

NATO's Hague Summit – Keeping the Americans in!

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ABSTRACT: The brief analyses the 2025 NATO Hague Summit and argues that the European allies have managed to keep the United States of America engaged in the continent's security for the foreseeable future. This outcome has been achieved by increasing European defense spending over the next ten years. In the long run, the US will try to “pivot to Asia”, withdrawing some of its troops from Europe. The analysis will look at the outcomes of the summit from US, European, Ukrainian, and Romanian perspective. Finally, it makes recommendations regarding Romanian foreign and defense policy.

KEYWORDS: NATO, United States, European defense, Ukraine, Romania, Romanian foreign policy.

¹ This publication draws exclusively on open-source materials. The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the institution.

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INTRODUCTION

This brief looks the recently held NATO summit in the Hague and will argue that it has successfully maintained, for the time being, the Transatlantic alliance. Today's NATO is at a crossroads, as the United States would like to shift its strategic focus and security commitments towards Asia, it faces a rather hostile and distrustful Trump Administration and an aggressive and revisionist Russia. The analysis will look at the outcomes of the Hague Summit for the United States of America, the Trump Administration, the European allies, Ukraine and Romania. Furthermore, it will make a number of foreign and security policy recommendations for Romania.

The NATO summit in The Hague, the first summit of the second Trump term, has just ended and every European country and leader has breathed a sigh of relief. Donald Trump has not withdrawn from NATO, as many Euro-Atlantic experts on both sides of the “pond” expected him to do so considering his hostility and disinterest in America's European allies ([Newsweek](#), March 22, 2025). The summit was not cut short or marred by diplomatic animosities as was the G7 summit, earlier in June, in Calgary, Canada ([Reuters](#), June 17, 2025).

The 2025 summit declaration is terse and short. Compared to the 2024 declaration, it has only five paragraphs, while the former has 38 paragraphs plus a separate pledge of support for Ukraine ([NATO](#), July 10, 2024). The five paragraphs encapsulate the fundamental mission of the Alliance:

- Commitment to collective security and defense: “We reaffirm our ironclad commitment to collective defence as enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty – that an attack on one is an attack on all.” ([NATO](#), June 25, 2025)
- Russia is defined as a long-term threat in the document.
- Terrorism is considered a persistent threat.
- Commitment to support Ukraine.
- The members of the Alliance have committed themselves to increase defense spending up to 5% of GDP until 2035. The 5% target of GDP is divided between direct defense spending of 3.5% of GDP and 1.5% of GDP spending on

protecting critical infrastructures, networks, civil defense, societal resilience, innovation (dual – use) and consolidating the industrial base.

- The increase in defense spending will be tracked using NATO Capability Targets and allies will submit annual plans showing how will they reach and meet the defense spending targets agreed.
- European allies and the US have agreed to “to rapidly expand transatlantic defence industrial cooperation and to harness emerging technology and the spirit of innovation to advance our collective security” (Ibidem). It includes the elimination of trade barriers in the defense sector and cooperation on common projects.

WHO GOT WHAT AND WHAT ARE THE TRANSATLANTIC TRENDS?

The United States of America:

- European allies have agreed to significantly increase their defense spending from 2% of GDP to 5% of GDP. This is a significant shift in NATO since the Wales Summit when the 2% of GDP spending target was agreed ([NATO](#), September 5, 2014). Five percent of GDP is far more than the United States spends on its own defense, which spends around 3.4% of GDP ([World Bank Data](#)). From this budget the US must cover its defense security and defense commitments all over the world. However, there are two major caveats to this decision. The first is that direct 5% of GDP target is divided between direct defense spending and defense related spending. European allies will effectively spend on their defense 3.5% of GDP, while 1.5% will be used for adjacent spending such as infrastructure or cyberdefense. The other caveat is the fact that the allies should attain this spending target over the next decade, in 2035. Nevertheless, president Trump can present this decision as a success to his movement and to the American public. It can be argued that Europe now pays for its own defense or pays it fair share – the details of this arrangement may escape Trump’s base.
- There is an understanding now that US companies will play a part, likely a significant one, in the re-armament of Europe. Paragraph four of the final declaration of The Hague Summit speaks of lifting barriers of defense industrial cooperation between the US and

Europe. American companies will not be excluded from European (EU) defense programs. This is an outcome desired by both the current US administration, but also by some European countries (Romania included). US defense companies deliver faster than their European counterparts, and their products are far more effective on the battlefield. The Russo-Ukrainian war has proven yet again the capabilities of western manufactured military equipment, especially American weapon systems (Javelin missiles, Patriot air defense systems and Bradley Infantry Vehicles). Even older versions of US weapons systems proved superior to equivalent Russian made ones (Copperhead 155 mm laser guided anti-tank shells, older variants of the Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle). Looking beyond the commercial aspects, defense industrial cooperation between the US and European allies (EU) is important in both military and economic terms. It is very likely that closer defense industrial cooperation will contribute to maintaining the transatlantic link.

The NATO Hague summit delivered more than expected for the US president on the personal prestige plain. Donald Trump practices a hyper-personalized diplomacy where he believes that good personal rapport between leaders represents the benchmark of the diplomatic relationship between countries. Furthermore, this personal approach to foreign policy-making and diplomatic dialogue can be seen when the president is not satisfied with a certain country: that country's president or prime minister is going to be at the receiving end of Donald Trump's public fury and ire – see for example Volodymyr Zelensky's unfortunate experience in late February 2025 in the Oval Office, with the press present ([The New York Times](#), February 28, 2025) – or the case of Canada's former prime minister Justin Trudeau, who was personally chastised and insulted (“governor” Trudeau) on social media and in the press ([BBC](#), December 11, 2024; [Toronto Sun](#), February 14, 2025).

Sometimes this hyper-personalized form of diplomacy manifests itself through particular tokens of appreciation and flattery, to burnish Donald Trump's ego. The American president feels at ease when an interlocutor appreciates and recognizes his superiority or good taste, see for example the personal letters sent by North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong Un, during Trump's first term ([CNN](#), September 9, 2020). It seems that is vital to personally acknowledge Donald Trump's superiority and leadership qualities and flatter him in order to build up a relationship and get one's message across – which is an unusual diplomatic practice.

NATO Secretary General and former Dutch prime-minister Mark Rutte acknowledged the importance of stimulating Donald Trump's ego and creating a positive rapport between himself and the American president in order to advance Transatlantic relations. As such he signaled president Trump his appreciation by sending a message, using irregular language, not used in official diplomatic communications: "Mr. President, dear Donald, - Congratulations and thank you for your decisive action in Iran, that was truly extraordinary, and something no one else dared to do. It makes all safer. You are flying into another big success in The Hague this evening. It was not easy but we've got them all to signed to 5 percent. Donald, you have driven us to really, really important moment for America and Europe, and the world. You will achieve something NO American president in decades could get done. Europe is going to pay in a BIG way, as they should, and it will be your win. Safe travels and see you at His Majesty's dinner." ([France24](#), June 24, 2025; [The Irish Times](#), June 24, 2025)

The message delivered by Secretary General Rutte before the beginning of The Hague Summit was not meant to be public, however president Trump decided to share it on social media. Mark Rutte's approach helped get president Trump a deliverable for his base in the United States, while at the same avoided the rancor of the Brussels Summit in 2018 ([CNN](#), July 11, 2018; Woodward 2018, p. 86), when president Trump intended to leave the Alliance (Bolton 2020, 194; [The New York Times](#), January 14, 2019). Mark Rutte understood Donald Trump's personality and his unconventional approach towards the US president proved effective, although it is controversial ([Mark Galeotti](#), July 7, 2025): "No, [Rutte] likes me. I think he likes me. If he doesn't, I'll let you know. I'll come back and I'll hit him hard, OK? He did it very affectionately, 'Daddy, you're my Daddy.'" ([ABC News](#), June 26, 2025).

The European allies

Europe achieved a number of major objectives at The Hague Summit:

- The US continued to be a member of the Alliance, despite Trump's Administration general hostility towards Europe.
- The validity of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty was reaffirmed and not called into question.

- Russia continues to be considered a persistent threat to the security of the Alliance.
- Continued support for Ukraine was agreed.
- Increased defense spending. The decision to increase more in defense should not be viewed as a concession to the Trump Administration, but as a mean to increase Europe's credibility in a very volatile international system.

These are important achievements for European countries in the current international and transatlantic context. The Trump Administration is the most hostile US presidential administration to Europe since the NATO was established in 1949. President Trump believes the EU was established “to screw” the United States ([France24](#), February 24, 2025; Woodward 2020, 175). At the Munich Security Conference, vice-president J. D. Vance chastised European allies for curtailing the free speech of populist parties and leaders on the continent or the cancelling and repeat of the Romanian presidential elections over Russian interference, even suggesting the development difference in values between the US under the Trump administration and European allies:

“The threat that I worry the most about with Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor. What I worry about is the threat from within—the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values, values shared with the United States of America. Now, I was struck that a former European commissioner went on television recently and sounded delighted that the Romanian government had just annulled an entire election. He warned that if things don't go to plan, the very same thing could happen in Germany too. These cavalier statements are shocking to American ears. For years, we've been told that everything we fund and support is in the name of our shared democratic values. Everything from our Ukraine policy to digital censorship is billed as a defense of democracy. But when we see European courts canceling elections and senior officials threatening to cancel others, we ought to ask whether we're holding ourselves to an appropriately high standard. And I say “ourselves” because I fundamentally believe that we are on the same team. We must do more than talk about democratic values—we must live them.” ([Foreign Policy](#), February 18, 2025; [The White House](#), February 14, 2025)

Peter Hegseth, Trump's Secretary of Defense, and vice-president J. D. Vance expressed the general disdain for the European allies in the now infamous conversation on the unsecure Signal group used to coordinate attacks on the Houthis:

JD Vance: @Pete Hegseth if you think we should do it let's go. I just bailing Europe out again.

Pete Hegseth: I fully share your loathing of European free-loading. It's PATHETHIC. But Mike is correct, we are the only ones on the planet (on our side of the ledger) who can do this. ([The Atlantic](#), March 24, 2025)

Beyond the aggressive rhetoric and strong diplomatic exchanges over defense spending and values with European allies, what is most concerning about US policy during the second Trump term is the calling into question of the territorial integrity of traditional American allies such as Canada and Denmark (Greenland). Even before taking office Donald Trump engaged in this sort of rhetorical revisionism, demanding Canada become the 51st US state ([Al Jazeera](#), May 28, 2025) and asked if Greenland can be acquired from Denmark ([BBC](#), March 24, 2025). Faced with very firm and negative answers from Ottawa and Copenhagen, Trump Administration rhetoric on Canada and Greenland escalated, even hinting at the potential use of force ([MSNBC](#), April 11, 2025; [The Wall Street Journal](#), May 6, 2025). This is unheard of between NATO allies and raises questions about the cohesion of the Alliance, playing into the hands of Russia and China, the main revisionist powers.

At The Hague Summit, all this seems to have been put behind (at least for the time being), Donald Trump warming up to the position of American's European allies:

"They want to protect their country, and they need the United States, and without the United States, it's not going to be the same... I left there saying that these people really love their countries. It's not a rip off. And we're here to help them protect their country..." ([Associated Press](#), June 25, 2025)

The summit did not discuss the issue of a reduction of US forces deployed in Europe. Such a decision is likely to be made in the near future as US foreign and security policy turns towards the Indo-Pacific region. ([NBC News](#), April 8, 2025; [Reuters](#), May 16, 2025)

Spain and Slovakia were the only NATO member not to agree with the defense spending target of 5% of over the next decade ([Reuters](#), June 23, 2025). Madrid instead pledged to achieve the same capability targets by spending 2.1% of GDP ([Associated Press](#), June 22, 2025). President Trump threatened with increased tariffs on its exports to the US for not agreeing to the new defense spending target ([El País](#), June 25, 2025). Slovakian prime minister Robert Fico has argued that his country reserves to right, similar to Spain, to decide the pace of its defense spending and deplore the fact his country is not neutral ([Euractiv.com](#), June 18,

2025). President Peter Pellegrini has criticized Fico's position and stated that it will not block any decision reached by the allies during the summit (Ibidem). There was no rebuke from the US in Bratislava's case and Slovakia did not break the consensus in The Hague.

Ukraine

- Support for Ukraine continues but is not as strongly emphasized as before in the summit's final declaration.
- US attitude towards Ukraine remains reserved.
- The Trump Administration is gradually realizing that Russia is not interested in peace in Ukraine.
- US aid for Ukraine depends on the perceptions of president Donald Trump regarding the direction of the war and/or Allied contribution to helping Kyiv.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has not been condemned.
- Russia is not identified as the aggressor in its war against Ukraine.
- No mention of Ukraine's potential membership to NATO.

The final declaration mentions continued support for Ukraine, however, there is no mention of Ukraine's eventually becoming a member of NATO or the Open Door policy. This is not necessarily negative, but usually every summit final declaration has mentioned Ukraine and Georgia becoming members of the Alliance in an unspecified future.

Before the summit, the US has asked the organizers to lower the profile of Kyiv at the event ([Newsweek](#), July 1, 2025). Washington does not view the security of Ukraine as essential to European security ([BBC](#), June 25, 2025). These are significant diplomatic signals that US-Ukraine relations have deteriorated significantly since Donald Trump was sworn in as president.

Nevertheless, presidents Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump had a 50-minute meeting on the margins of the summit ([The Kyiv Independent](#), June 25, 2025). This was the second meeting between the two leaders after the heated exchange in the Oval Office, on February 28. The issues discussed in The Hague by the two heads of state included the state of the peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, the situation on the frontline, Russian aerial attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure and population, air defense of Ukraine and

potential for defense industrial cooperation ([President of Ukraine](#), June 25, 2025). A separate ministerial meeting of the NATO-Ukraine council was held ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine](#), June 25, 2025) but there was no high level meeting of the council, with the participation of the heads of state and government of the Alliance.

During Donald Trump's press conference at the summit, while answering a question put by a Ukrainian journalist regarding military aid for Ukraine and support for its air defenses, specifically providing Patriot missile interceptors, the American president stated that he is considering the delivery of such munitions:

"So let me just tell you, they do want to have the anti-missile missiles, as they call them, the Patriots and we're going to see if we can make some available. You know, they're very hard to get. We need them, too. We were supplying them to Israel and they're very effective. 100 percent effective. Hard to believe how effective. And they do want that more than any other thing, as you probably know. That's a very good question..." ([Roll Call](#), June 25, 2025)

The issue of US military aid to Ukraine began as controversial, but the Trump Administration changed tack during and in the aftermath of the summit. Soon after the conclusion of The Hague summit, the Department of Defense paused the delivery of Patriot interceptors to Ukraine ([Politico](#), July 1, 2025), as it was deemed that these munitions were necessary for US defense interests: "A decision was made to put America's interests first following a DOD review of our nation's military support and assistance to other countries across the globe." (Ibidem). The decision to halt air defense munitions to Ukraine has been reconsidered by the Trump administration ([Axios](#), July 8, 2025). The US Congress has authorized in the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act a \$ 500 million aid package to Ukraine, the first military aid package approved for Kyiv during the Trump Administration ([RFEL](#), July 11, 2025). President's Trump disappointment with Vladimir Putin's reluctance to engage in serious negotiations for ending the Russo-Ukrainian war seems to have played a major part in changing the Administration's position of further sending military aid to Ukraine. Moreover, the US president has agreed to sell American made weapons systems to its European allies, which will then transfer them to Ukraine to replenish Kyiv's stocks and to equip its armed forces ([Euronews](#), July 15, 2025).

Romania

- The summit re-affirmed alliance unity and cohesion.
- Romania has agreed with the 5% of GDP spending target for defense and defense related investments. Bucharest is likely to use 1.5% of GDP for defense spending related investments for the development of infrastructure to facilitate military mobility. Some of these funds could be used for
- Bucharest has reaffirmed its continuous support for Kyiv. The security of Ukraine is important for Romania, because a potential Ukrainian defeat will severely affect its security.
- Romania supports the idea of non-EU member states to participate as partners in European defense programs. Romania has established defense cooperation relations with the United States, Türkiye and Israel.
- Netherlands agreed to deliver 18 F-16 AM/BM fighters for the fighter training center at Fetești air base which trains Romanian and Ukrainian fighter pilots. ([MApN](#), June 25, 2025)

The Hague Summit was the first NATO summit for Romania's newly elected president Nicușor Dan and for the newly appointed ministers of foreign affairs and defense, Oana Țoiu and Ionuț Moșteanu, respectively. Minister Oana Țoiu has participated at the NATO-Ukraine Council ministerial meeting, where she reiterated Romania's position regarding support for Ukraine and the need for just and sustainable peace ([MAE](#), June 25, 2025). The foreign minister emphasized Ukraine's efforts to achieve peace, while noting Russia's lack of interest in the peaceful resolution of the war (Ibidem). Defense minister Moșteanu discussed the ways and means to increase interoperability between Romanian troops and French troops deployed in Romania as well as France's interest in the Black Sea region, with defense minister Sebastien Lecornu ([MApN](#), June 25, 2025). Constructive discussions have been held between the Romanian defense minister and his Dutch counterpart.

President Nicușor Dan met with US president Donald Trump during the summit ([Hotnews.ro](#), June 25, 2025). This is significant because the Trump Administration was displeased with Romania for canceling its first round of presidential elections held in November 2024 as a result of Russian interference ([Digi24.ro](#), April 15, 2025). Romania

rescheduled its presidential elections for May 2025 and disqualified Călin Georgescu, the candidate that Russian interference supported, from running in the elections ([Hotnews.ro](https://hotnews.ro), March 9, 2025; [Europa Liberă România](https://europa-libera.ro), March 10, 2025). Romania's repeat of its presidential elections was criticized by vice-president J. D. Vance, at the Munich Security Conference. The pull-aside between the Romanian and American president signaled that the relationship between the two countries was not seriously affected by this dispute.

The Black Sea region was not mentioned in the final declaration of the summit. However, considering the circumstances in which this NATO summit was held as well as allied presence in Romanian, near the epicenter of the Russo-Ukrainian war didn't warrant a new reiteration of the Allied commitment towards the defense of the Eastern flank. Moreover, the current NATO strategic concept mentions the Black Sea as a strategic region for the Alliance.

CONCLUSIONS

- The United States of America remains for the foreseeable future committed to the defense Europe. However, this commitment is likely to dwindle over the medium and long term, as Washington tries to shift its strategic focus towards the Indo-Pacific region.
- The US continues to remain a member of NATO despite strong reservations inside the Trump Administration over the utility of the alliance. NATO's popularity among the Republican Party as well as Alliance credibility with the US public act as a hand break for the Trump Administration withdrawing from the organization. Furthermore, the cost of withdrawing from NATO will be too high in the long run for the US to bare.
- The US would like to shift its focus to the Indo-Pacific. However neglecting and underestimating Europe constitutes a major strategic error. The US requires allied support in Asia and European allies and NATO can offer that support. Moreover, Europe is gradually becoming a theater of great power competition. China is interested in the strategic developments happening in Europe.
- US relations with its European allies (EU) will remain strained for the duration of president's Trump second term, as the increase in trade tariffs to 30% from August 1, 2025, shows ([Reuters](https://reuters.com), July 13, 2025). The Trump Administration will continue to blame its European allies, which are members of the EU, for its industrial trade deficits

and will link them to Europe's lack of investment in its own defense. The linkage between trade deficits and defense free riding will be one of the main threats to the Transatlantic link during Donald Trump's second term in office.

- Appealing to Trump's better nature represents a good diplomatic tactic when the US president practices hyper-personalized diplomacy. However, this type of approach should be employed in such a manner that is not going to be perceived as obsequious by the European public.
- The United States is underestimating the importance of Russo-Ukrainian war as bellwether for world order.
- The US drawdown of military forces from Europe will affect either directly or indirectly Romania. Even if, for example, the US partially withdraws troops from Germany, this will have an impact on the logistics of the rotational deployments in Romania.
- The security of Ukraine is linked to European security. Ukraine's potential NATO membership should not be taken off the table during the eventual negotiations with Russia for the peaceful resolution of the war. If Ukraine becomes a member of NATO in the foreseeable future this will represent a net gain for the Alliance and European security.
- The US will pass over to Europe the burden of supporting militarily and economically Ukraine during the Trump Administration, barring some unforeseen developments in US policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROMANIA

- Maintaining and consolidating Romania's partnership with the United States of American should be prioritized in the short and medium term by the Romanian security and foreign policy establishment.
- Romania should do more to explain to the US the advantages of maintaining a presence in the Black Sea region. Bucharest should emphasize the interest for the region manifested by Russia, China, Iran and DPRK.
- Efforts should be made to explain to the Trump Administration the need for a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. A peace that leaves Ukraine vulnerable to future Russian aggression, impacts the security of the entire region.

- Romania must consolidate its position of security provider in the Black Sea region. Streamlining and accelerating defense spending is one of the means to achieve this objective.
- In the current international environment, Romania must build up its military capabilities in order to be a credible ally. Bucharest needs to streamline its procurement procedure for defense acquisition and prioritize the development of capabilities required for territorial defense and alliance capability targets.
- Beyond the strategic partnership with the US, Romania must develop and consolidate defense partnerships with France, Germany and Ukraine.
- Attaining the defense spending target of 3.5% of GDP for direct military investment and 1.5% of GDP for defense related spending would help maintain the strategic partnership with the US, including troop presence.
- Military readiness should be gradually increased, but at an accelerated pace in order to have credible deterrence.
- Increased spending in unmanned systems and in deep strike capabilities is required in order to increase deterrence on the Eastern Flank.
- A new defense strategy should be formulated as fast as possible. This defense strategy should include a distinct strategy for the Black Sea.
- Romania's new Black Sea strategy should prioritize the development of credible and modern naval capabilities to protect and promote the country's maritime interests. Freedom of navigation in the Black Sea should be one of the objective Romania must secure with this strategy.
- The new defense strategy should focus on defense and on increasing societal resilience from foreign interference.
- Romania's decisionmakers should understand that defense spending not only increases deterrence against aggression but represent also a bargaining chip in negotiations with allies.

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