility across NATO countries.

The Alliance is working to ensure that its new defence plans – the most detailed since the Cold War – can be executed if needed. The plans also guide defence planning and procurement, determining the capabilities Allies need to invest in and send a demand signal to the defence industry. While 23 of NATO's 32 members will spend at least two percent of GDP on defence this year, Secretary General Rutte will need to push hard for the others to follow suit next year when NATO leaders meet in The Hague.

Ukraine will remain at the top of the agenda, as NATO prepares to take on a bigger role in coordinating assistance and training. The aim is to achieve greater predictability for Kyiv and better burden-sharing between the Allies. The Secretary-General will play a key role in keeping the flow of support going, but also, when the time is right, in forging consensus on Ukraine's NATO membership.

Ultimately, the Secretary-General's main job is to keep Europe and North America together. Mark Rutte may face challenges from both. Meanwhile, French politician Marine Le Pen says she would keep France in NATO, but a National Rally government could undermine the Alliance from within and end support for Ukraine – not unlike a second Donald Trump presidency in the US. The Secretary-General must convince both that NATO remains a good deal in a dangerous world.

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# NATO 2030: A future anticipated and avoided?



**Ricardo Borges de Castro**, Senior Adviser to the European Policy Centre and Visiting Fellow at the College of Europe

As NATO prepares to celebrate 75 years as the most successful global defensive alliance, transatlantic partners seem to be living through the latter stages before a worst-case scenario. To avoid this, it is imperative that we prepare for a potential direct military confrontation with Russia.

This is no longer a war game that many military institutions play. It is the reality we face and, therefore, more complex and complicated than an exercise or a top-table simulation. But time is running out, and delays, hesitation or downplaying the potential risks of inaction would be a strategic mistake.

Several [political](#) and [military](#) leaders have spoken publicly of Europe needing to prepare for [war with Russia](#) until the end of the decade. This would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. Perhaps these conversations took place behind closed doors, but now they are out in the open. A policymaker's role is not just to diagnose potential risks but to try to avoid them.

Preparations are especially needed on the European flank of the Alliance on deterrence and defence. Deterrence is used to avoid a war; defence is needed if a war must be fought. While US support is presently indispensable in doing both, Europeans should be

prepared to defend themselves alone, if necessary, in a situation where all parties do not uphold NATO's Article 5. Although this may be considered unlikely by most, in forethought, planning and preparedness, it cannot be ruled out.

Four priority areas need to be strengthened and reinforced by 2030 and beyond: nuclear deterrence, conventional military capabilities, cyber warfare and space. Yet, the first step to avoiding a war in the future is to make sure that Ukraine defeats Russia in its war of aggression. While NATO leaders will want to celebrate the achievements of the last decades at the Washington Summit, ensuring they will not be undone, means supporting Kyiv with all that it needs – now.

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