



PyleaMUN 2026

Committee: **NATO**

Topic: **Reassessing NATO's Strategic Autonomy Amid U.S. Unpredictability** – Debating the need for European strategic autonomy and defence integration in light of fluctuating U.S. commitments and rhetoric questioning NATO's relevance.

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1. Personal Introduction

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 1st PyleaMUN! We look forward to meeting everyone and chairing all of our debates! We would like to congratulate you all for taking on the challenge of participating in one of the most demanding, but also most exciting committees.

My name is Vaggelis Bletsas; I am a student at Arsakeio High school of Thessaloniki. I've loved my previous MUN experiences, both the debating and conference atmosphere. The combination of formality and socializing is unique and fun. While it seems intimidating with everyone in formal clothes and all of the seemingly difficult rules of procedure, everyone is feeling the same way. Everyone I've met at a conference has been so nice and helpful, and every mistake I've made or witnessed has been met with support, not judgment.

I am Niki Tsitroudi, a student at the American Farm School of Thessaloniki. For this year's Pylea MUN, I am honoured to be serving as your Co-Chair in NATO, throughout your exploration of a particularly multifaceted and urgent issue in the contemporary political scene. Having attended a variety of conferences nationally and abroad, my enthusiasm has culminated into the commitment to transfer the very fulfilment MUN has provided me with, both as a first-timer and an award-winning delegate, to each and every one of you, to the best of my ability.

On that note, I am thrilled to extend my warmest welcome to all of you and looking forward to meeting you in January! Should you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me via my personal email.

My name is Evanthia Panagiotarea, and I am a 16-year-old student at the Experimental School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. I have participated in many MUN conferences in various committees, as well as in my school's MUN club. The opportunity to take part in these conferences has offered me valuable experiences that have enriched both

my personal life and academic development. Beyond developing my debating and argumentation skills and improving my English, I have also met many wonderful people who have become close friends. My goal now is to pass on what I have learned from these experiences and, of course, to be your mentor. I sincerely believe that our partnership will be productive, inspiring, and truly rewarding for all of us. If any questions arise while you are conducting your research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

This study guide should help you prepare for the debate on the subject. It will introduce you to the history of NATO, its internal balance and current position in global politics, and will provide you with potential solutions to expand on. Moreover, it should provide some guidance on the direction the debate and your resolution should follow. Hopefully, this will give you the background information necessary for you to conduct your country-specific research.

We hope we can give everyone the best conference experience possible!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at: pyleamun.nato@gmail.com
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2. Introduction to the Topic

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), also called The North Atlantic Alliance is a political and military alliance which consists of 32 member states from Europe and America. It was first established by 12 countries after World War II, in 1949. The organization's main purposes were to prevent another major armed conflict happening in European soil, helping Western countries to flourish again after the Soviet's Union impact and create a secure environment where if one member was being attacked by an outside party the others were obliged to instantly provide strategic assistance.

During the recent years, NATO has not been steady in its decisions, causing uncertainty to its members. One primary factor for this state is the fluctuating U.S. position on NATO, which has always been the Alliance's most invincible military force and largest financial contributor. Different U.S. administrations and government leaders have adopted markedly divergent strategic orientations to NATO, especially regarding burden-sharing and the value of the Alliance itself. The constant signs of unaccountability has been causing concern in the E.U about the reliability of the U.S, the values it represents and whether it can fully commit to such an Alliance.

Due to what has been already mentioned, European strategic automation has turned into a salient topic of discussion. In essence, it suggests for Europe to engage in a more self-operative system causing independence in military, technological, and political fields. Some argue that with menaces including Russia's aggressive behaviour, attacks in the cyber world and in neighbouring regions Europe ought to enhance its capacity for self-defence without depending solely on the U.S. They support that enhanced defence cooperation not only would benefit Europe but also empower NATO as a whole. Contradictory, others claim that the European Union, being composed of a total of 27 countries, has to overcome many other pressing issues so having a fully self-reliant defensive alliance is almost unachievable.

Simultaneously, broader international developments like increasing friction with China, the emergence of novel hybrid warfare tactics and political changes across both Europe and the United States further complicate this debate. NATO has proved its importance since it has been successfully delivering in its operations as an organization. However, the main focus is

no longer pointed at NATO's value, but whether Europe should cultivate its ability to act more independently at critical moments when U.S. support is uncertain.

As delegates, you should evaluate on how the EU can balance its need for further responsibility with the desire to continue being a member of a rewarding and powerful oversea partnership. Would it be advisable for Europe to chase after its autonomy, or should it continue being under the major influence of the U.S ? And if it would, how can those adjustments come to life without disturbing the way the Alliance has successfully been offering collective protection since the 20th century?

3. Definition of key terms

Treaty¹: a written agreement between two or more countries, formally approved and signed by their leaders.

Proxy wars²: a war fought between groups or smaller countries that each represent the interests of other larger powers, and may have help and support from these

Defence expenditure: defined by NATO as payments made by a national government specifically to meet the Alliance's or Allies' military needs, which consist of 'NATO common funding and NATO-managed trust funds'.³

Autonomy: 'the right of an organization, country, or region to be independent and govern itself'⁴

4. Historical Background

1941-1949 Pre-NATO Treaties

The foundation of NATO was the Atlantic Charter, which was a treaty between the U.S. and the U.K. Its purpose was to allow for global cooperation without territorial expansion. In 1947 France and the U.K. signed the Treaty of Dunkirk (1947-1997) as a means of defending against the looming threat of the Germans and Soviets. In 1948 the Brussels Pact (1948-2010) was signed by Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, the U.K. and France, constituting the Western Union. Its goal was to organise the military and the socioeconomic cooperation of member states. Lastly, in 1949 the Northern Atlantic Treaty was signed by the Western Union, the U.S. , Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, forming NATO.

1948–1991 Origins of NATO and U.S. Leadership

¹ "TREATY | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge.org*, 2019, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/treaty.

² Cambridge Dictionary. "PROXY WAR | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Dictionary.cambridge.org*, 1 Mar. 2010, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/proxy-war.

³ NATO. *Defence Expenditures and NATO's 5% Commitment*. NATO, 27 June 2025, www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment. Accessed 16 Nov. 2025.

⁴ Cambridge Dictionary. *Cambridge.org*, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/autonomy.

Following WWII the US actively participated in Europe's recovery and security. In 1948 the US enacted the Marshall Plan [European Recovery Program, ERP (1948-1951)], an economic recovery program that provided foreign aid to Western Europe. Western Europe got transferred a sum amount of 13.3 Billion USD, in the span of 4 years. These funds were split roughly on per capita basis. NATO was officially formed in 1949 a few years after the end of the Second World War, with the Northern Atlantic Treaty signed in Washington DC. This treaty was a by-product of the U.S.' desire to prevent overextension and as a result it brought multilateralism to Europe. NATO's main purpose was to provide a collective defence tactic against enemies' aggression, as stated under Article 5 of the Washington Accord. The United States took the central leadership role, contributing significantly with their military, economic and nuclear capabilities, which have ensured the alliance's credibility.

The 1948-1949 Berlin Blockade entailed the blocking of the Western Allies' access to Berlin sectors under Soviet Union control, while both British and American air forces supplied West Germany. In May-September of 1949 the USSR lifted the Blockade due to economic reasons in East Berlin.



In 1950 North Korea launched an invasion of South Korea with the support of the USSR, this created emotions of fear to NATO members of a potential Communist takeover. In 1955 during the cold war, the Warsaw Pact (WP, or Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance) was signed by the USSR,

Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The Warsaw Pact Organisation (WPO) was a military alliance aiming to balance the power NATO had. These two organisations did not directly engage but with the use of proxy wars.

In 1951, the official headquarters of NATO were situated near Mons, Belgium (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) . A former US president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, serving as its General Commander, devised the structure for the new European command.

In 1966 France withdrew from NATO after the Anglo-American domination of the command structure reached a peak and their inadequate influence in it. Although European countries occasionally sought greater independence, such as France, U.S. leadership remained the cornerstone of European security throughout the Cold War. In 1989, communism fell, leading to a strategic re-evaluation of NATO's nature. In 1990, with the unification of East Germany with the Federal Republic of Germany as well as its joining the alliance, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) was signed between NATO and the USSR. This treaty controlled military excursions across Europe, it also continued even after the collapse of the WPO and the dissolution of the USSR. The fall of the USSR also marked the end of the cold war. The CFE significantly reduced conventional armaments and military spending in the following years.

1990-2009 Post–Cold War Adjustments and Transatlantic Shifts

With the end of the cold war, NATO was successful in defending democratic and member nations against the communist threat. But now without a serious and clear opponent, NATO had a new problem at hand which was that they were left with no goal anymore. This problem fired up long debates over Europe's defence role and its dependence on the US.

In 1990, during one of those debates in London, NATO's Heads of State and Government reached a consensus on the alliance's need to be changed to reflect this new more promising era in Europe.

In 1991, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was created, its goal was to include the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact allies into European security frameworks. NATO's purpose of collective defence changed to a broader collective security, managing regional conflicts and humanitarian crises. Main examples are NATO's involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1995 where the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) was deployed to maintain security. Another example is NATO's intervention in the war between the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo (1998), in which NATO used Air Strikes to force Yugoslavia to recall their Forces. During 1999 Czechia, Hungary and Poland were introduced to the alliance, first former WPO members joining.

In 1998 with the signing of the Saint-Malo declaration, the UK and France advanced the creation of a European security and defence policy (CSDP) as well as an autonomous military force. This document was essentially a response to the armed conflict in Kosovo (1998). The creation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), in 1999, worked as a means of preserving peace, preventing conflict and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. These actions marked a key moment in asserting Europe's capacity for autonomous military action. However, these ambitions remained largely dependent on U.S. support within NATO structures.

In 2003 campaigns against Iraq divided NATO members, as the US-led Coalition sent to eliminate the regime. This action was backed up by Eastern Europe and the UK while notably being opposed by France and Germany. The crisis highlighted Europe's fragmented foreign policy and revived discussions about the need for a coherent, autonomous European defence identity. NATO continued its expansion in 2004 and 2009, with the addition of the Baltic countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) and Balkan nations (Albania, Croatia) to the alliance.

NATO remained active, most importantly through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Yet, these missions exposed Europe's reliance on U.S. leadership, logistics, and intelligence. As the alliance entered the late 2000s, the question was no longer whether NATO was still relevant but rather how dependent Europe was to the US.

By 2008, NATO had proven its adaptability but also revealed a structural imbalance. While the U.S. remained dominant, European nations started to question how long they could still be dependent on an unpredictable transatlantic partner.

2008-2016 The Rise of European Defense Ambition

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War highlighted Europe's lack of preparations and its heavy dependence on U.S. forces. This crisis questioned whether Europe lacked the capability to independently respond to regional threats, restarting debates on whether the continent should make stronger, more autonomous defence structures. In 2009 the Lisbon Treaty entered into force after being ratified by all 27 member states. It significantly strengthened the European Union's role in defence. It introduced a mutual defence clause, Article 42.7, which obligated EU members to assist one another in the event of armed aggression. Although mechanisms such as the EU Battlegroups and the European Defence Agency (EDA) were developed to support rapid deployment and industrial cooperation, they remained largely theoretical. Europe had created new frameworks, but lacked the capabilities to make them fully operational. In 2011, NATO intervened in Libya's Civil War, by adopting the 1970 Resolution⁵ NATO implemented surveillance aircrafts. They began their military

⁵Security Council. "Resolution 1970 (2011)." *Un.org*, 2025,

[docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1970%20\(2011\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1970%20(2011)).

intervention as individual nations with the adoption of the UNSCR 1973⁶. The command was passed to NATO. US. Defence Secretary Robert Gates⁷ warned that Europe's declining defence capabilities were becoming unsustainable. The Libya operation demonstrated that Europe could not conduct a sustained military operation without American support.

In 2014 Russia annexed Crimea, this event shifted NATO's focus back to collective defence. This crisis brought up old concerns about Europe's defence vulnerability, especially after the Barack Administration pivoted their focus to eastern Asia. In response, the European Union launched the EUGS (European Union Global Strategy). Its purpose was to improve Europe's defence and security, the protection of civilians and the cooperation of member nations' armed forces. It was the first to describe the need for strategic autonomy. By the 2010s, Europe started to acknowledge that their long-term reliance on the US' military power was unsustainable. Even though Europe advanced its defence legislations, it continuously relied severely on U.S. capabilities. A new challenge arose, the growing American unpredictability and political questioning of NATO's relevance.

2016-2021 U.S. Unpredictability and NATO's Identity Crisis

In 2016 Donald J. Trump was elected president of the US. In one of his many talks as president he repeatedly called NATO "obsolete" and accused Allies of not contributing their owed share. Trump's administration put into question US' involvement with NATO since they bear a disproportionate share of the alliance's defence burden. These actions created uncertainty within NATO about US reliability and commitment, as well as signalling other nations to rethink US leadership could not be assumed.

The European Union, as a means of relation, launched the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and European Defence Fund (EDF) both in 2017. Each, respectively, brought together 25 member states to collaborate on military projects and operational readiness and to support joint research and development in defence technologies. An example being the Military Mobility Initiative led by PESCO in late 2017. The President of France (Emmanuel Macron) was an advocate for "European sovereignty", arguing that Europe was in need of autonomy in its capabilities to protect itself. In 2019 he referred to NATO as "brain-dead" revealing continuously growing concerns about the US' guarantor of European Security.

In the following years (2018 through 2020), Trump's administration brought even more uncertainty to NATO, especially with his confrontation during the Brussels Summit of 201, in which he threatened the US' withdrawal from the alliance. In 2019 the US formally withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) leaving Europe at the possible Russian missile deployments. These actions deepened the already existing concerns among European nations that U.S. leadership had become unpredictable, decreasing trust within the alliance.

In 2021, Joseph R. Biden was elected into office and with his arrival into the picture the tension between NATO and the US was temporarily relieved. During the 2021 Brussels Summit Biden reassured US' commitment to NATO and highlighted the importance of transatlantic partnerships. Even with these actions, concerns remained. The US' pivot towards the Indo-Pacific region, reignited doubts about their devotion to European Security

⁶ ---. "UN 1973 ." *Un.org*, UN, 2025, [docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1973%20(2011)).

⁷ Harris, Paul. "Robert Gates: No US "Boots on Ground" in Libya." *The Guardian*, The Guardian, 31 Mar. 2011, www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/31/gates-rules-out-american-troops-libya. Accessed 17 Nov. 2025.

in the long term. Their withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 negatively influenced European allies, reviving fears of unilateral US leadership.

By 2021 NATO faced a vital question, regarding whether or not Europe can maintain their security by relying on the extremely unpredictable US or do they need to pursue strategic autonomy to ensure their long term security.

2021-2025 Intensified U.S. Unpredictability and Europe's Renewed Push for Strategic Autonomy

By the 2020s repeated statements from Washington questioning NATO's relevance and criticizing European defence spending led European nations to re-evaluate US' commitment. As well as introducing a new variable to the equation: the US' domestic politics instead of a shared long term strategy.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed Europe's critical vulnerabilities, specifically in the supply chains and crisis response mechanisms. Significant shortages of medical equipment and dependence on external suppliers highlighted Europe's limited strategic autonomy. This crisis expanded the debates on Europe's strategic autonomy beyond traditional defence concerns, demonstrating the need for greater industrial, technological, and logistical independence.

NATO and European security were redefined with Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, even with the increase of European nations' defence budget and military support, the US was still the main supplier of weaponry and intelligence. This event revived NATO's vitality but also exposed Europe's military dependence on the US.

In 2022 the Strategic Compass was introduced by the European Union, with the purpose to strengthen unity and to make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider. In the meanwhile the EU expanded PESCO's projects and increased their funding of the EDF. These actions showed European determination in constructing a more autonomous defence strategy.

In conclusion, the debate over European strategic autonomy is the by-product of nearly a century of evolving relations, alternating security threats, and recurring questions about the reliability of U.S. commitments. As NATO enters a new era marked by renewed great power competition and uncertainty, Europe must decide how to balance the benefits of transatlantic cooperation with the growing need for independent capabilities. The historical trajectory shows that this dilemma is not new but today, it is more pressing than ever.

5. Timeline Of Key Events

April 3, 1948	Marshall Plan a US economic aid to rebuild Western Europe after WWII
4 April 1949	North Atlantic Treaty signed
3-4 December 1988	Saint-Malo Declaration a statement formalising the idea that the EU should be able to act autonomously on certain crises
1-16 August 2008	The Russo-Georgian War exposed European capability gaps
13 December 2007	Lisbon Treaty strengthened the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and added a mutual-defence ,institutionalising

	the EU's defence role
19 March 2011	NATO's intervention in Libya revealed European dependence on U.S. capabilities
18 March 2014	Russia's annexation of Crimea refocused NATO on collective defence
8 November 2016	Trump's election into the white house
16 January 2017	Trump's repeated "NATO is obsolete" comments and pressure on burden-sharing
2017-2018	PESCO & European Defence Fund was launched. The EU moves from policy to capability cooperation
2-4 August 2019	US and Russia's withdrawal from the INF Treaty increased uncertainty about long-term U.S. policy.
14 June 2021	Biden's administration reaffirms NATO.
30 August 2021	US withdrawal from Afghanistan
January 20th, 2025	Second Trump Administration
June 22nd, 2025	US arbitrary attacks to Iranian nuclear sites
June 24th-25th, 2025	NATO Summit in the World Forum in The Hague
October 1st - November 12th, 2025	US Government Shutdown

6. Current Situation

The shifts in the United States' external policy, priorities and 'America First' rhetoric, enforced by the second Trump Administration beginning in January 2025, have considerably altered the internal centre of gravity and the configuration of NATO. The purpose of collective defence and protection of mutual interests affirmed in the 1949 treaty is now being replaced by a transactional relationship among the US and the European Union. The guarantee of the former's support is gradually fading, new commitments are being proposed, while a now greater than ever load is transferred to the latter.⁸ Currently, Europe's military and defence capabilities depend on a US-powered NATO, a condition that, as the European Parliament reports, can no longer be considered applicable, due to the unpredictability of the Pentagon. As U.S. Vice President JD Vance stated, addressing European Leaders at this

⁸ Dowell, Stuart. "ANALYSIS: NATO's New Spending Pledge Signals an Alliance Built on US Priorities." *Tvpworld.com*, Telewizja Polska S.A, 24 June 2025, tvpworld.com/87443177/analysis-natos-new-spending-pledge-signals-alliance-built-on-us-priorities. Accessed 9 Nov. 2025.

year's Munich Security Conference, "Europe should not expect that the United States will guarantee its security forever."⁹

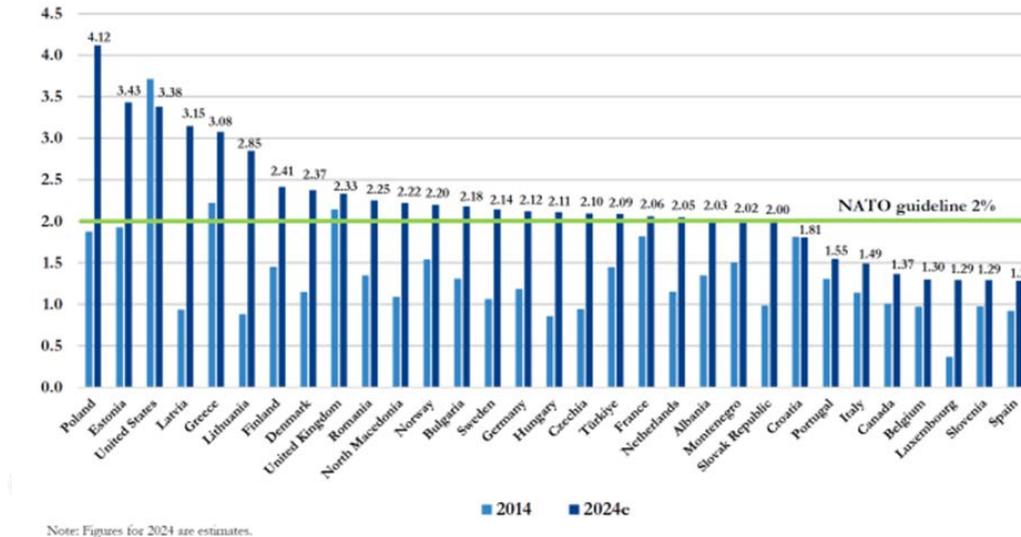
On June 22, 2025, President Trump ordered a unilateral strike on three Iranian nuclear strikes, a move decided upon independently, without consultation of the Members of the Alliance. The highly controversial move, condemned by nations such as Venezuela and Cuba, while Australia and Mexico urged for de-escalation, showed the European World that security decisions made in Washington solely depend on US policy and priorities, being unforeseeable in their nature.¹⁰



⁹ Clapp, Sebastian. *EU-NATO Cooperation*. European Parliament - European Parliamentary Research Service, 2025.

¹⁰ "NATO "Watching Closely" after US Attacks Iran." *Tvpworld.com*, Telewizja Polska S.A, 22 June 2025, tvpworld.com/87408538/nato-watching-closely-after-us-attacks-iran.

The controversial NATO Summit of 2025, held in The Hague, Netherlands, days after the attacks, uncovered the first tangible step to change, with a new pledge of allocating five per cent (5%) of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) towards NATO defence requirements and expenditure by 2035, which was formerly 2% of GDP, (2014-2024). The current proposed distribution entails a minimum of 3.5% for direct military needs and up to



1.5% namely for inter alia protection of infrastructure, cyber- and military mobility networks¹¹. The Summit therefore signified the commencement of a new era of NATO. Experts and media point out the unprecedentedly brief declaration that followed and the absence of any reference to International Law and the UN Charter, which are included as per usual. Therefore, concerns have been raised as to the diversion from collaborative defence and the validity of Article 5¹². Since reported data exhibit a trend of under-investment and previous failure to meet the goal of 2% from the majority of EU and NATO-allied states, this newly proposed commitment was naturally subject to different conceptions by European leaders. Spain negotiated exclusion, deeming the commitment ‘disproportionate and unnecessary’, while several Western Europe governments, argued for a phased approach until the next decade, due to high debts and public opposition to increased military spending. On the eastern flank of the alliance, however, Poland and the Baltic countries strive to preserve defence barriers against Russia, recognizing the urgent threat now posed, should any gaps be detected. They have committed to building national and regional capacity, via efforts to strengthen airspace security, invest in ammunition production, and raise defence spending, with Poland allocating the largest amount of GDP percentage to the cause, followed by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, in 2024, as evident below. Similarly, Greece and the Nordic countries are gradually returning to Cold War percentages of 3-4%.

The alertness is not unjustified; it reflects the current picture. Noting frequent incidents of Russian violation of Polish, Norwegian, Romanian and Baltic airspace and recent naval incursion of Danish straits, the intensity of grey zone campaigns by Russia in Europe has

¹¹ NATO. *Defence Expenditures and NATO’s 5% Commitment*. NATO, 27 June 2025

¹² “The Hague Summit Declaration.” North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 25 June 2025, www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/06/25/the-hague-summit-declaration .

been amplified and broadly felt¹³. So has been the uncertainty over common objectives, with US attention shifting to China and the Indo-Pacific, while its relations with the Kremlin and Kyiv are changing. As a matter of fact, the 40-day U.S. government shutdown delayed more than \$5 billion worth of weapons exports to NATO allies, with China and Russia benefiting from such conditions. Europe was left vulnerable to the latter's aggression, which is mainly aimed at dividing European leaders over fragmented political views, acquiring intelligence and inducing overt spending on defence¹⁴, with a view to exploiting weaknesses.

In light of these shifts, the European side of NATO is simultaneously faced with multiple challenges alongside security matters. Europe's goods and energy sector lacks diversification, suffering supply chain disruptions, depending on the market's volatility and political decisions. Simultaneously, transnational disparities and differing views on strategy and prioritization, along with domestic socioeconomic issues and public opposition, deteriorate the Union's position and hinder its ability to reach consensus. Although there has been significant progress along the diversification and automatization of Europe's energy and industrial sector, dependency cycles continue to exist. A characteristic example is that of LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas), adopted as a primary "flexible supply" source and primarily supplied by the US, limiting reliance on Russian pipeline gas. Thus, dependency is transferred, not eliminated, making it evident that the parameters influencing autonomy are numerous and of certain complexity.

Currently leadership structures within NATO are also vulnerable and volatile. The US has been the primary military and political leader of the alliance, but is evidently abdicating from that position in recent years. Europe is called upon not only to increase spending, but also to upscale prominence and assert leadership. The Trump administration has already set forth cost-cutting downgrades in military presence in Europe, nominating US three-star generals (instead of four-stars) for European defence positions, with most recent being the placement of a three-star to serve as the new commander of the US Air Forces in Europe and AIRCOM.¹⁵ This trend is expected to perpetuate, necessitating European ascension to air, land and maritime command structures, along with Canada, appointing four-star generals and Europeanizing NATO. Such a modification requires alignment within the continent, which according to US Secretary of Defence, Pete Hegseth, is key to deterring Russian aggression, constituting a 'lethal, capable and European-led NATO'.

The transition from US authority has commenced inevitably, but Europe appears divided and unprepared, with the question of whether US withdrawal from the foreground undermines Article 5 and the mandate of the Alliance, as a whole, remaining unanswered. NATO and Europe are reconstructing, reforming and rearming; the final response to new developments, looming threats and internal division remains to be seen.

7. Major Parties Involved

¹³ "NATO Faces Surging Russian Airspace Violations in 2025." Grand Pinnacle Tribune, 30 Sept. 2025, evrimagaci.org/gpt/nato-faces-surging-russian-airspace-violations-in-2025-505080

¹⁴ Loss, Rafael. "Flaunting Mischief: Three Aims of Russia's Airspace Incursions." ECFR, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 26 Sept. 2025, ecfr.eu/article/flaunting-mischief-three-aims-of-russias-airspace-incursions/

¹⁵ Solar, Karel. "Look What You Made Us Do: How to Realise a European-Led NATO." ECFR, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 30 Oct. 2025, ecfr.eu/article/look-what-you-made-us-do-how-to-realise-a-european-led-nato/

United States of America

The United States is the largest military contributor to NATO and the alliance's primary security preserver. Recent foreign policy reorientation, strong support for multilateral cooperation, calls for reduced burdens and increased European defence spending, along with renewed interest in the Indo-Pacific region have sparked uncertainty among allies. U.S. unpredictability raises questions over European security, burden-sharing, defence, commercial and industrial policy, and the long-term reliability of Washington's commitments.

European Union

Although not all EU countries are NATO members, the EU plays a pivotal role in the continent's security. Via initiatives such as PESCO and the European Defence Fund, Europe has been strengthening defence capabilities, in the pursuit of strategic autonomy. However, internal divisions among member states regarding strategic autonomy's scope and its relationship to NATO complicate significant progress.

NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization fosters US-European defence cooperation. The commitment to collective safeguarding, with particular emphasis on Article 5, is founded upon mutual trust and political cohesion. NATO must now regulate diverging US and European interests, adapt to emerging security threats, and ensure interoperability amid EU-specific defence projects.

Germany

Germany maintains a key role to balancing NATO responsibilities with support for EU defence integration, often serving as a mediator between U.S. concerns and EU ambitions for autonomy. Historically cautious with military engagement, Germany faces pressure to upscale defence spending and undertake a more assertive security role in Europe.

France

France strongly advocates for strategic autonomy, supporting the development of independent European defence structures to reduce reliance on unpredictable U.S. policy shifts. Possessing one of Europe's most capable militaries, France also plays a major leadership role in military operations, often promoting a sovereign European defence posture even if it causes friction within NATO.

United Kingdom

The UK's security and military posture renders it a critical NATO contributor. Although no longer an EU member, it maintains deep defence ties with European allies. The UK generally maintains skepticism towards EU-led defence that could duplicate NATO structures but supports greater European capabilities as long as they reinforce the Alliance's internal alignment and shared interests.

Central/Eastern Europe - Baltic States

As the frontline against Eastern threats and Russia, with a historical background of security vulnerabilities, these countries place strong emphasis on the U.S. security guarantee and NATO's collective defence mechanisms. They often perceive EU strategic autonomy

initiatives as detrimental to U.S. involvement, instead promoting stronger NATO-supported deterrence measures and increased U.S. military presence.

Mediterranean (Italy and Spain)

The countries support NATO-EU complementarity, especially as a barrier to region-specific issues, such as threats from North Africa and the Sahel, migration, instability in Libya and terrorism.

Canada

Canada supports strong transatlantic ties and burden-sharing, also acting as a moderator to U.S. unpredictability and European concerns. Canada's role in NATO missions, Arctic security debates, and multilateral diplomacy makes it an important party in transatlantic defence and negotiations.

Partners (South Korea and Japan)

Two of the key NATO partners in the Indo-Pacific, viewing NATO as a collaborator to cyber- defence and security, deterrent against China and North Korea, and upholder of security in Asia. Signs of U.S. unpredictability and retrenchment are considered detrimental, while the countries encourage stronger European military engagement in the Indo-Pacific, seeing EU autonomy as useful if it enhances and does not interfere with transatlantic cooperation.

8. Blocs Expected

A provisional overview of the expected blocs:

Bloc 1	Bloc 2
Countries in favour of enhanced European autonomy and security via EU initiatives and strategic reforms, as well as minimum dependence on the US.	Countries prioritizing NATO unity, US security guarantees, increased spending and reinforcing Article 5, over independent defence capabilities (mainly frontline nations of the alliance).

9. Previous Attempts To Solve The Issue

In the past 76 years, European nations have tried to better their defence capabilities, reduce dependence on the United States, and build a more autonomous security defence structure. Even though some of these actions made slight progress, none of them were able to grant Europe its independence from the US' military power.

- The Western Union Defence Organisation (WUDO) – 1948

Its purpose was to create an European collective defence system independent from the US' military, this achieved to coordinate security cooperation between member nations, it showed

Europe's desire of defence autonomy, the parties involved were the UK, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, Netherlands it was limited by sufficient military capability and political unity

- European Defence Community (EDC) – 1950–1954

This established a fully integrated European army under supranational command. It proposed one of the most ambitious models of European autonomy ever designed. However it never developed any strong military capabilities.

- Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) – 1999

It enabled the EU to conduct peacekeeping, crisis management, and humanitarian operations. It launched missions in Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East, helping Europe to act without NATO in smaller scale operations.

- European Defence Agency (EDA) – 2004

This coordinated defence planning and developed shared capabilities. It created multinational projects and improved cooperation on research, while promoting long-term industrial alignment. It was underfunded and had a limited strategic effect.

- Lisbon Treaty & Article 42.7 – 2009

It introduced a formal EU mutual defence clause and strengthened EU security. This reinforced political solidarity among EU members. Its implementation was unclear.

- European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) – 2016

It defined Europe's long term security priorities, including their need for strategic autonomy. This re-established autonomy as a policy goal, while influencing future initiatives like PESCO and the Strategic Compass. But it was Non-binding; lacked clear deadlines and capability requirements.

- Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) – 2017

It bounded member EU states to legally committed defence cooperation. This increased joint investment in advanced technologies while reducing European fragmentation in defence industries. Its funding was insufficient compared to the US'.

- Strategic Compass – 2022

It established a military roadmap for 2030. This cleared deadlines and increased coordination. It was the strongest EU attempt to address capability gaps. But it faced delays, funding limits, and political divergences.

- NATO Burden-Sharing Reforms & Increased Spending (2022–2025)

It encouraged European states to meet or exceed the 2% GDP defence target. This was able to achieve the majority of NATO states now reaching 2% or higher.

10. Possible Solutions

1. Forming stronger military alliances between NATO's member states

Europe can strengthen its defensive strategies while still being included in NATO. This includes:

- a) Greater economical contribution by every European member state to defensive systems.
- b) Unity among equipment and standardization of military technologies.
- c) Expanding NATO's operational command system to reduce reliability to the U.S
- d) More EU member states contributing to rapid deployment forces.

2. Forming a permanent Deployment Force

The E.U could create a secure deployment force –without replacing NATO- in order to increase its autonomy and be ready to defend itself in case of an emergency.

Possible steps:

- a) Gathering 6.000-20.000 armed troops from every member to form an operative team.
- b) Permanent planning headquarters.
- c) Mutual funding systems.

3. Regular, formal and diplomatic discussion between the U.S and the E.U

To handle uncertainty:

- a) Frequent U.S-E.U strategic dialogues about safety and defence.
- b) Following faithfully every existing protocol and engaging in serious and formal discussions before making major foreign policy decisions.
- c) Transparency mechanisms for troop deployments and withdrawals.

4. Enhancing EU–NATO Cooperation Frameworks

Increase collaboration in fields that both unions can work as whole:

- a) Task forces for cyber defence and hybrid warfare.
- b) Shared databases for intelligence.
- c) Exercises that are coordinated to ensure interoperability.
- d) Collaborative funding for emerging technologies. (AI, quantum, drones).

5. Mentioning E.U's relations

Broadening Security Ties

- a) Strengthening defence collaboration with Canada, the UK, and Norway.
- b) Strategic Defence Dialogues with Japan/South Korea/Australia

c) the EU's defence diplomacy outreach in the Indo-Pacific and Africa

6. Developing a European Defence Industrial base

The E.U becoming more self-reliant when it comes to military forces:

- a) Purchases of equipment and munitions produced in Europe.
- b) Decreasing reliance upon U.S. technology and weapons systems.
- c) Industry cooperation across borders.

7. Forming a European strategic resilience fund

Create a new European fund dedicated to:

- a) Improvements to cybersecurity.
- b) Safeguarding infrastructure (energy, communications, transport).
- c) Enhancements in military mobility.
- d) Abilities to counter hybrid warfare.

8. Making widely understood the potential plan for European autonomy

Informing with clarity what autonomy means:

- a) Autonomy with NATO (complementary).
- b) Autonomy within NATO (fortifying Europe's foundation)
- c) Autonomy beyond NATO (long-term independence).

9. Crisis Response Coordination Mechanism

Set up teams from both the EU and NATO to deal with crises. These teams should:

- a) Defend potential threats united.
- b) Creating a hierarchy based on each member's abilities .
- c) Make sure there are no repeated tasks or missed missions

10. Public Communication & Counter-Disinformation Strategies

Help civil society deal with Russian or Chinese hybrid threats.

These can include:

- a) NATO and EU together running communication centres.
- b) teams which will be held responsible for fact-checking.



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