

Transatlantic Test

Towards and After the 2024 NATO Washington Summit

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BRUSSELS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE
CENTRE FOR SECURITY,
DIPLOMACY AND STRATEGY



Event Report

The **2024 Washington Summit** comes at a crucial time for NATO. Positive momentum has been generated by NATO's Strategic Concept and the Madrid and Vilnius Summits. Undoubtedly, NATO has taken a bold and decisive step towards its core tasks of **deterrence and collective defence**. However, in addition to celebrating 75 years of NATO, the Washington Summit will need to grapple with major challenges such as the adequate resourcing of the Regional Plans that were approved in Vilnius and the continuation of vital military and financial support for Ukraine in its defence against Russian military aggression. Furthermore, in addition to crises in the Middle East and China's rise in the Indo-Pacific, NATO Allies need to reflect on what more can be done to **effectively manage burden-sharing, develop capabilities and build-up the defence industry across the Alliance**.

With the potential political turbulence that could emerge within the Alliance in the coming year, the Washington Summit is an ideal moment to ensure the future cohesion and strength of the Alliance. To this end, on 26 April 2024 the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS), Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations and Belgian Permanent Representation to NATO organised a public conference focusing on **burden-sharing and defence-industrial challenges**. The event benefitted from the presence of several senior experts, industry representatives and policy-makers including: Ambassador **Ariadne Petridis**, Permanent Representative of Belgium to NATO; **Javier Colomina**, Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, NATO; and **Jörg See**, Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Defence Policy and Planning, NATO.

During the keynote speeches, the audience learned how NATO has remained a steadfast and durable Alliance for 75 years. The Washington Summit marks an anniversary that should be celebrated, but there is a need to focus on the current and long-term challenges facing NATO. One way to ensure the future health of the Alliance is to invest

in deterrence and defence, as this is the only way for NATO to maintain and extend its strength and credibility. NATO is assisting with Ukraine's defence by coordinating assistance from Allies for military equipment and supplies. NATO is also providing Ukraine with a crisis consultation mechanism through the NATO-Ukraine Council, and NATO is also supporting Allies with military training and assistance. Furthermore, participants learned that NATO is working closer with partners than ever before. Working with Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, NATO is able to deepen its partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, and it is developing closer ties with countries such as Argentina and Morocco. In the South, NATO is working to develop its approach to the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions, especially following the report of the Group of Experts on the southern neighbourhood.

The keynote speeches underlined that European NATO Allies need to invest more in their defence. It was widely acknowledged during the event that all Allies should progressively meet the 2% of GDP pledge in as rapid a fashion as possible. Many NATO members are increasing their spending, but more needs to be done. NATO members such as Belgium can play a critical role in enabling defence and deterrence. For example, Belgium is the location of several critical port and transport infrastructures, which need to be secured and ready as enablers for NATO's overall defence, whenever needed. In this sense, it was acknowledged that more public outreach is essential if citizens are to grasp the full extent of NATO's defensive responsibilities and actions.

Over **100 individuals** attended the event from diverse backgrounds including from several universities in Belgium. The audience actively engaged in the panel session discussions and questions were taken from representatives of Belgian innovators and industry, as well as from think tank experts, academia and civil society organisations. Two specific panels brought together experts and decision-makers to debate the future of NATO in the areas of burden-sharing and the defence-industry.

Burden-sharing

The first panel sought to better understand how burden-sharing in the Alliance has evolved since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. In the context of shifts in the United States' (US) strategy, and with the US presidential election on the horizon, the panel analysed how European Allies can ensure that burden-sharing is put on a robust and long-term footing after the Washington Summit. Panellists stated that the Washington Summit is of symbolic importance, and it will be an occasion to bring together all 32 NATO members (the largest number in the Alliance's history). There are also grounds for optimism on burden-sharing as by the end of 2024 two-thirds of Allies will be spending more than 2% of GDP on defence. Such investments are vital if the Alliance is to continue to support Ukraine, deter adversaries and engage partners beyond the Euro-Atlantic region.

Nevertheless, there was a sense of urgency on burden-sharing given the looming US presidential election, which may see the election of a less than supportive administration. Accordingly, European Allies need to rapidly take on more responsibility for defence. There has, with Russia's actions in 2008, 2014 and 2022, been more than enough warning for Europeans to get their act together. Now, we live in a context of high-intensity warfare, the fusion of disruptive technologies with trench warfare and the increasing relevance of the cyber and space domains. Russia is in the process of reconstituting its armed forces, so Europeans need to be prepared for deterrence and, if it ultimately comes to it, war.

So far, European Allies have been dependent on the US for strategic enablers such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capacities, long-range fires and air and missile defence. The US still underwrites European security with its nuclear deterrent. In this regard, it is not enough for Europeans simply to invest 2% of GDP in defence – they need a plan to lower their dependence on US equipment that might be needed by Washington in case of conflict in the Indo-Pacific. What is more, Europeans need to step up their efforts in filling military and technological gaps in the Alliance, as well as ensuring that its armed personnel are trained and accustomed to using critical military capabilities. While there was some scepticism about role specialisation within the Alliance, panellists agreed that the chief way of ensuring the future endurance of NATO is for Europeans to do more for defence.

It was also made clear that Russia is not going to disappear anytime soon as NATO's predominant challenge. In this sense, there was a plea for greater public communication on the part of political leaders to inform the public about what defence readiness means in practice. As Russia may not want a deal on Ukraine anytime soon, NATO has to ensure that it is prepared to continue to deter Moscow. The accession of Finland and Sweden in NATO means that the alliance has become a lot stronger in the Arctic and High North, yet there is no room for complacency as Russia is still a direct threat in the Baltic Sea with its naval and missile ranges, as well as the risk it poses to critical infrastructure. Accordingly, translating increased defence investments into credible deterrence and defence requires a 360-degree approach.

Defence-industrial challenges

The second panel focused on the defence-industrial challenges facing the Alliance today. Speakers focused their remarks on how defence industries across the transatlantic should adapt to the return of high intensity warfare. They also reflected on what support NATO can offer Allies in this regard. One of the main points raised during the discussion focused on the continued need to ensure standardisation and interoperability between NATO members' armed forces. Still today, we witness a duplication of or even tension between Allied military requirements for equipment, which only adds further costs to defence contracts and industry. As we currently live in a period that demands rapid and large-scale production of vital military equipment, NATO members cannot continue to duplicate efforts as this will effect production times and create security of supply bottlenecks.

Yet, it was also recognised that increased defence investment – while absolutely critical – is not enough if NATO is to continue to defend its members and deter adversaries. Indeed, while increasing investments are welcome they do not automatically result in contracts for industry, which makes it particularly difficult for industry to adapt, invest in manufacturing capacities and skills or plan for future demand and capacity. Leaders must recognise that investments take time before they result in capabilities, especially given the under-investment in defence experienced in Europe for the past three decades.

Nevertheless, NATO is taking measures to ease the pressure on industry by assisting, where it can, on procurement and interoperability. Participants learned that the shipments of Soviet-era equipment in support of Ukraine has allowed NATO members to modernise their own military inventories. This has led to increased interoperability among Allies, but it also means that there has been an urgent need to ramp-up

production of basic equipment and high-tech military systems. In this respect, NATO has been able to support Allies through the Defence Production Action Plan (DPAP) and by pooling purchases for ammunition worth more than US\$10 billion via the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA).

Finally, there was recognition that political leaders are not doing enough to reinforce the necessity of the defence industry, which is still widely perceived by the public as a “dirty” industry to be avoided. In fact, panellists underlined how the defence industry is *the* vital component of European security, and, if defence is desired by the public, then the defence industry is the only credible foundation on which to achieve it. Accordingly, any public campaign on defence must include a clear and convincing message on why the defence industry is essential for NATO.