

Why We Need a New NATO: A European Manifesto



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The 75th NATO Anniversary Summit in Washington was a formidable manifestation of the *raison d'être* of the transatlantic alliance and its successes to manage the transformation from the 20th to the 21st century – from the dark days of the cold war to a more optimistic post-cold-war period up to today's new world of multiple strategic uncertainties, instabilities and challenges.

The war Vladimir Putin has launched against the West by invading Ukraine in 2022, China's rise as the second global power next to the United States, a hostile Moscow-Beijing axis towards the West, growing threats from rogue states like Iran and North-Korea, and the ongoing catastrophic crisis in the Middle East are mirroring an unpredictable and highly unstable geopolitical environment. On top: America has become less reliable. Former US President Donald Trump's constantly repeating harsh words that the Alliance is obsolete and that he will only defend those allies "who pay" their NATO-share, would have dire implications for Europe's security in a second Trump administration. With the departure of Joe Biden the "transatlantic

honeymoon” is over for good – Europe is losing the last atlanticist US president. From now on we are entering a new era – no matter who will be the next president in the White House – which will have significant consequences for the security of Europe. Wishful thinking that a Kamala Harris presidency would continue “transatlantic NATO business as usual” is an inadequate strategy for Europeans.

Leaders in Europe had many warnings – long before Trump’s NATO bashing – from former US presidents, including Barack Obama or former Defense Secretary Bob Gates, who chronically complained about European “free-riders” causing the imbalance in NATO, which is why Obama insisted on the 2% target in Wales in 2014. Obama was very clear: his pivot to Asia meant that Washington would have to focus its attention in the future more and more to the Indo-Pacific region due to China’s growing military power and geopolitical ambitions, and therefore the Europeans should get ready to spend more for their own defense. As Europeans, and especially the Germans, have to admit that it is our political responsibility that we lost a decade where we could have started recalibrating our military budgets and capabilities in the alliance in order to reduce the unfair imbalance vis a vis the American contribution. After all, Europe was united again for more than 20 years, and in comfortable economic circumstances.

Today Europe is confronted with the most serious situation it has ever been since the last 75 years. The neo-revanchist posture of the Russian President, peppered again and again with imperial nuclear blackmailing makes it clear that he is not aiming alone in conquering Ukrainian territory. That is just the beginning. Putin is actually waging a vendetta against the hated West. Putin’s narrative that the West has been humiliating Russia repeatedly the last 30 years is well known. What is new is: that today he considers himself militarily strong enough to break the security-bond between Europeans and Americans. Putin wants to know whether Art.5 of the NATO treaty, the military promise to stand up for each other collectively if a country is attacked, still applies. His next victim could be another non-NATO country: Moldova. And afterwards, a Baltic State? And then, will a President Trump stand by the Baltic? This could be the moment of truth for the Alliance. With the prospect to reach such a moment, Europe must be prepared to answer the question whether it is able and willing to stop Putin’s vendetta with its own NATO forces.

Therefore we are outlining in this European Manifesto why a *New NATO* is imperative: to keep the Americans on board a *Europeanization* of NATO is a must. Without the Americans – NATO will stop existing. And without NATO – Europe’s collective security will collapse. If we then wake up at war with Russia everyone will be fighting for themselves and no one for the others. Europe will be back where it was 100 years ago.

What does a *New NATO* mean and what needs to be done by Europeans, but also Americans.

First of all this means that the Europeans have to realize the reality, that only NATO provided the last 75 years the military structures and capabilities to Europe’s security, which was the precondition for the (West) Europeans to be able to live in peace and freedom; and that *only* NATO can provide a full-fledged security-umbrella for the Europeans also in the future – alas under new conditions. Respecting and appreciating the European efforts to build a more strategic defense autonomy, its usefulness is limited in the era of growing confrontation with nuclear-capable aggressive Russia. The concentration of funds for military resources inside NATO is key, but that should go in parallel with increasing EU capabilities in other, lower-key conflict scenarios. Much needed is a European defense consolidation, a strengthening of the competitiveness and innovativeness of Europe’s military technological and industrial complex and the harmonization of its procurement base. The European Defense Industrial Strategy and the European Defense Industrial Program announced this year are hinting in the right direction. The longterm Franco-German defense cooperation in military joint projects, the special Franco-British defense partnership (operational, industrial and nuclear) as well as the recently announced UK-German enhanced defense cooperation are fundamental accomplishments of a European defense pillar complementary to NATO’s security umbrella. In this respect buying European equipment should go hand in hand with buying off-the-shelf US equipment, and this should apply for all NATO members. We therefore fully agree and support the “Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security’s Forward Defense Program” to accelerate transatlantic defense consolidation by integrating defense capabilities with allies. This implies friend-sourcing, production diplomacy, and supply-chain resilience. The US military procurement bureaucracy though tends to seek domestic sources of aircraft, ships, ground vehicles, and missile systems, and often then export those systems to allies and partners. This tendency, it is argued in the program, predisposes security cooperation to be a one-way street from the United States to its allies. Given challenges to the US defense-industrial base and geopolitical threats from strategic competitors, this approach is no longer tenable.

Second, for the last 30 years Americans and Europeans have been arguing about the necessity of “burden-sharing” within the Alliance. Today though “burden-sharing” is not anymore a debate:

“burden-sharing” today translates into European co-sharing conventional responsibility together with the Americans; that will determine whether NATO will or will not remain in business to protect Europe, as a re-elected Donald Trump might pull-

off substantially the American security blanket from NATO-soil. This means that all 32 member states – as applaudable as it is that 23 of 31 are hitting this year the 2% military spending target – must ensure in the near future that a substantial upgrade of conventional forces on land, in the air and at sea is set up with appropriate capabilities to credibly deter a potential aggressor – for the foreseeable future this will remain Vladimir Putin. That means that Europeans would have to provide 50% of all conventional forces and strategic capabilities needed to deter and defeat a major-power aggressor. Today 68% of the NATO budget is paid by the Americans, 32% by the European member states. Such an imbalance is unsustainable for any future US president, not only for a President Trump, given the new multiple challenges the Americans have to face in Asia or in the Middle East. The big economic players in NATO, UK, France and Germany, will have to shoulder more of the burden than the smaller countries. London already announced that it plans to increase its NATO contribution to 2,5%. As far as Berlin is concerned, it spent 3,5 to 4 percent of its GDP on defense during the Cold War – without becoming a socially poor or militaristic country. The future of the Alliance will decisively depend on the military role Germany is prepared to undertake and its political willingness to take responsibility for a significant increase of its military capabilities to strengthen the European pillar within NATO. So far Berlin has changed dramatically its military posture – triggered by Russia's invasion in Ukraine that Olaf Scholz described as *Zeitenwende* and which the German Chancellor underpinned with a €100bn investment to rebuild the German Armed Forces. A purchase of 35 F-35 fighter jets and 60 Chinook helicopters from the US followed swiftly. Defense Minister Boris Pistorius will also station a brigade of 5000 personnel in Lithuania and provide NATO from next year with 35.000

troops to strengthen the defense of the alliance. Finally Scholz pledged to increase the defense budget from € 53.3bn to € 80.000bn by 2028. These are encouraging steps.

Third, triggered by the confused and irresponsible statements of Donald Trump to debilitated NATO, an open debate has started about an extended credible nuclear European deterrent in European capitals. Nuclear-sharing and nuclear deterrence within the Alliance, not anymore discussed behind closed doors, needs to be addressed in a realistic manner, as it is *the* decisive element for Europe's security. Relying on the hope that the US would not weaken the nuclear guarantee even under a President Trump is not a strategic option for European leaders responsible for their country's security. To counter Putin's irresponsible imperialist nuclear blackmailing with his considerable nuclear arsenal we suggest as a **first** step that the incoming

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte proposes the cancellation of the commitment from the NATO- Russia- Founding – Act not to deploy nuclear weapons in accession countries after 1997.

The rationale for this is clear: Russia has created a reality that did not exist before 1997 by deploying short-range missiles in Belarus and mid-range nuclear-capable Iskander and Hypersonic Kinshal missiles in Kaliningrad, which was a violation of the IMF Treaty, exposing NATO's eastern and northern allies under direct threat. In response, the US withdrew from the IMF treaty in 2019. One NATO response came during the last Washington Summit: A German-American agreement foresees for 2026 the deployment of three land-based US medium-range weapons in Germany: the Tomahawk cruise missile, the SM 6 missile, and the Dark Eagle, a long-range Hypersonic missile under development. NATO currently has no such medium range weapons, only air-and sea-launched variants. Also France, Poland, Italy and Germany teamed up to develop a new ground-launched "deep precision strike" cruise missile. In addition to the two NATO allies UK and France, which have their own nuclear arsenal and in addition to the five NATO allies Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey, which benefit since decades from their nuclear-sharing agreements with Washington, we suggest as a **second** step, in order to close the capability-gap vis a vis Russia's increasing nuclear armament to launch a deepend

analysis and thorough discussion among NATO allies about the operational and strategic risks and benefits from stationing US tactical nuclear weapons in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, in particular in the view of the developing Russian nuclear doctrine. The Polish debate is ongoing. In July two American nuclear capable heavy bombers (B-52s) have been deployed to a Romanian NATO military base. In Bulgaria a debate has started behind closed doors. As a **third** step we suggest, Germany should make the proposal to establish a European multinational, rapidly deployable NATO Strike Component Force equipped with American weapons. This proposal would first be directed to the countries of the current nuclear sharing program and would provide for the procurement and deployment of land-based-missile systems with ranges of up to around 2000 km, air-launched cruise missiles and submarine-launched short-and medium-range missiles. German submarines could also carry American weapons as such an arrangement would not violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Berlin has signed. The scope and capabilities of these component forces would be such that considerable damage could be inflicted upon Russia in response to an attack on NATO territory and, in addition, an effect could also be achieved on the periphery of the NATO treaty area to relieve the American ally. A conventional strike force should though be created first as the basis for this, whose weapons systems will be certified for American nuclear weapons over the next 5-10 years, if Moscow continues its excessive nuclear build-up. In addition, missile defense should be planned in Europe from the North Cap to Anatolia and supplemented by appropriate cyber-operational means in order to be able to protect Europe and the North Atlantic from

Russian missiles, air and cyber attacks in the long term. In a **fourth** step we suggest the creation of a *new multilateral NATO nuclear planning force group* which will replace the existing NATO nuclear planning group (where France is not a member). The nuclear-sharing countries involved: the US, the UK, France (which should join now), Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria would use this setting to coordinate and implement an extended US-European NATO nuclear deterrent policy and to demonstrate to Moscow that collective defense works, on conventional as well as on nuclear levels. The message from the new NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte to Vladimir Putin must be made clear that these steps were triggered by Russia's treaty violations, its war against Ukraine, and its imperial nuclear blackmailing against the West. The Alliance principle remains unchanged: NATO will continue to act as a defensive alliance only in defense against attacks of all sorts of aggression on its territory; but any aggressor should expect immeasurable damage to its territory if it attacks even one inch of a NATO country. By closing NATO's capability gaps the door for potential arms control discussions with Russia can open: this is the positive message Mark Rutte can deliver to Vladimir Putin. No doubt, in the future the "transatlantic cohabitation" will become more demanding, but also more mature, not only within NATO. Americans know very well that NATO and other politico-military alliances aren't acts of charity or were created by the United States because of warm feelings for the Europeans. The NATO alliance does not only serve vital European security interests, but hard US national security interests as well. To abandon NATO would mean that Washington is abandoning and undermining its status as a global power. We trust that every US president understands that. US-Vice-President and Presidential candidate Kamala Harris does, as she has repeatedly demonstrated her commitment to NATO at the Munich Security Conference and again at the Democratic Convention in Chicago.

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