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Hearing on “NATO Summit 2025: An Assessment of Transatlantic Security Cooperation”

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Introduction

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to address you today on a critical matter of US national security and foreign policy. I should note that the views expressed in this testimony do not reflect those of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) or its staff and fellows.

The upcoming NATO Summit in The Hague next week convenes at a pivotal moment, as the transatlantic community confronts an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally reshaped global security, prompting a wake-up call among European allies that they will need to take far greater responsibility for their defense. The growing cooperation between Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea is also reshaping the geopolitical order, fueling Russia's war economy and warranting a new vision of European security.

Therefore, this Summit not only falls at a pivotal moment, but also represents a powerful opportunity for the United States to engage with allies as they commit to massive new defense spending levels. Because as was true at NATO's founding and is still today, the alliance remains central to the vital US national security interest of defending the US homeland.

It is important to view the historical context to understand how significant these new European defense spending targets are — which are bound to garner press attention. Prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, only seven European allies met the 2% GDP

defense spending target. Now, 23 of 32 NATO allies are expected to meet or exceed this target by 2024.¹

At this historic Summit, NATO's European allies are poised to commit to an even higher threshold of GDP on defense. This new commitment signifies a profound transformation, positioning Europe as an example for other partners — a point made by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth in his remarks to Indo-Pacific allies in Singapore last month.² Indeed, the Trump Administration deserves a great deal of credit for pushing European allies to step up in such a significant way on defense, something that until now, they were not able or willing to do.

The Summit thus also provides an important opportunity for Allies to make significant progress not just on spending but capability development and investment. Interoperability will be key for NATO strength and cohesion. US leadership, both from the Executive Branch and from Members of Congress, will be instrumental in ensuring that financial commitments translate into concrete defense capabilities that will ultimately benefit global US national security interests and send a strong message to adversaries, strengthening deterrence.

Therefore, my testimony today focuses on three interconnected points vital to US national security and the collective interests of the Alliance. These imperatives collectively underpin transatlantic unity amid great-power competition and Russia's revisionist ambitions.

- 1. Europe is stepping up, but US leadership and commitment — in principle, people, and resources — remain critical for NATO's continued success as the strongest military alliance in history, ensuring its central role in defense of the US homeland.**
- 2. Russia is a far greater threat to NATO now than it was at beginning of the full scale invasion.**
- 3. Commitment to NATO's open-door policy by all allies is critical for alliance credibility, resilience, and capability improvement.**

¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm

² <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4202494/remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-the-2025-shangri-la-dialogue-in/>

1. US Leadership in NATO: Critical to the Alliance’s Past, Present, And Future

NATO is the most successful military alliance in history, with its core mission of collective defense, enshrined in Article 5, having deterred aggression and ensured stability for over seven decades. Facing renewed great-power competition, particularly from a revisionist Russia, NATO has rediscovered its core purpose: to defend and deter in the European theater. The Alliance provides the indispensable framework for coordinating defense, sharing intelligence, and projecting a unified front.

NATO serves vital US national security interests. The United States led NATO's formation in 1949 to prevent another devastating European war, contain the Soviet Union, and establish a core pillar of the US-led global order. As large-scale conflict again rages in Europe, these founding principles remain urgent and relevant in the present day. America’s consistent commitment to NATO, coupled with strong US leadership, sends a clear signal to Russia as well as others across the globe who would question US resolve and security commitments that America always stands with its friends and allies and delivers in moments of crisis. In addition, the US has used its presence in Europe for decades to forward project globally. It is this capability, enshrined in NATO, that ultimately protects the US homeland from global threats.

It is, of course, no secret that there has been a long-standing imbalance in burden sharing within NATO. The US is by far the largest contributor to NATO: providing for 60% of NATO’s rapid reaction capacity and contributing the highest proportion (16% or approximately \$650 million) of the cost share for NATO’s common funding.³ Historically, overall US spending on defense has far exceeded the 2% threshold that Allies agreed on almost 20 years ago and formalized at the 2014 Wales Summit. On average, the US spent 3.52% of GDP in defense between 2014 and 2024 but spending has been decreasing in recent years to 3.38% in 2024. The US also provides the nuclear umbrella to NATO allies via the nuclear burden sharing framework enshrined within NATO.

In addition to these operational and capability contributions, as of this year, the US had approximately 84,000 troops stationed across Europe under the US European Command (EUCOM) as well as a network of US bases — 31 persistent bases and 18 other military sites to which the Department of Defense (DoD) has access in Europe, encompassing air bases, naval stations, army garrisons, missile defense systems, and surveillance hubs.⁴ The base network and force posture serve as “the first line of defense of our homeland,” according to General Christopher Cavoli’s testimony before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) in April, serving as a core foundation for NATO operations, regional deterrence, and global US power projection.⁵

The US has consistently utilized our European bases to carry out operations across the globe in various conflict zones in the Middle East, Africa, and the Arctic, which has

³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm

⁴ <https://cepa.org/article/going-going-the-us-base-network-in-europe/>;
<https://sfp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R48123.pdf>

⁵ https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025_useucom_posture_statement_-_hasc.pdf

allowed the US military to become the only truly global military force in the world and to maintain that position for decades.

There are many examples in how US bases in Europe serves not just European security but US projection and national security. Below are four key examples that have supported US national security interests:⁶

1. Aviano Air Base (Italy)

- a. Aviano Air Base houses the 31st Fighter Wing, the only US fighter wing south of the Alps, and is a key NATO air power hub in southern Europe supporting US air combat missions and contingency missions across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.⁷ Aviano has supported major US operations, including Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Odyssey Dawn, the US contribution to the 2011 NATO-led intervention in Libya.⁸

2. Incirlik Air Base (Turkey)

- a. Incirlik Air Base is critical for US military operations, particularly in the Middle East, with aviation facilities and rotational aerial refueling capabilities. It has played a crucial role in US and coalition military campaigns, serving as the launch point for combat missions over Northern Iraq during the First Gulf War and later supporting US-led operations in Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom.⁹ It has also been heavily used in counterterrorism missions, including operations against ISIS, and enables a rapid US military response in the region.¹⁰

3. Mihael Kogălniceanu Air Base (Romania)

- a. Mihael Kogălniceanu Air Base is a major and fast-growing hub for US and NATO forces, supporting deployments to the Black Sea, Middle East, and Africa. It has been a staging area for US operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹¹

4. Naval Station Rota (Spain)

- a. Naval Station Rota is a major logistics hub for US and NATO forces, providing cargo, fuel, and support to naval vessels and military units transiting the region. It hosts four US destroyers equipped with Aegis

⁶ Text below is drawn from recent CEPA research: <https://cepa.org/article/going-going-the-us-base-network-in-europe/>

⁷ <https://www.aviano.af.mil/Units/31st-Fighter-Wing/>

⁸ <https://www.aviano.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/280335/31st-fighter-wing/>

⁹ <https://www.dw.com/en/what-is-turkeys-incirlik-air-base/a-38869196>

¹⁰ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-troops-turkish-air-base-highest-force-protection/story?id=40634670>

¹¹ <https://avim.org.tr/UEPRapor/EXPANDING-NATO-S-FOOTPRINT-THE-NEW-MIHAIL-KOG%C4%82LNICEANU-BASE-IN-ROMANIA-24-06-2024>

Baseline 9 Ballistic Missile Defense systems, forming a key component of EUCOM's regional missile defense strategies.¹²

5. Royal Air Force (RAF) Lakenheath and Mildenhall (United Kingdom)

- a. RAF Lakenheath is a significant US Air Force base in the UK and home to the 48th Fighter Wing, tasked with providing combat airpower worldwide.¹³ It has played a key role in combat operations in the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and was a launchpad for the 1986 bombing of Libya.¹⁴
- b. RAF Mildenhall, together with its sister base at Lakenheath, hosts the largest United States Air Force presence in the United Kingdom.¹⁵ It is home to the 100th Air Refueling Wing, the only permanent US air refueling wing in the European theater.¹⁶ From this hub, US forces conduct missions across Europe, the Arctic, Africa, and the Black Sea. Because of its strategic location and rapid deployment capabilities, the base has contributed to major campaigns, including the Kosovo War, the War in Afghanistan, and the Iraq War.

Because the US plays such a vital role in NATO from a capability and contribution perspective, its political leadership of the alliance is that much more important. The US perspective impacts NATO policy, European defense spending, day to day decisions of various NATO bodies and the key strategic decisions reached at the North Atlantic Council (NAC). The Summit will provide an opportunity to influence these details.

The long-standing tradition of an American Supreme Allied Commander of Europe (SACEUR) is a cornerstone of NATO's command structure, reflecting the foundational role of the United States in the Alliance's collective defense, particularly its nuclear deterrent and substantial military contributions. The United States possesses the largest and most robust nuclear arsenal within NATO, which serves as the ultimate guarantee of the Alliance's security through "extended deterrence." Having an American SACEUR ensures a direct and seamless link between NATO's conventional defense plans and the US nuclear umbrella, enhancing the credibility of the overall while retaining US control of nuclear forces.¹⁷

In terms of global security and perceptions, US adversaries, most notably Russia, see US views and engagement with NATO as a bellwether for assessing the pull of US global leadership and Europe's vulnerability. There is no question that the US commitment to Article 5 is at the core of NATO's effective defense and credible

¹² <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48123>

¹³ <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/in-depth-overview/raf-lakenheath>

¹⁴ <https://www.afhistory.af.mil/FAQs/Fact-Sheets/Article/458950/1986-operation-el-dorado-canyon/>

¹⁵ <https://55wa.org/raf-mildenhall/>

¹⁶ <https://www.mildenhall.af.mil/About-Us/FOIA/>

¹⁷ <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/why-america-should-keep-nato-command-chair-rebeccah-heinrichs>

deterrence. Even more so than US direct contributions to NATO and European security, it is this political commitment that has kept the peace in NATO's European domain.

2. European Allies Are Stepping Up, But Deep Vulnerabilities Remain

There is broad recognition among NATO allies that the imbalance in burden sharing must be rectified. In a speech last week, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte reiterated the long-standing call for European allies to "pull their weight," asserting that "America has carried too much of the burden for too long."¹⁸ As Secretary General Rutte said, NATO has to become a **“stronger, fairer and more lethal Alliance” — an objective shared by all Allies.**

Indeed, since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, European NATO member states have significantly increased their defense budgets as a whole. Europe's defense budgets have risen from €218 billion in 2021 to €326 billion in 2024, with a projected further increase of at least €100 billion by 2027.¹⁹ By 2024, 23 of NATO's 32 members were expected to meet or had met the 2% GDP spending benchmark.²⁰ Poland has significantly escalated its spending to 4.12% of GDP in 2024 (plans to reach 4.7% in 2025), making it NATO's top defense spender by GDP.²¹ Germany reached 2.12% of GDP in 2024 and approved a €500 billion fund for defense in 2025.²² France raised spending to 2.06% of GDP in 2024, intending to reach 3.5%.²³ Countries like Italy and Spain have vowed to reach 2% in 2025, while Sweden and the Netherlands aim for 5%.²⁴

This rapid increase in defense spending and the push for higher GDP targets at the Hague Summit (5% with 3.5% for core defense) indicate a fundamental shift in Europe's strategic posture and thinking. If European allies meet the 3.5% target in the next years, they will still be spending less than the US on defense in absolute terms but more than the US in proportional terms (as a percentage of GDP). To be sure, this shift in European NATO Allies' commitment is long overdue, and most European states (with the exception of the frontline states of the Eastern Flank) are far from a war footing, which would require even higher expenditures and far more rapid armed force preparedness as well as defense industrial production.

2.2. Europe Stepping Up on Spending

Given overlap between EU and NATO member states – 23 of 32 NATO member states are also EU members – it is important to highlight the growing EU investment and

¹⁸ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235867.htm

¹⁹ <https://epthinktank.eu/2025/05/07/eu-member-states-defence-budgets/>

²⁰ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm

²¹

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2025/772846/EPRS_ATA\(2025\)772846_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2025/772846/EPRS_ATA(2025)772846_EN.pdf)

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

strategic shift on defense. In fact, the EU is rapidly becoming a defense and security actor in its own right.

Europe having extra defense production capacity is a net positive for the US, especially as our own defense industrial base is already stretched and struggling to deliver on US requirements, let alone foreign partner requirements. Europe producing more of the capabilities it needs will, in the long run, make it more self-sufficient. Europeans will also still seek to buy US equipment because their militaries will require the best and most effective systems, which are made by the US. Europe may be able to scale up on low-end items like munitions, but it will take them 5-10 years to do so. In the foreseeable future, Europe will still have to rely on US industry for high-end exquisite systems and strategic enablers (ISR, air/sealift, refueling, hyperscaler technology, etc.). The key for European defense companies will be to identify complementary capabilities, opportunities for co-production and joint ventures. The key for US defense industry resilience will be in the US ability to make it easier for industry to sell product and engage in co-production.

Building on its robust direct military support for Ukraine, the EU is also stepping up its direct investment in Ukraine's defense industry, reflecting its ambition to integrate it into the EU's defense industrial base. The ReArm Europe Plan, part of this effort, offers significant fiscal leeway, mobilizing up to EUR 800 billion, with EUR 650 billion potentially unleashed by activating the National escape clause under the Stability and Growth Pact. Separately, SAFE Regulation loans specifically allocate up to EUR 150 billion to enable joint procurement and contracts directly with Ukrainian industry.

Moreover, while the increased financial commitment deserves recognition, it also exposes a critical challenge: translating budgets into capabilities. Russia's war in Ukraine has exposed shortcomings in Europe's defense industrial base's ability to meet surging demand for "quality and quantity in a short timeframe."²⁵ For Europe, the invasion has made it painfully obvious that Europe will need significant time to rebuild, or in many cases build afresh, a defense industrial capacity.

2.3. Europe's Vulnerabilities

A true "wartime mindset" requires industrial mobilization and strategic coordination, not just budget allocation. The need for "long-term contracts to stabilize and ensure the predictability of supplies" and addressing "bureaucratic hurdles" highlights a systemic bottleneck.²⁶ If production cannot keep pace or delays occur, increased spending targets will fail. A more integrated, alliance-wide industrial strategy, potentially including joint procurement, is necessary to overcome fragmentation and ensure interoperability and scale, especially considering Russia's capacity to fully shift its economy to a "war footing."

One area that could have significant impact — and is particularly relevant to this committee — is that of ongoing defense sales reform, to include alignment of export control policy with national security priorities and interests. As the Trump

²⁵ <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2025/06/12/natos-path-to-peace-and-security-in-an-unstable-world/index.html>

²⁶ Ibid.

Administration's April 9th Executive Order on Foreign Military Sales noted, export controls should now "focus protections solely on our most sensitive and sophisticated technologies," allowing the vast majority of controlled items to be shared with allies whether through sales or joint ventures such as co-development and co-production.²⁷

Europe is also very exposed to Russian military and nonconventional threats (more on Russia's military capabilities in the following section). For example, US-led and NATO exercises are taking place at a "significantly increased tempo and scale," which are vital for readiness, interoperability, and alliance cohesion. The increased US military footprint in Poland, with additional troops, and NATO's forward presence in the Baltic states (around 12,000 troops as of June 2025) demonstrates Article 5 commitment to deter Russian aggression.²⁸

However, roughly 12,000 troops in the Baltics are explicitly "insufficient to counter a Russian land offensive."²⁹ The Nordic Response exercise in March 2024 exposed gaps in rapid reinforcement capabilities, with only 40% of planned logistics support arriving within 72 hours.³⁰ This disparity between deterrence intent and actual reinforcement capacity reveals a critical vulnerability given Russia's military reconstitution. Effective deterrence requires vastly improved military mobility, pre-positioning of supplies, and resilient logistics chains to withstand hybrid and conventional attacks.

De facto, sudden US withdrawal of forces from NATO's Eastern Flank would be an invitation to Vladimir Putin as it would leave the European frontline exposed without a reinforcement force to fill the gap. The reason for this is simple: it takes planning and time to stand up an army, and while Europe is taking up the challenge, there is no magic wand that would allow European allies to produce a highly competent force that can deploy rapidly across the continent.

General Cavoli, in his April 2025 testimony, provided the most pointed and stark assessment of several key vulnerabilities within the European defense landscape, underscoring areas where significant improvements are needed to counter the evolving Russian threat.³¹ It is worth detailing them here as these vulnerabilities collectively highlight a gap between the desired deterrence posture and current capabilities:

- **Insufficient Forces on Borders with Russia:** Cavoli explicitly stated that the current troop levels on NATO's borders with Russia, particularly in the Baltic states (e.g., around 12,000 troops as of June 2025), are "**insufficient to counter a Russian land offensive.**" This suggests a critical numerical and readiness deficit against a potentially large-scale conventional attack.
- **Reliance on US for Sea Control:** European allies "**cannot marshal the forces necessary to gain sea control without US support.**" This points to a

²⁷ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/reforming-foreign-defense-sales-to-improve-speed-and-accountability/>

²⁸ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

²⁹ <https://armedservices.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=5030>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025_useucom_posture_statement_-_hasc.pdf

significant dependency on American naval power for critical maritime operations, which could be a strategic vulnerability if US resources are strained or redirected.

- **Vulnerability to Cyberattacks on Critical Infrastructure:** Cavoli warned that Europe is "**highly vulnerable to cyberattacks on military-critical infrastructure.**" This extends beyond traditional military hardware to the digital backbone supporting defense, logistics, and even civilian life, making it a prime target for Russia's extensive "grey zone" and non-kinetic warfare tactics.
- **Need for Unmanned Systems Buildup:** The testimony highlighted Europe's urgent need to "**undertake a massive buildup of unmanned vehicles.**" This implies a current deficiency in drone capabilities and other autonomous systems, which have proven critical in modern conflicts like the one in Ukraine.
- **Logistics and Reinforcement Gaps:** Related to troop numbers, exercises like "Nordic Response" in March 2024 exposed "gaps in rapid reinforcement capabilities," with only 40% of planned logistics support arriving within 72 hours. This suggests that even if forces are available, the ability to move them quickly and sustain them in a conflict zone remains a challenge.
- **Defense Industrial Capacity Limitations:** While European defense budgets have increased, Cavoli emphasized that the European defense industrial base faces challenges in meeting the surging demand for military hardware in both "quality and quantity in a short timeframe." This highlights bottlenecks in production, the need for long-term contracts, and addressing "bureaucratic hurdles" to ramp up output, especially when Russia has fully shifted its economy to a "war footing."

In sum, while Europe is making progress in defense spending, the continent still faces significant material, logistical, and **readiness challenges that could impede its ability to independently deter or defend against a fully mobilized Russian threat without substantial and sustained US support.**

3. The Growing Russian Threat To NATO

Russia today *is* the threat we feared it was at the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. After suffering initial strategic and tactical losses, Russia's military capability has undergone a significant transformation, marked by accelerated reconstitution and adaptation. The new Russian military is emerging larger, more industrially mobilized, and increasingly adaptive.

This is being driven by the switch to a full war economy, which now allows Russia to produce the amount of ammunition in three months than all of NATO can produce in a year.³² While NATO states struggle to fully reach 2% spending on defense, Russia's military expenditure reached an estimated \$149 billion in 2024, representing 7.1% of Russia's GDP and accounting for almost 20% of all Russian government spending.³³

³² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235867.htm

³³ <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges>

This marks a 38% increase from 2023 and a doubling of spending since 2015. It is clear that Russia is on a long-term path of militarization that is designed to not just fight a war with Ukraine but to eventually confront NATO. SG Rutte estimated that Russia "could be ready to use military force against NATO within five years."³⁴

While early stages of the invasion saw considerable losses of personnel and equipment, the Russian army is now "larger than it was at the beginning of the war—despite suffering an estimated 790,000 casualties."³⁵ This reconstitution is occurring at a rate "faster than most analysts had anticipated," defying initial Western expectations of long-term degradation.³⁶

As of early 2025, Russia's armed forces are estimated to number approximately **1,134,000 troops**, an increase of 234,000 compared to the pre-war estimate of 900,000.³⁷ Its Ground Forces alone are estimated at 550,000, while the Aerospace Forces maintain around 1,224 operational aircraft. Notably, the Russian Navy's personnel strength has seen a decline from 150,000 in 2021 to 119,000 in 2025, reflecting losses primarily in the Black Sea Fleet and naval infantry imposed by Ukraine's remarkable success.

Russia is rapidly expanding its industrial output. Specific figures indicate projections for **1,500 tanks, 3,000 armored vehicles, and 200 Iskander ballistic and cruise missiles to be rolled out in 2025 alone.**³⁸ Furthermore, Russia is anticipated to produce **250,000 artillery shells per month**, aiming for a stockpile three times greater than the United States and Europe combined.³⁹ This sustained output is achieved through expanding existing facilities, opening new ones, and converting commercial production lines for military purposes. This process is actively leveraging support from partners like China, North Korea, and Iran, with Russia having a "critical dependency on Chinese components to produce tactical and long-range drones."⁴⁰

3.1. Force Generation and Manpower

Russia's ability to replenish its ranks is a testament to aggressive and varied recruitment efforts. The Kremlin has intensified its recruitment drives, employing tactics such as dynamic pricing for enlistment bonuses, luring individuals via online job platforms under false pretenses, recruiting foreigners, offering compensation for referrals, and forming all-female detachments. They are also contracting out Russian patriotic centers to meet

³⁴ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235867.htm

³⁵ https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/general_cavoli_opening_statements.pdf

³⁶ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/immediate-steps-that-europe-can-take-to-enhance-its-role-in-nato-defense/>

³⁷ https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/koizumi_02.html

³⁸ https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025_useucom_posture_statement_-_hasc.pdf

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-force-generation-and-technological-adaptations-update-june-11-2025>

recruitment quotas and offering military service contracts to university students facing deferment or poor academic performance.⁴¹

Additionally, Russia is coercing Ukrainian men in occupied territories into signing military service contracts, with reports of over 55,000 men recruited from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.⁴² The Kremlin continues to expand military-patriotic education initiatives for youth, including Ukrainian children, and is integrating veterans into positions of power to elevate their status and encourage future military service.⁴³

3.2. Battlefield Adaptation and Technological Advancements

The Russian military has demonstrated a notable capacity to learn and adapt from the conflict. This includes rapid cycles of adaptation and the development of new capabilities.

Examples include the deployment of V2U strike unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that can autonomously search and select targets using AI, adapting to Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW) effectiveness by using only one GPS module.⁴⁴ Russian forces are incorporating Chinese hardware, including electronics, navigation, optical, and telemetry systems, and using 50-kilometer-long fiber-optic coils to enable longer drone ranges.⁴⁵ They are also reportedly experimenting with jet-powered Dan-M drones for combat, initially designed as training targets.⁴⁶

New anti-drone measures are continuously being tested and deployed, such as combat lasers (e.g., Chinese-made Silent Hunter), fiber-optic cable cutters, and advanced EW adaptations like the Mgl-Sarmat dome complex.⁴⁷ Footage has shown Russian forces testing FPV drones equipped with shotguns to shoot down Ukrainian drones. Unmanned Ground Systems (UGVs) are being used for logistics, capable of transporting significant supplies and freeing up personnel.⁴⁸

Efforts also include centralizing control over drone and AI development companies and restricting foreign cloud servers to enhance self-sufficiency.⁴⁹ Russia is also belatedly constructing hangars and other defensive infrastructure at airfields to protect aircraft

⁴¹ Summary of data from The Institute for Study of War's "Russian Force Generation and Technological Adaptations Update" series.

⁴² <https://kyivindependent.com/intelligence-russia-has-forcibly-mobilized-up-to-60-000-men-in-occupied-territories/>

⁴³ <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/8c54abb4-3c6d-4b5c-be05-727f612afccc> ; <https://jamestown.org/program/veterans-of-war-against-ukraine-become-new-russian-elite/>

⁴⁴ <https://understandingwar.org/background/russian-force-generation-and-technological-adaptations-update-june-11-2025>

⁴⁵ <https://understandingwar.org/background/russian-force-generation-and-technological-adaptations-update-june-11-2025>

⁴⁶ <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/russian-force-generation-and-technological-adaptations-update-june-6-2025>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

from Ukrainian drones. While Russia is also moving to modernize its strategic nuclear arsenal by replacing older Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and phasing out older nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) in favor of newer models, the development of next-generation strategic bombers (PAK-DA) has been slow.⁵⁰

4. Russia's Shadow War Against NATO In Europe

In addition to the clear and imminent threat posed by Russia in the conventional domain, Russia's military doctrine centers on the notion of "full spectrum" warfare, which strategically incorporates nonconventional or hybrid capabilities. While many of these types of operations are not new — the Soviet Union was infamous for using propaganda and other types of active measures to undermine the United States globally — the rapid acceleration and expansion of these operations since 2022 is difficult to overestimate. They amount to a full out systematic "shadow war" against NATO's European domain.

Russia's shadow operations — ranging from sabotage and assassinations to cyberattacks and disinformation — reflect doctrine of perpetual war. This whole-of-system model treats dissent, defection, and Western resistance as existential threats to the regime, legitimizing continuous sub-threshold conflict. NATO is facing more than a diffuse and haphazard series of attacks, what Russia is executing is covert activity aimed at the physical destruction and/or severe disruption of human life, infrastructure, and economic activity outside of a recognized warzone. Russia's shadow war operations claim lives and go beyond the "active measures" that characterized much of the Soviet Union's approach to the West, and even the "hybrid warfare" that has occupied so much Western thinking since the mid-2010s.

NATO does not have the tools and doctrine to defend and deter against this type of renewed Russian aggression. This is primarily because Russian operatives target weak points in European security — from logistics and critical infrastructure to political polarization — making use of **deniable proxies, local recruits, and hybrid methods** to undermine European unity and willpower without triggering formal NATO thresholds.

(See Appendix Table 2 for a list of recent Russian operations in Europe.)

Russia's shadow war is an extension of its conventional war in Ukraine. It is meant to weaken the NATO Alliance and damage NATO's ability to carry out appropriate defense and deterrence operations. Responding to these attacks and building resilience to them should be part of any NATO strategy when it comes to defense investment.

NATO's defense ministers have already endorsed a refresh of their counter-hybrid strategy which will likely include new measures to protect critical infrastructure and respond to Russia's shadow fleet of tankers in the Baltic Sea.⁵¹ It would be in the U.S. interest to encourage coordinated responses at the NATO level while pushing for a more forward leaning approach to push back against Russia's shadow war.

5. NATO's Open Door Policy is a Strategic Asset for the Alliance

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ <https://cepa.org/programs/democratic-resilience/countering-russias-shadow-war/>

NATO's open door policy has been the bedrock of NATO's success and credibility over the decades. It is crucial for solidifying continent-wide security, extending stability, and deterring future Russian aggression. Integrating new members also removes vulnerabilities and denies adversaries strategic advantages by eliminating "grey zones."

Recent Successful Integrations: Finland and Sweden

Finland and Sweden's recent NATO accessions are powerful examples of the open door policy's strategic impact. Both abandoned long-standing neutrality after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Public support for NATO membership shifted dramatically (over 60% in Sweden, 80% in Finland). Thanks to both joining NATO, the alliance is better equipped, better prepared, more lethal and far more effective.

In particular, the integration of Sweden and Finland significantly contributes to NATO's capabilities and strategic depth:

- **Force Contribution:** Collectively add almost 300,000 active and reserve troops. Finland alone can muster over 900,000 personnel.
- **Geographic Advantage:** Transform the Baltic Sea into a "NATO internal sea," increasing naval superiority. Finland doubles NATO's land border with Russia (to 1,584 miles).
- **Strategic Depth and Logistics:** Sweden provides strategic depth in Scandinavia, serving as a crucial logistical hub for NATO reinforcements to the Baltics and Finnish-Norwegian border. This enhances information sharing in maritime/air domains and focuses on Arctic security.
- **Expertise and Resilience:** Both bring invaluable expertise in civil defense, cold weather operations, and understanding the Russian threat. Sweden's "Total Defence" model offers insights into societal resilience.
- **Defense Industrial Contribution:** Sweden has a strong defense industry (Gripen jets, Archer artillery, CV-90s, submarines). Finland's sophisticated defense sector can help meet Europe's production shortfalls.
- **Integration Mechanisms:** Both signed Defense Cooperation Agreements (DCAs) with the US, allowing US force/equipment stationing in the Arctic. Finland's request for an FLF formation and Multi Corps Land Component Command was approved, with Sweden leading the Finnish FLF.

Finland and Sweden's detailed contributions (geographic control, extended border security, industrial capacity, expertise, logistics) demonstrate NATO expansion dynamically alters the strategic landscape. Russia's aggression, intended to deter expansion, instead triggered it, leading to a stronger Alliance. The open door policy acts as a deterrent by expanding security and denying Russia a "sphere of influence." It's a strategic force multiplier, strengthening collective defense. This success provides a powerful precedent for Ukraine's future integration into NATO.

6. Ukraine is a Security Asset to NATO

For long-term strategic security and stability in Europe, there is no better answer than Ukraine's membership in NATO. Ukraine's strategic value to NATO and European defense is profound. Its integration is not merely about extending security guarantees to Ukraine but leveraging a battle-hardened military and unique insights to significantly enhance the Alliance's collective capabilities.

Assessment of Ukraine's Strategic Contributions to NATO:

- **Battlefield Experience & Military Modernization:** Ukraine fields Europe's largest, most combat-hardened land force (~1 million personnel), demonstrating "relentless adaptability and ingenuity." This provides NATO invaluable, real-time insights into modern warfare, Russian tactics, and effective countermeasures. NATO must use this proving ground to inform decision-making, capability development, training, and strategic posture.
- **Defense Industrial Base & Innovation:** Ukraine possesses an extensive, inventive defense industry, "supercharged by war." It has developed homegrown technologies (drones, long-range strike systems), responsible for ~75% of Russian battlefield casualties. Drone manufacturing approaches millions annually, with an "ecosystem" of production and rapid battlefield improvements. This industrial capacity can help meet Europe's defense production shortfalls and offers critical lessons for NATO. Ukraine serves as a "real-life testbed" for advanced US weapons systems.
- **Countering Hybrid Threats:** Ukraine's resilience to Russian shadow war offers invaluable, real-time insights into Russian tactics and countermeasures, providing NATO practical knowledge to counter cyberattacks, PMCs, illicit finance, and intelligence operations.
- **Strategic Geographic Position & Deterrence:** Ukraine's location on NATO's eastern flank makes it a critical buffer. Its continued resistance degrades Russia's military, buying time for European rearmament. If Ukraine fell, NATO would face urgent, expensive eastern flank reinforcement, and Ukrainian technology/factories would fall to the Kremlin. Ukraine's success is essential for solidifying continent-wide security and deterring Russian aggression. **Its integration into NATO removes a persistent vulnerability, denies Russia a strategic advantage, and offers the only credible pathway for the US to reduce its military footprint in Europe without undermining NATO deterrence.**

7. Policy Recommendations for Strengthening NATO

To strengthen transatlantic security and ensure NATO's future effectiveness, the following recommendations are put forth for the Committee's consideration:

7.1. Recommendations for Continued US Leadership and Investment in NATO:

- **Invest in Strategic Air Defense Capabilities:** Recent conflicts have shown that NATO is far more vulnerable in the air domain. US should continue to focus on supporting European efforts while executing on previously agreed deployment of long-range fires capabilities. This includes the execution of the US Multi-Domain Task Force in Germany, which will eventually include SM-6, Tomahawk, and developmental hypersonic weapons.
- **Establish Joint Procurement at the NATO Level:** A more integrated, alliance-wide industrial strategy is necessary to overcome fragmentation and ensure interoperability and scale within Europe's defense industrial base
- **Sustained European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) Funding:** Critical for forward defense in Europe, supporting US rotational forces.
- **Confirm the New US SACEUR:** Demonstrates continued US leadership and a needed US voice, and Congress should act swiftly to confirm the Administration's nominee.
- **Renewed Baltic Security Support:** Continue military aid and support, boosting air defense capabilities.
- **Uninterrupted NATO Exercises:** Maintain increased tempo and scale; vital for readiness and cohesion.
- **Support Complementary European Defense Efforts:** Actively support Europe's defense initiatives (e.g., U.K.-led CJEF, French-led EII, EU CSDP/PESCO), ensuring they complement US efforts.
- **Pressure on Burden-Sharing:** Continue to press allies to meet/exceed 2% GDP defense as a bare minimum and, if agreed at the Hague Summit, to deliver the 3.5-5% spending.
- **Invest in Congressional Expertise on Russia's Shadow War:** Develop in-house Congressional expertise on Russian shadow war operations in the NATO space.

7.2 Recommendations for Enhanced Support and Clear Pathways for Ukraine's Eventual Integration:

- **Sustained, Predictable Assistance:** Provide targeted funding, clear partnership objectives, and multi-year authorities and appropriation mechanisms (e.g., MOU).
- **Investment in Ukraine's Defense Industrial Base:** Support expanding Ukraine's industrial capacity; address bureaucratic hurdles for co-development/production.
- **Immediate Use of Russian Frozen Assets:** Utilize immediately for Ukraine's recovery and defense; provides crucial funding.

- **Accelerate Adoption of Autonomous Weapon Systems:** US/NATO must accelerate adoption and build mass to extend military capabilities, learning from Ukraine.
- **Continued Pressure on Ukrainian Reforms:** Maintain consistent pressure on Kyiv for judicial and anti-corruption reforms; conditional assistance.

7.3. Strategies for Leveraging Ukraine's Strategic Value for NATO's Future and European Defense:

- **Integrate Ukraine's Cyber Resilience and Innovation:** Enhance public-private information sharing and investment in cyber defense (DIANA), incorporating Ukraine's experience.
- **Harness Ukraine's Battlefield Innovation for NATO's Modernization:** Accelerate adoption of autonomous weapon systems, drawing from Ukraine's adaptability/ingenuity.
- **Develop European Defense Industrial Base with Ukrainian Capacity:** Support expanding Ukraine's industrial capacity; integrate into Western defense industrial base.
- **Develop Ecosystem Approach with Ukrainian Collaboration:** Work with US agencies tracking Russian illicit finance/PMCs/disruptive groups, integrating lessons from Ukraine.

Conclusion: A Call to Action for a Secure Future

The challenges posed by Russia's aggression and evolving warfare demand urgent, coordinated action across the transatlantic community. The 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague is a crucial opportunity. The Kremlin's toolkit is exposed, yet Russia has faced few consequences for malign activities, signaling impunity to other actors.

The stakes are clear: the future of the international order and democratic values depend on our collective resolve. By strengthening NATO, providing unwavering, predictable support to Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic future, and proactively countering hybrid threats, the transatlantic community can secure a future where democratic principles prevail and stability is restored. To do otherwise is to leave this arena open for authoritarians to set the rules.

APPENDIX

Table 1: NATO Allies' Defense Spending

The data below includes 2024 spending projections and 2023 confirmed figures. The along with the 2% commitment for many, can be traced back to:

- **NATO Public Releases/Reports on Defence Expenditures**
- **National Government Statements:** For specific targets and commitments.
- **SIPRI Military Expenditure Database:** For additional confirmed spending data

Member State	2024 Expected Defense Spending (% GDP)	Announced Target/Commitment (% GDP and/or timeframe)
Overall EU-NATO (23 members)	1.99% (combined)	Minimum 2% (2023 Vilnius Pledge)
Poland	4.20%	Plans to reach 4.7% in 2025; Publicly committed to 5%
Estonia	3.43%	At least 2% (reached)
United States	3.38%	Advocates for 5%
Latvia	3.15%	Publicly committed to 5%
Greece	3.08%	At least 2% (reached)
Lithuania	2.85%	Publicly committed to 5%
Finland	2.41%	At least 2% (reached)
Denmark	2.37%	Reached 2% in 2024
United Kingdom	2.33%	Has met 2% target annually since 2006
Romania	2.25%	At least 2% (reached)
North Macedonia	2.22%	At least 2% (reached)
Norway	2.20%	At least 2% (reached)
Bulgaria	2.18%	Projected to reach 2.5% over 3 years
Sweden	2.14%	Intends to reach 5% (3.5% core)
Germany	2.12%	Exempt defense spending beyond 1% GDP from debt limits, €500bn fund; Reached 2% in 2024
Hungary	2.11%	At least 2% (reached)
Czechia	2.10%	Accepted new capability targets; Reached 2% in 2024
Turkey	2.09%	At least 2% (reached)
France	2.06%	Intends to reach 3.5% (no timeframe); Reached 2% in 2024
Netherlands	2.05%	Intends to reach 5% (3.5% core, 1.5% other); Reached 2% in 2024
Albania	2.03%	At least 2% (reached)
Montenegro	2.02%	At least 2% (reached)
Slovakia	2.00%	At least 2% (reached)
Croatia	1.81%	3% by 2030
Portugal	1.55%	At least 2%
Italy	1.49%	Vowed to reach 2% in 2025
Canada	1.37%	At least 2%
Belgium	1.30%	2% by end of 2025
Slovenia	1.29%	At least 2%
Luxembourg	1.29%	At least 2%
Spain	1.28%	Vowed to reach 2% in 2025
Iceland	0.0%	(No standing army, participates in common defense)

Table 2: Russian Operations in Europe (since Russia's Feb. 2022 Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine)

Data from forthcoming CEPA report.

- **Assassinations and Attempted Assassinations:**
 - In December 2022, then Eskom CEO André De Ruyter survived an attempted assassination by cyanide poisoning. His company was in the process of clamping down on corruption, theft, and illicit revenue from procurement irregularities.
 - In 2023, exiled Russian journalist Irina Babloyan was poisoned in an assassination attempt in Tbilisi after investigating reports of Ukrainian children being forcibly taken to Russia.
 - In 2023, Germany opened investigations into the attempted assassination of Berlin-based Russian journalist Elena Kostyuchenko, who reported on Russian war crimes in Ukraine, via poison.
 - In May 2023, President of the Free Russia Foundation, Natalia Arno, was poisoned in an assassination attempt while visiting Prague.
 - In February 2024, Russia assassinated Russian military defector, Maxim Kuzminov, in a Spanish town near Madrid.
 - In July 2024, a Russian plot to assassinate Armin Papperger, CEO of German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall, was foiled by Germany and the US.
 - In March 2024, three arrests were made after a close ally of Alexei Navalny, Leonid Volkov, was attacked outside his home in Lithuania.

- **Sabotage, Arson and Property Destruction:**
 - In December 2023, a Polish court convicted 14 citizens of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine of espionage and planning to derail trains delivering aid to Ukraine.
 - In February 2024, the Estonian Security Service (KAPO) detained 10 individuals for desecrating several national memorial sites and vandalizing the cars of the interior minister and a journalist on behalf of the Russian special services.
 - In February 2024, two men recruited by Russian special services attempted to set fire to the Museum of the Occupation in Latvia.
 - In March 2024, two British men were charged with helping Russian intelligence services after a suspected arson attack on a Ukraine-linked business in London.
 - In May 2024, pro-Russian saboteurs committed arson at Diehl Metall factory, which produces Iris-t air defense systems for Ukraine, in Berlin.
 - In June 2024, Parisian police made an arrest in response to an attempted explosive attack orchestrated in Moscow on a hardware store north of Paris.
 - In the summer of 2024, multiple arson incidents targeted logistical facilities in Poland, including a paint factory and a shopping mall, and an Ikea warehouse in Vilnius. Authorities suspected GRU involvement.

- In July 2024, incendiary parcels ignited at DHL cargo hubs in Leipzig, Germany, and Birmingham, UK. Authorities suspected these were ‘trial runs’ in preparation for attacks on transatlantic cargo flights.
 - In July 2024, coordinated arson attacks damaged three French high-speed rail lines on the opening day of the Paris Olympics, disrupting rail services to and from the event.
- **Infrastructure Disruption:**
 - Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, global communications company, Viasat, faced a Russian cyber-attack that impacted the Ukrainian military, Central European windfarms, and personal and commercial internet users globally.
 - Since 2022, Russia has repeatedly tampered with and blocked navigational systems on western ships and boats from Kaliningrad.
 - In April 2023, following a joint investigation by public broadcasting companies in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, Russia was charged with spying in the Baltic and North Seas using civilian fishing trawlers, cargo ships, and yachts.
 - In April 2023, Norway barred 15 Russian intelligence officers from the Russian embassy for “engaging in activities not compatible with their diplomatic status,” following an earlier removal of three intelligence officers in 2022.
 - In May 2024, the Danish Security Intelligence Service (PET) announced the increasing threat of Russian-directed physical sabotage campaigns against military and civilian targets in Denmark in response to the government’s support for Ukraine.
 - In May 2024, Russia’s GPS jamming for flights over and ships in the Baltic Sea led Finnish airline Finnair to suspend all flights between Helsinki and the Estonian airport at Tartu.
 - In May 2024, Germany accused Russia of large-scale cyber-attacks against its defense and aerospace firms.
 - In November 2024, two fiber-optic cables in the Baltic Sea (BCS East-West and C-Lion 1) were deliberately damaged by anchor drags involving Russian-linked vessels.
 - In 2025, the UK noted rising concern over undersea cable sabotage. The UK reported 12 suspected incidents from 2021 to 2025 linked to Russian ‘shadow fleet’ vessels.