

# NATO SUMMIT 2025: AN ASSESSMENT OF TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY COOPERATION

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## **NATO SUMMIT 2025: AN ASSESSMENT OF TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY COOPERATION**

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**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2025**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:54 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James E. Risch presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Ricketts, Shaheen, Coons, Merkley, Booker, and Van Hollen.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH, CHAIRMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. This morning's hearing is on the NATO Summit of 2025 on assessment of transatlantic security cooperation. Obviously, this is coming up quite soon. We don't have an ambassador in place. The ranking member and I have been discussing that. I think both of us are the frame of mind that we need our ambassador in place. We hope we can get the cooperation to move it forward, notwithstanding everything else that's going on. But this is particularly, at this point in time, with what's happening in Europe, it's important we have an ambassador there.

To our witnesses, thank you. And we'll get to you in a moment.

I'm going to make an opening statement, yield to Senator Shaheen, who will do so. We will then hear from each of you your thoughts. And we really, really appreciate you coming here to talk with us today. And then we'll go with a round of questions for the witnesses.

So, NATO was founded in 1949 to protect the United States and transatlantic partners from the aggression of those who seek to harm us. In fact, it was Russian aggression and a divided Berlin that finally convinced our partners to sign the treaty.

The world has endured a lot in the past 76 years since then, but NATO has played a crucial role in preserving stability and security. It is this security that has provided room for enormous U.S. and European economic prosperity. Today, as in times past, NATO must adapt to new changes and new challenges. Our alliance faces unprecedented threats from a rising China, a belligerent Russia, and rogue actors in Iran, North Korea, and elsewhere.

This year's NATO Summit presents a unique opportunity to assess the threats facing our alliance and the response they demand from us if we hope to maintain the security and stability the world has enjoyed for so long, much of it due to what NATO offers us.

Over the last decade, but particularly the last 3 years, Putin's aggression has created the largest security crisis in Europe since the Second World War. In 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine for the first time, and Europe did little to deter further aggression after the full scale invasion. In 2022, Europe leaders made momentous pledges to take more responsibility. Three years on, Europe still has a long way to go.

Since January 20, President Trump has worked diligently to determine whether peace between Ukraine and Russia is possible, and we strongly support his efforts to secure a lasting peace in the region. Russia's actions demonstrate an unwillingness to support peace and a preference for war to continue, a war that is already radically reshaped the security landscape in Europe and proving one indisputable fact: NATO is more relevant than ever and will be for decades to come.

There are still actors who seek to subvert America, our allies, and the values we hold dear. Russia's invasion of Ukraine proved that we do not live in a "post-conflict era" as Secretary General Rutte has pointed out. Russia could be ready to use military force against a NATO nation within a few years. We could only defend against these threats together, but there are still members of NATO that take the alliance and U.S. support for granted.

For decades, our European allies have left the heavy lifting to America, and by their own admission, did not pull their own weight in defense spending. This is starting to change thankfully. NATO has always succeeded because there was no first or second tier membership, unanimity, and voting guarantees. Sovereignty and equality is respected.

However, the failure of Europe to spend appropriately on defense started to create the very tiers that NATO worked to avoid. Europeans must make dramatic investment in their defense. U.S. taxpayers will not continue to foot their bill thanks to President Trump's leadership since he first came to office, I believe Europe now understands this.

Many of us on this committee have underscored that issue with them when we meet with them. The number of allies fulfilling their defense spending pledges has risen from six members in 2017 when President Trump first took office to 23 today, with many more presenting plans to reach 2 percent by the end of this year. This is great progress, and I'm glad that Secretary General Rutte has called for greater defense investment in production capacity across NATO.

Our allies must agree to raise defense spending levels to 5 percent of their GDP and not through defense adjacent expenditures. That means increasing production of defense capabilities, equipment, recruitment, and developing innovative technologies that enhance lethality. Many of these topics will be discussed at the NATO Summit in June, and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of those conversations.

After all, Russia is not the only threat NATO faces. NATO security umbrella does not and should not cover Asia. But Iran, North Korea, and China actively support Russia's war in Ukraine. These authoritarian actors are not operating in silos, and NATO can't think of them as such. Indeed, China poses risk to NATO military

readiness. The Alliance must set standards for its members to guard against malign Chinese investments and supply chain vulnerabilities that threaten NATO security in Europe.

Above all, we must remember that we are united. There may be disagreements from trade to technology, but the threats we face are existential, and none of us can face them alone. NATO is still the most successful political and military organization in the history of this planet. Adversaries who seek to do us harm would be wise to recognize that fact.

I'm grateful to our witnesses for being with us today and look forward to a productive conversation on the future of the NATO alliance.

With that, I yield to the distinguished ranking member, Senator Shaheen.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN,  
RANKING MEMBER, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to both of our witnesses today. We appreciate your willingness to sit through our business meeting while we wait for your testimony.

I want to actually begin by going to a different region of the world and expressing my concern about the conflict between Israel and Iran because the exchange of missile attacks not only endangers our partners in the region, but also the safety of American service members, diplomats, and their families.

And I asked Secretary Hegseth about this at an earlier hearing. We have 40,000 troops in the region, many of whom are within range of Iranian missiles. And he was not at all clear about what we're doing to protect those service members.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that we will ask the Administration on the part of this committee for a briefing on what's going on in this area.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. We've talked about that, and we're going to try to make that happen—

Senator SHAHEEN. Great. Thank you.

Senator RISCH [continuing]. That's a legitimate request.

Senator SHAHEEN. One of the things that this conflict does is it makes the upcoming NATO Summit and the need for international partners, as the chairman has said, even more consequential. As co-chair of the Senate NATO Observer Group, I will be attending the summit along with Senator Tillis, and we hope to have a good bipartisan delegation from the Senate.

The support for NATO is also reflected here at home. A recent Pew Research poll found that nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults see a benefit to NATO membership. Our European allies feel the same. Despite the rhetoric and the trade practices from this Administration, our allies continue to recognize NATO's value, perhaps now more than ever.

According to official figures, 23 out of NATO's 32 member states currently meet or exceed the defense spending threshold of 2 percent. And as the chairman said, I certainly agree with him in hoping that out of the summit will come an agreement to adopt 5 percent as the new defense spending target at the Hague Summit.

In fact, Sweden and the Netherlands just announced plans to spend 5 percent of GDP on defense, and these increases are not the result of trade policies or tariffs. They are a direct response to Russian aggression to Vladimir Putin's willingness to lay waste to Ukraine. As NATO Secretary General Rutte has said, and I quote, "We are all on the eastern flank now."

The reality of this shared vulnerability is clear. If Putin wins in Ukraine, he will not stop there. He's already sent troops into Belarus. He threatens the Balkans, the Baltic states, and the Black Sea, and Russia's ambitions also continue to play out over our own borders, through the Kremlin's repeated attacks on our financial institutions and energy infrastructure. That's why I don't understand the Administration's continued refusal to lower the price cap for Russian oil sanctions at the G7. It would've put more pressure on Putin.

I think Congress needs to act, and we have legislation supported by 82 members of the Senate that will put in place additional sanctions on Vladimir Putin. I think we should get that done as soon as possible. I also think that we shouldn't stop there, that NATO membership should be on the table for Ukraine. NATO's open door policy enshrined in the Washington Treaty should not be up for negotiation to satisfy what Vladimir Putin wants, but its membership should determine who has the opportunity to get into the alliance, and Ukraine's membership would strengthen that. They have the largest army in Europe, the most experienced army in Europe at this point, and we are developing cutting edge countermeasures based on Ukraine's real time experience against Russian systems.

We should also not forget the power of alliances in taking on adversaries like Russia, or Iran, or others. As Senator Risch has rightly said, the NATO alliance is the most successful political and defensive organization that's ever been on the face of the planet. I agree with that, and I hope our witnesses today can speak to the full picture for NATO, the challenges that NATO should address at this year's summit, as well as the opportunities and advantages that NATO offers each of its members.

So, I very much look forward to hearing your thoughts and to our discussion. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

We have now two distinguished witnesses we're going to hear from. I'd ask you to keep your remarks to about 5 minutes. You're going to get questions from the committee. If you have other remarks or you go beyond 5 minutes, if you'd put them in writing for the record, we will see that they are included in the record of this hearing. And again, we sincerely appreciate you coming here.

We're going to start with Mr. Peter Rough. He's a senior fellow and director of the Center on Europe and Eurasia at the Hudson Institute, where he focuses on U.S. national security, defense, and foreign policy toward Europe. He writes and comments on U.S. foreign policy and regularly briefs official delegations, news media, public intellectuals, academics, and business leaders, and convenes several Track 1.5 dialogues.

In the past Mr. Rough served in White House Office of Strategic initiatives, USAID, and U.S. Army Special Operations Command



Strategic Initiatives Group. He holds his BA from the George Washington University, and MA in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He's a member of the boards of the American Main Street Initiative, the Bastion Institute, and has been named a next generation leader at several think tanks, including the Munich Security Conference, which we all know.

Mr. Rough, the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF MR. PETER ROUGH, SENIOR FELLOW AND DIRECTOR, CENTER ON EUROPE AND EURASIA, HUDSON INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. ROUGH. Thank you, Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and members of the committee, thank you for the honor of testifying today and for your attention to the upcoming NATO Summit. My name is Peter Rough, and I'm the director of the Center on Europe and Eurasia at Hudson Institute. My views are my own and should not be construed as representing the position of Hudson.

With your permission, I'd like to take this opportunity to summarize my written testimony, which I'd like to submit for the record.

For starters, it's worth repeating that Europe remains of vital importance to the United States with the stock of two way foreign direct investment totaling \$7.5 trillion in 2023. In fact, the Netherlands, host of next week's NATO Summit, holds the largest FDI position in the United States of any country in the world.

Worryingly, the peace and prosperity of Europe are under threat. Russia's reconstitution of its Leningrad Military District, de facto takeover of Belarus, plans to expand and enlarge its ground forces, establishment of bases and rail networks along the Russian-Finnish border, and waves of hybrid attacks have all reinforced the truth that Russia remains implacably hostile to the alliance.

A recent Danish intelligence assessment even characterized Russian re-armament as having "changed character from reconstruction to an intensified military build up." As NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte put it rather dramatically last week, Europe now faces a choice: "Either invest in defense or learn to speak Russian."

That message is resonating. Two weeks ago, defense ministers in Brussels agreed to new capability targets that represent on average a 30 percent increase over existing goals. At the NATO Summit, the alliance will agree to a new investment pledge: 5 percent of gross domestic product for defense, of which 3.5 percent is to be set aside for hard power, while 1.5 percent is to be earmarked for related costs such as cybersecurity and infrastructure.

Central to this breakthrough is Germany, which has taken up the mantle of leadership under its new Chancellor, Friedrich Merz. In a refreshing break from its recent past, Germany has now committed to convert its economic power into military capabilities. This sets up a new NATO bargain: Five for five. In return for NATO adopting its new defense spending target, President Trump should reiterate the United States' ironclad commitment to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which obligates member states to mutual defense.

To turn promises into reality, NATO should consider supplementing its defense ministerials with a finance ministerial comprised of allied ministers of finance, many of whom in parliamentary democracies control their country's purse strings.

There is no bigger deterrent to Russian aggression in Europe than forward deployed U.S. forces. In his own words, General Cavoli has "consistently recommended" that we maintain our current force posture to counteract Russia's local superiority on the eastern flank of the alliance. As we have seen this week, U.S. bases in Europe project American power into other theaters. The KC-135 Stratotankers and KC-46 Pegasuses that deployed from the United States on Sunday and Monday are now at air bases in Spain, Greece, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, as the President weighs his options on Iran. Our Ambassador to NATO, Ambassador Whitaker has promised to "make sure that there are no security gaps," in Europe. As the U.S. undertakes this global force posture review, this will be especially important for the strategic enablers, which Europe still lacks.

Russia cannot take on NATO on its own. Unfortunately, it now enjoys close defense industrial ties with the People's Republic of China, whose supply of machine tools and microelectronics have powered the Russian war on Ukraine. Russia's drones, which now count for more casualties in Ukraine than any other weapon system, are derivatives of Iran's Shahed family of unmanned aerial vehicles. Meanwhile, North Korean shells now make up half of all Russian artillery fired in certain sectors of the front line.

Earlier this year, a division sized force of North Korean troops played a decisive role in Russia's counteroffensive in Kursk Oblast. In return, Russia has provided each of its partners with diplomatic, technological, and economic benefits. If the U.S. cannot prevent the alignment of these revisionist actors, it should, at the very least, vector Europe's stark opposition to Russia into a tougher transatlantic stance against China, Iran, and North Korea.

As the President suggested at the G7 2 days ago, whatever sanctions Europeans are requesting of the United States should be mirrored by similar actions from our allies on the continent.

Finally, given the presence of major war in eastern Europe, no NATO Summit can ignore the plight of Ukraine. It is not expected that Ukraine will receive significant mention in the Summit Declaration, but leaders should plan now rather than later for how to support Ukraine as U.S. congressional funding runs out over the coming months.

Europe will fill gaps and shoulder much of the load, but for those systems that Europe cannot replace, NATO leaders should begin exploring U.S. attitudes toward either another supplemental or direct military sales. For example, the U.S. could backfill Europe's air defenses as those countries transfer interceptors to Ukraine.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to the discussion.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Peter Rough follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Mr. Peter Rough**

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

## EUROPE'S STRATEGIC BACKDROP

Europe remains of vital importance to the United States. Last year, total U.S. trade in goods and services with Europe exceeded \$2 trillion while European foreign direct investment (FDI) in the U.S. stood at \$3.5 trillion and U.S. FDI in Europe reached \$4 trillion.<sup>1</sup> The Netherlands, host of next week's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit, holds the largest FDI position in the United States of any country in the world.<sup>2</sup> At one-third of global gross domestic product (GDP), the transatlantic economy dwarfs that of all other U.S. relationships in the world, including with Asia.

Worryingly, the transatlantic alliance is under threat. Russian President Vladimir Putin remains implacably opposed to the U.S.-European partnership, which he seeks to undermine at every opportunity. In recent months, European intelligence services have issued one warning after another about the prospect of Russian aggression against a NATO member state.<sup>3</sup>

In February, the Danish Defense Intelligence Service forecast that under the right conditions, Russia would be able to begin hostilities with a neighboring state within 6 months of a cease-fire in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> *The Economist* reported last month that a separate Danish intelligence assessment characterized Russian rearmament as having "changed character from reconstruction to an intensified military build-up."<sup>5</sup> Russia's reconstitution of its Leningrad Military District, de facto takeover of Belarus,<sup>6</sup> plans to expand its ground forces,<sup>7</sup> and establishment of bases and rail networks along the Russian-Finnish border<sup>8</sup> have all reinforced to Europe the unavoidable truth that Russia's postwar focus will be on NATO. As Bruno Kahl, the outgoing head of Germany's Federal Intelligence Agency, stated last week, "We see that NATO's collective defence promise is to be tested . . . We are very sure, and we have intelligence evidence to back this up, that Ukraine is only one step on Russia's path towards the West."<sup>9</sup>

## A NEW NATO BARGAIN: FIVE FOR FIVE

Europe now faces a choice, as NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte put it last week: either invest in defense or "learn to speak Russian."<sup>10</sup> Europe's post-cold war fallback option, to offload deterrence onto the United States, is no longer tenable.

Since returning to the White House, U.S. President Donald Trump has walked a tightrope, exposing allies in Europe to just enough Russian power to engender burden-shifting without going so far as to risk another security crisis on the continent. Thus far, this approach has achieved a high return on investment, most notably by prodding Europe's economic giant, Germany, into exempting defense spending from

<sup>1</sup>Daniel S. Hamilton and Joseph P. Quinlan, *The Transatlantic Economy 2025* (Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University SAIS/Transatlantic Leadership Network, 2025), <https://transatlantic.amchameu.eu/>.

<sup>2</sup>Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Direct Investment by Country and Industry, 2023," news release, July 23, 2024, <https://www.bea.gov/news/2024/direct-investment-country-and-industry-2023>.

<sup>3</sup>Simon Saradzhyan, "Would Russia Attack NATO and, If So, When?," In the Thick of It (blog), June 5, 2025, <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/would-russia-attack-nato-and-if-so-when>.

<sup>4</sup>"Opdateret vurdering af truslen fra Rusland mod Rigsfællesskabet" [Updated assessment of the threat from Russia against the Kingdom of Denmark], Danish Defense Intelligence Service, February 9, 2025, [https://www.fe-ddis.dk/globalassets/fe/dokumenter/2025/trusselsvurderinger/-20250209\\_opdateret\\_vurdering\\_af\\_truslen\\_fra\\_rusland\\_mod-.pdf](https://www.fe-ddis.dk/globalassets/fe/dokumenter/2025/trusselsvurderinger/-20250209_opdateret_vurdering_af_truslen_fra_rusland_mod-.pdf).

<sup>5</sup>"Would Vladimir Putin Attack NATO?," *The Economist*, May 8, 2025, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2025/05/08/would-vladimir-putin-attack-nato>.

<sup>6</sup>"Putin Signs Agreement Offering Russia's Security Guarantees to Ally Belarus," Associated Press, December 6, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-belarus-security-agreement-nuclear-doctrine-c07ef5d341f93be6934ac14a77b58f8b>.

<sup>7</sup>"Putin Orders Military to Boost Troop Numbers by 180,000 to 1.5 Million as Ukraine Fighting Continues," Associated Press, September 16, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-military-numbers-9c5554302486adfe7b3d69cb297f8a98>.

<sup>8</sup>Jeffrey Gettleman, Amelia Nierenberg, and Johanna Lemola, "Russia Beefs Up Bases Near Finland's Border," *New York Times*, May 19, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/world/europe/russia-finland-border.html>; <https://yle.fi/a/74-20135804>.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Escritt, "Russia Could Send 'Little Green Men' to Test NATO's Resolve, German Intelligence Boss Warns," Reuters, June 9, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-has-plans-test-natos-resolve-german-intelligence-chief-warns-2025-06-09/>; Nick Alipour, "Russia planning attack on Nato 'to test article 5', warns Germany," *The Times of London*, June 10, 2025, <https://www.thetimes.com/world/russia-ukraine-war/article/attack-nato-germany-9700tn2z2>.

<sup>10</sup>Chatham House, "NATO Chief Mark Rutte Warns Russia Could Use Military Force Against Alliance in Five Years," news release, June 9, 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/06/nato-chief-mark-rutte-warns-russia-could-use-military-force-against-alliance-five-years>.

its constitutional debt brake. Over time, the upshot could be hundreds of billions of euros in new defense outlays.

Two weeks ago, defense ministers paved the way in Brussels by agreeing to new capability targets that represent, on average, a 30 percent increase over existing goals. To turn promises into reality, NATO should consider supplementing its defense ministerials with a new finance ministerial, comprised of allied ministers of finance, many of whom in parliamentary democracies control their country's purse strings. As my Hudson Institute colleague, Luke Coffey, has argued, this would prove far more useful than annual leader-level summits, which have proven costly, time-consuming, and often unnecessary bordering on the counterproductive.

To be sure, the same Trumpian style that is pushing Europe toward these increased defense spending targets has also raised questions about America's staying power. Left unattended, these anxieties may spur allies to engage in hedging by way of so-called European strategic autonomy, with all the attendant downsides such an approach would entail for U.S. defense contractors and America's leverage against China.

At the NATO Summit, therefore, President Trump should look to convert Europe's unease into deliverables. Thanks to his leadership, NATO stands on the cusp of an ambitious new investment pledge: 5 percent of GDP for defense, of which 3.5 percent is to be set aside for hard power while 1.5 percent is to be earmarked for related costs, such as cybersecurity and infrastructure.

At President Trump's urging and Secretary General Rutte's behest, NATO should ratify the new 5 percent goal, to be achieved over a 5-year time horizon, with tightly defined categories for what constitutes defense spending; in return, President Trump should preempt any moves toward strategic autonomy by reiterating his ironclad commitment to Article V of the Washington Treaty, which commits allies to mutual defense.

Such a "five for five" arrangement would have the additional benefit of challenging the U.S. to make larger investments in our own military going forward.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, it would force Russia to think twice about any moves against NATO.

#### U.S. FORCE PRESENCE

There is no bigger deterrent to Russian aggression in Europe than forward-deployed U.S. forces. Today, the U.S. stations just over 65,000 troops in permanent facilities across Europe, with an additional 20,000 forces rotating through the continent since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In total, the number of U.S. servicemembers across Europe remains far below the historical average of the past seventy-five years.<sup>12</sup>

The expectation across the alliance is that the U.S. will downsize its troop presence in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Although U.S. Ambassador to NATO Matt Whitaker has communicated to partners that in-depth consultations will not begin until after next week's Summit, the status of American forces in Europe will loom over the proceedings.<sup>14</sup>

The preference of our senior military commander is clear. "Since we originally surged forces forward in 2022, we have periodically reviewed for structure both the military and policy level," General Christopher Cavoli, the outgoing head of EUCOM and SACEUR argued before the House Armed Services Committee in April, "and I have consistently recommended throughout that period to maintain the forces we surged forward, and I would continue to do so now if asked."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Dustin Walker, "Will the U.S. Pull Its Weight in NATO?," *Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/will-america-pull-its-weight-in-nato-trump-gdp-target-spend-717dc8c3>.

<sup>12</sup>Data for military and civilian personnel by service/agency by state/country, Defense Manpower Data Center, accessed June 2025, <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>.

<sup>13</sup>Gordon Lubold, Dan De Luce, and Courtney Kube "Pentagon Considering Proposal to Cut Thousands of Troops from Europe, Officials Say," NBC News, April 8, 2025. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/pentagon-considering-proposal-cut-thousands-troops-europe-officials-sa-rcna199603>.

<sup>14</sup>"U.S. Ambassador to NATO Reveals Trump's Plan to Reassess American Military Presence in Europe After NATO Hague Summit," *Baltic Sentinel*, May 21, 2025, <https://balticsentinel.eu/8253450/u-s-ambassador-to-nato-reveals-trump-s-plan-to-reassess-american-military-presence-in-europe-after-nato-hague-summit>.

<sup>15</sup>Hearing to Discuss U.S. Military Posture and National Security Challenges in Europe before the House Committee on Armed Services, 118th Cong. (2025) (Statement of Gen. Christopher G. Cavoli, Commander, U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe), <https://armedservices.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=5030>.

The reasons are myriad. An on-the-ground presence allows U.S. forces to absorb local factors like terrain and weather, deepen interoperability with allies, benefit from the savings of host nation support, and project power around the world. As my Hudson Institute colleague, Dan Kochis, reminds us in a forthcoming paper, the U.S. forces ordered to respond to the attack on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012, were based in Spain at Naval Station Rota.

Most of all, U.S. forces in Europe counteract Russian advantages. Although NATO is a superior fighting force, Russia has local superiority on the eastern flank of the alliance. It can deploy forces opposite NATO countries that lack strategic depth and heavy divisions. Moreover, because NATO is a defensive alliance while Russia is a revisionist power, Putin can decide to initiate hostilities at a time and place of his choosing secure in the knowledge that NATO is highly unlikely to act first.

These factors make it all the more important that NATO maintains a forward presence and adequately resources the NATO Force Model's multi-tiered system of force generation.<sup>16</sup> Ambassador Whitaker has promised "to make sure that there are no security gaps" in Europe.<sup>17</sup> For now, this will require the continued deployment of U.S. strategic enablers, from Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets and Electromagnetic Warfare (EW) capabilities to Strategic Airlift, Ballistic Missile Defenses (BMD), and Command and Control (C2) infrastructure.

#### RUSSIA'S HYBRID WAY OF WAR

To date, Russia has eschewed major war with NATO. Instead, it operates just below the threshold of conventional war by prosecuting a campaign of gray zone attacks that numbers in the dozens, if not hundreds, of incidents.<sup>18</sup> These range from funneling illegal immigrants toward NATO borders to undertaking arson attacks on major public venues.<sup>19</sup> Moscow even reportedly planned the assassination of Armin Papperger, the CEO of Rheinmetall, one of Europe's largest arms manufacturers, and planted incendiary devices on Western cargo planes, with plans to target air-planes bound for the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Russia's hybrid war is now discussed at nearly every NATO ministerial, but the alliance's response remains deliberate bordering on the tepid. This month, the alliance adopted a new hybrid strategy, but it has mostly confined itself to three categories of countermeasures. First, NATO has improved information sharing within the alliance and publicly blamed Russia for its operations. Second, it has sought to drive up the costs of Russia's actions. In December, for example, Finnish forces boarded the oil tanker *Eagle S* and took legal steps against it for dragging its anchor across an undersea power cable, an increasingly common occurrence.<sup>21</sup> Third, NATO has pulled together an observation mission in the Baltic Sea. In January, NATO launched an operation called Baltic Sentry to patrol and track Russia's shadow fleet of tankers.<sup>22</sup>

These defensive measures have not deterred Russia.<sup>23</sup> At little cost to itself, Russia has saddled the alliance with huge expenses, like repairing damaged undersea infrastructure. NATO members may need to consider additional countermeasures, like offensive cyber operations, to reestablish deterrence in the realm of hybrid oper-

<sup>16</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, "NATO Is Not Ready for War: Assessing the Military Balance between the Alliance and Russia," Hudson Institute, June 28, 2024, <https://www.hudson.org/security-alliances/nato-not-ready-war-assessing-military-balance-between-alliance-russia-can-kasapoglu>.

<sup>17</sup> "Digital Press Briefing: U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO Ambassador Matthew Whitaker," U.S. Department of State, June 4, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/digital-press-briefing-u-s-permanent-representative-to-nato-ambassador-matthew-whitaker>.

<sup>18</sup> Sam Clark, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare Could Cause 'Substantial' Casualties, Senior NATO Official Says," Politico, December 29, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-hybrid-warfare-defense-substantial-casualties-james-appathurai-nato/>.

<sup>19</sup> Marek Strzelecki, "Poland Says Russian Secret Service Behind 2024 Fire in Warsaw Shopping Centre," Reuters, May 11, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/poland-says-russian-secret-service-behind-2024-fire-warsaw-shopping-centre-2025-05-11/>.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Schwirtz and Julian E. Barnes, "Russia Plotted to Put Incendiary Devices on Cargo Planes, Officials Say," November 5, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/05/world/europe/russia-plot-dhl-planes.html>.

<sup>21</sup> In May, Estonia's navy intercepted the oil tanker *Jaguar* in the Gulf of Finland, leading Russia to dispatch a Su-35 fighter jet in response, one of only hundreds of incidents annually of Russia violating Baltic air space.

<sup>22</sup> NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), "Baltic Sentry to Enhance NATO's Presence in the Baltic Sea," news release, January 14, 2025, <https://shape.nato.int/news-releases/baltic-sentry-to-enhance-natos-presence-in-the-baltic-sea>.

<sup>23</sup> Victor Jack, Lucia Mackenzie, and Sam Clark, "Europe's new war with Russia: Deep sea sabotage," *Politico*, April 7, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-sabotage-undersea-cables-baltic-sea-europe-war/>.

ations. Moreover, some NATO members have begun to explore and define at what threshold a hybrid attack could lead to the invocation of Article V.<sup>24</sup>

#### RUSSIA'S ALLIANCE SYSTEM

Russia cannot take on NATO on its own. In fact, it still borrows power from the West today. In 2024, the European Union (EU) saw a rebound in Russian gas imports, even as the European Commission works to end Russian energy imports in the next 2 years.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Russia continues to use systems in Ukraine that rely on dual-use technologies sourced from Western commercial markets. As a first step, therefore, the West must redouble its efforts to end its Russian energy imports and block Russian shell companies from circumventing export controls.

More broadly, however, it will have to tighten the noose on Russia's global partnerships. In the 2019 London Declaration, NATO flagged "China's growing influence" as a factor for the alliance for the first time.<sup>26</sup> By the time of the Washington Summit last year, NATO expressed "profound concern" for the "coercive policies" of China and its deepening strategic partnership with Russia. Beijing's vast defense industrial support for the Russian war machine, especially its provision of microelectronics and machine tools, has proven of the utmost significance for Russia in Ukraine. It is an open question if Russia could continue the war in Ukraine without Chinese support.

Iranian drones and North Korean artillery have also allowed Russia to defy expectations and sustain a high operational tempo in Ukraine. Many of Russia's drones, which now account for more casualties in Ukraine than any other weapon system, are derivatives of Iran's Shahed family of unmanned aerial vehicles. Meanwhile, North Korean shells now make up half of all Russian artillery fired in certain sectors of the front-line. Earlier this year, a division-sized force of North Korean troops played a decisive role in Russia's counteroffensive in Kursk Oblast. In return, Russia has provided each of its partners with diplomatic, technological, and economic benefits.

If the U.S. cannot prevent the alignment of these revisionist actors, it should at the very least vector Europe's visceral opposition to Russia into a tougher transatlantic stance against China, Iran, and North Korea. For example, the U.S. should encourage allies to tighten their screening of Chinese greenfield investments and FDI into critical areas like Artificial Intelligence (AI), microelectronics, quantum technologies, space, drones, and pharmaceuticals.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the U.S. should make clear to its NATO partners and the EU and its member states that Chinese control of critical infrastructure, from telecommunications networks to some 30 port terminals across Europe, poses a threat to the alliance.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. and much of Europe are treaty allies; it is entirely appropriate for Washington to ask our closest partners to choose between the United States and our adversaries on matters of security.

#### FUTURE OF UKRAINE

Of course, the war in Ukraine will loom over this Summit as it has over all debates on transatlantic security for the past 3 years. And yet, it is already clear that in The Hague leaders will not take significant political decisions on the war; just like at this week's meeting of the Group of Seven, the war will receive hardly a mention in the NATO Summit Declaration.

At minimum, though, alliance leaders would be wise to revisit the extraordinary advances in Ukraine's military capabilities, especially in drone warfare. Today, despite the establishment of the Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre (JATEC), NATO is struggling to keep pace with Russia and Ukraine as they iterate

<sup>24</sup>"Russian Acts of Sabotage May Lead to NATO Invoking Article 5, Says German Intel Chief," Reuters, November 27, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-hybrid-attacks-may-lead-nato-invoking-article-5-says-german-intel-chief-2024-11-27/>.

<sup>25</sup>Victor Jack and Louise Guillot, "EU's Top Russian LNG Buyers Wary of Brussels' Gas Ban," *Politico*, June 3, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eus-top-russian-lng-buyers-wary-of-brussels-gas-ban/>; European Commission, "Roadmap to Fully End EU Dependency on Russian Energy," news release, May 6, 2025, [https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/roadmap-fully-end-eu-dependency-russian-energy-2025-05-06\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/roadmap-fully-end-eu-dependency-russian-energy-2025-05-06_en).

<sup>26</sup>"London Declaration," NATO, December 4, 2019, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm).

<sup>27</sup>Camille Gijs and Francesca Micheletti, "EU Countries Soften Push to Stop Chinese Tech Buyouts," *Politico*, May 6, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-countries-soften-push-to-curb-chinese-access-to-sensitive-tech/>.

<sup>28</sup>Martina Sapio, "Chinese Companies Bought Up European Ports—and Now Brussels Is Starting to Worry," *Politico*, May 9, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/chinese-companies-bought-up-european-ports-and-now-brussels-is-starting-to-worry/>.

new forms of drone warfare in real time on the battlefield. Without becoming a party to the conflict, NATO countries will need to consider a more robust in-country presence to supplement the analysis being undertaken at JATEC in Bydgoszcz, Poland. This holds doubly true for Western industry. Ukraine is eager to share lessons-learned from the battlefield as a form of repayment for Western support; we should seize that opportunity.

Second, NATO leaders should plan now rather than later for how to supply Ukraine as U.S. Congressional funding runs out over the coming months. Europe will fill gaps and shoulder much of the load, but for those systems that Europe cannot replace, NATO leaders should begin exploring U.S. attitudes toward direct military sales. For example, the U.S. could backfill Europe's air defenses as those countries transfer interceptors to Ukraine.

Finally, given that Russian projectiles have periodically transited NATO airspace or even crashed onto allied soil, leaders in The Hague should consider the establishment of a joint liaison office to facilitate coordination between NATO's air policing and air and missile defense architecture and the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Alliance members may even wish to consider authorizing troops in Poland and Romania to shoot down Russian missiles and drones flying across western Ukraine toward NATO.<sup>29</sup>

#### EU DEFENSE SPENDING

The NATO Summit in The Hague will be the first meeting of allied leaders since the EU adopted its ReArm Europe Plan. This initiative should be applauded for exempting up to 1.5 percent of GDP over 4 years in defense spending from the fiscal strictures of the Stability and Growth Pact. In theory, this will benefit U.S. and European defense industry alike. Moreover, the EU's Security Action for Europe (SAFE) instrument establishes a long-maturity €150 billion credit line for EU members. Under SAFE, 65 percent of procurements for any one program must come from EU states, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries of Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Iceland, and/or Ukraine. By including Ukraine in its regulations, the EU is sending an important signal of support to Kyiv.

At the same time, while encouraging Europe to buildup its own defense industrial base is a U.S. priority, regulations that dictate where euros are spent warrant special scrutiny. This applies to SAFE but also to the European Defense Industrial Program, a modest €1.5 billion EU spending program to be unveiled in the coming months that is widely viewed as a template for how future EU defense euros will be spent.

If a non-EU member like Switzerland, which has withheld export licenses to an allied country attempting to support Ukraine, is eligible for SAFE, so, too, should the United States qualify for contracts above the 35 percent value threshold. Most worryingly, however, SAFE mandates European design authority for certain classes of weapons, which could hamper the participation of U.S. defense firms altogether. Moreover, Asian countries like Japan and South Korea with which the EU has struck a Security and Defense Partnership receive preferential treatment over the U.S. to participate in procurement programs. At the very least, the U.S. should insist that procurement decisions are consistent with NATO capability targets and that SAFE design stipulations do not serve as templates for future European defense spending.

Ultimately, NATO Summits are opportunities for leaders to exchange views and communicate directly with one another. Sudden, unexplained policy decisions, like the Biden administration's decision in January to assign allies like Poland second-tier status through its AI diffusion rule, weaken the alliance. President Trump is off to a strong start in reversing that decision and landing spending commitments from our partners.

Now is the time to seal the deal through consistent, predictable policymaking that raises the standard for the alliance.

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to Dr. Alina Polyakova. And she's president and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis, where she focuses on transatlantic relations and European security. She's also the Donald Marron Senior Fellow at the Henry A. Kissinger Center for

<sup>29</sup> Luke Coffey, "Getting Ukraine to a Position of Strength: A Strategy for the Trump Administration," Hudson Institute, November 19, 2004, <https://www.hudson.org/foreign-policy/getting-ukraine-position-strength-strategy-trump-administration-luke-coffey>.

Global Affairs at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

Previously, she has held roles at the Brookings Institution and Atlantic Council, among others. She has also held numerous prestigious fellowships, including at the National Science Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Fulbright Foundation, among others.

She serves on the board of the Free Russia Foundation and is a member of the Leadership Council for Women in National Security and the Scientific Council of the Elcano Royal Institute. She holds a PhD and MA in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, and a bachelor's in economics and sociology from Emory University.

Dr. Polyakova, the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF DR. ALINA POLYAKOVA, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Well, thank you so much, Chairman Risch, and Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished members of the committee. It is a true honor to address you today on a critical matter of U.S. national security, the 2025 NATO Summit. You should know that the views expressed in this testimony do not reflect those of the Center for European Policy Analysis of which I'm president and CEO, or its staff and fellows.

The NATO Summit in The Hague next week convenes a pivotal moment as the transatlantic community confronts an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape marked by Russia's war in Ukraine, and the growing cooperation between Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, who collectively aim to undermine the United States and our allies. Therefore, the summit 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 the case today, the alliance remains central to the vital national security interests of defending the U.S. homeland. NATO's European allies are poised to commit to 5 percent of GDP to defense spending, which is a significant and appropriate level given the growing Russian threat to NATO and the broader geopolitical environment. This new commitment signifies a profound transformation positioning Europe, as an example for other partners, a point very aptly made by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and his remarks to Indo-Pacific partners last month.

Indeed, the Trump administration deserves a great deal of credit for pushing European allies to step up in such a significant way in defense. Therefore, U.S. leadership, both from the executive branch and also from the Members of Congress, will be instrumental in ensuring that these financial commitments translate into concrete defense capabilities that will ultimately benefit global U.S. national security interests.

Showing Allied unity at the summit will serve as an important deterrent. In my written testimony I provide specific examples on three key points I'll summarize here. First, Europe is indeed stepping up, but U.S. leadership and commitment, in principle, people,



and resources, remain critical for NATO's continued success as the strongest military alliance in history.

European allies are taking the right steps by setting these ambitious spending targets to rebalance the burden sharing relationship. And as Secretary General Rutte recently said, it is in all our interest to have a NATO that is stronger, fairer, and more lethal. But while Europe takes 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. That requires years of planning, as our military commanders will likely confirm.

Europe would be a sitting duck for Putin without U.S. presence, capabilities, and political leadership for NATO. The U.S. is indeed the indispensable nation for NATO and the key enabler for European capabilities as the alliance confronts Putin's growing appetite to use military force in Europe.

Number two, Russia is the threat today to NATO that we feared it was at the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As General Cavoli recently testified, Russia's military has shown a remarkable ability to adapt and reconstitute.

Thanks to support from its partners Russia is also carrying out an increasingly aggressive shadow war against NATO in Europe, and it is on a path to long term societal militarization. These are trends that we did not see even during the cold war era, and NATO is not well positioned to respond to the dual challenges of Russia's conventional, non-conventional threats. This means that Russia's actions are signaling that Russia will prepare and is actively preparing for direct military confrontation with NATO, and we need a common and comprehensive strategy to respond to this threat.

Number three, my last point, NATO's open door policy is a core asset to the alliance and the United States. Since the end of the cold war, NATO has doubled in size from 16 to 32 members. The integration of the former Soviet bloc states in the 1990s and early 2000s has ensured not only stability in Europe, it ensured that these countries would be the strongest pro-American allies, which is still the case today.

The most recent inclusion of Finland, Sweden has added significantly to native's capabilities, force posture, and strategic depth. Ukraine will also be a significant asset to NATO, bringing the largest most battle tested army to Europe with the most cutting edge capabilities.

With that, I yield the rest of my time, and I thank you for your time and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Alina Polyakova follows:]

#### **Prepared Statement of Dr. Alina Polyakova**

##### 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 percent GDP defense spending target. Now, 23 of 32 NATO allies are expected to meet or exceed this target by 2024.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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. 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 percent of NATO's rapid reaction capacity and contributing the highest proportion (16 percent or approximately \$650 million) of the cost share for NATO's

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49198.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm)

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

common funding.<sup>3</sup> Historically, overall US spending on defense has far exceeded the 2 percent threshold that Allies agreed on almost 20 years ago and formalized at the 2014 Wales Summit. On average, the US spent 3.52 percent of GDP in defense between 2014 and 2024 but spending has been decreasing in recent years to 3.38 percent 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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 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:<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> It has also been heavily used in counterterrorism missions, including operations against ISIS, and enables a rapid US military response in the region.<sup>10</sup>

3. Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base (Romania)

a. Mihail 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.<sup>11</sup>

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 Baseline 9 Ballistic Missile Defense systems, forming a key component of EUCOM’s regional missile defense strategies.<sup>12</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_67655.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm)

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

<sup>5</sup> [https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025\\_useucom\\_posture\\_statement\\_-\\_hasc.pdf](https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025_useucom_posture_statement_-_hasc.pdf)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

b. RAF Mildenhall, together with its sister base at Lakenheath, hosts the largest United States Air Force presence in the United Kingdom.<sup>15</sup> It is home to the 100th Air Refueling Wing, the only permanent US air refueling wing in the European theater.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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 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."<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> By 2024, 23 of NATO's 32 members were expected to meet or had met the 2 percent GDP spending benchmark.<sup>20</sup> Poland has significantly escalated its spending to 4.12 percent of GDP in 2024 (plans to reach 4.7 percent in 2025), making it NATO's top defense spender by GDP.<sup>21</sup> Germany reached 2.12 percent of GDP in 2024 and approved a €500 billion fund for defense in 2025.<sup>22</sup> France raised spending to 2.06 percent of GDP in 2024, intending to reach 3.5 percent.<sup>23</sup> Countries like Italy and Spain have vowed to reach 2 percent in 2025, while Sweden and the Netherlands aim for 5 percent.<sup>24</sup>

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

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

<sup>15</sup> <https://55wa.org/raf-mildenhall/>

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

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

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_235867.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235867.htm)

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

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_49198.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2025/772846/>

EPRS\_ATAG(2025)772846\_EN.pdf

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

This rapid increase in defense spending and the push for higher GDP targets at the Hague Summit (5 percent with 3.5 percent for core defense) indicate a fundamental shift in Europe's strategic posture and thinking. If European allies meet the 3.5 percent 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 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."<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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 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.<sup>27</sup>

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

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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.<sup>28</sup>

However, roughly 12,000 troops in the Baltics are explicitly "insufficient to counter a Russian land offensive."<sup>29</sup> The Nordic Response exercise in March 2024 exposed gaps in rapid reinforcement capabilities, with only 40 percent of planned logistics support arriving within 72 hours.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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 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 percent 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.

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm)

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

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> [https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025\\_ousecom\\_posture\\_statement\\_-\\_hasc.pdf](https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025_ousecom_posture_statement_-_hasc.pdf)

## 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 3 months than all of NATO can produce in a year.<sup>32</sup> While NATO states struggle to fully reach 2 percent spending on defense, Russia's military expenditure reached an estimated \$149 billion in 2024, representing 7.1 percent of Russia's GDP and accounting for almost 20 percent of all Russian government spending.<sup>33</sup>

This marks a 38 percent 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 5 years."<sup>34</sup>

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."<sup>35</sup> This reconstitution is occurring at a rate "faster than most analysts had anticipated," defying initial Western expectations of longterm degradation.<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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."<sup>40</sup>

## 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 recruitment quotas and offering military service contracts to university students facing deferment or poor academic performance.<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, Russia is coercing Ukrainian men in occupied territories into signing military service contracts, with reports of over 55,000 men recruited from occupied

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_235867.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235867.htm)

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

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_235867.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235867.htm)

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/gen-eral\\_cavoli\\_opening\\_statements.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/gen-eral_cavoli_opening_statements.pdf)

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

<sup>37</sup> [https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/koizumi\\_02.html](https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/koizumi_02.html)

<sup>38</sup> [https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025\\_\\_usecom\\_posture\\_statement\\_-\\_hasc.pdf](https://armedservices.house.gov/uploadedfiles/2025__usecom_posture_statement_-_hasc.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

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

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

Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

### 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> They are also reportedly experimenting with jet-powered Dan-M drones for combat, initially designed as training targets.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

Efforts also include centralizing control over drone and AI development companies and restricting foreign cloud servers to enhance self-sufficiency.<sup>49</sup> Russia is also belatedly constructing hangars and other defensive infrastructure at airfields to protect aircraft 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.<sup>50</sup>

## 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

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

<sup>43</sup> <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/8c54abb4-3c6d-94b5c-be05-727f612afccc>;

<https://jamestown.org/program/veterans-of-war-against-ukraine-become-new-russian-elite/>

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

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

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

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



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.<sup>51</sup> 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

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 percent in Sweden, 80 percent 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.

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

*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 decisionmaking, 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 percent 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 percent GDP defense as a bare minimum and, if agreed at the Hague Summit, to deliver the 3.5–5 percent 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 percent 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 Data base: For additional confirmed spending data

Member State	2024 Expected Defense Spending (percent GDP)	Announced Target/Commitment (percent 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%

Member State	2024 Expected Defense Spending (percent GDP)	Announced Target/Commitment (percent GDP and/or timeframe)
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.
- UK noted rising concern over undersea cable sabotage. The UK reported 12 suspected incidents from 2021 to 2025 linked to Russian 'shadow fleet' vessels.

Senator RISCH. Well, again thank you to both of you. You both have deep, deep knowledge of the matter that is near and dear to everybody's heart on this committee. We embrace NATO and want to see it continue to prosper. It's, I believe, truly stronger today than it's ever been. Putin seems to never miss an opportunity to make a mistake. And the mistakes he's made has actually done a lot to strengthen NATO, not the least of which is to add two new members in the considerably longer border of his with NATO. So, we're going to continue to support NATO in every way we can.

I have a question for each, and I like your thoughts. I believe although Putin has made a lot of mistakes, there's a mistake I think he won't make, and that is, I don't think he will engage militarily a NATO country. We have committed to our allies that Article 5 means exactly what it says. That includes the Baltic states and everybody between there and Los Angeles.

And I personally met with the Baltics right after the invasion of Ukraine. They were concerned, and I assured them that our position and policy of the United States is not one square inch of NATO ground will be given up, not one square inch. I think that message has been conveyed to Putin loud and clear. I think he understands it, and I don't think he'll make that mistake, which would be a disaster for his country.

Your thoughts, please, starting with you, Mr. Rough.

Mr. ROUGH. Well, sir, I think that deterrence is a matter of capabilities and will. And I would just submit there could be three or four measures that NATO might want to undertake to strengthen Article 5.

Number one, Putin has been undertaking a campaign of hybrid attacks, numbering in the dozens, if not hundreds, of incidents across the NATO alliance for years now. It might be worth considering calling an Article 4 meeting of the North Atlantic Council to discuss how to push back and deter against these hybrid attacks.

Operation Baltic Sentry kicked off in January to guard against sabotage attacks, but thus far, information sharing and some legal actions have been the only pushback we've seen from the alliance on this.

Second, speaking of the Baltics, it might be worth considering upgrading the battle group in Estonia to a brigade level. We have this now in Lithuania, thanks to the German brigade as of last month, which was activated.

The Estonians have invested more in long range fires in prepositioning stocks.

It's very expensive to host a brigade, but really, the issue there is the framework nation. The UK only has two maneuverable

heavy brigades in the British Army today. We need to find a way, I think, to deploy more forward and that instance.

And then third, it might be worthwhile considering the alliance in Romania and Poland shooting down missiles and drones, which are violating NATO airspace. We've seen drones land across the Danube in Romania. We've seen missile impact in eastern Poland and killing farmers in Poland. That would be a measure that I don't think would be escalatory, but could help reinforce the Article 5, which is so important.

Senator RISCH. Good thoughts.

Doctor.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I actually agree completely with my colleague. I think your question is a really important one, Chairman, because I would've agreed with you a few years ago that Russia would not risk direct confrontation with NATO. I think at this point, seeing the trends in Russia's military capabilities, reconstitution, adaptation, the build up in Russian forces there is no other reason to do that unless you're expecting a confrontation with a much larger potential adversary than Ukraine, because just to fight the war in Ukraine, Russia doesn't need to do what it's currently doing.

So, that is a very clear signal that there are long term strategic plans. I'm not sure that it will happen in the next 5 years as the Secretary General Rutte said, but certainly no longer a 20 or 25 year horizon.

That being said, I think whether that happens or not depends a huge amount on the United States, in particular. Some of the recommendations that my colleague, Mr. Rough, made in supporting the Eastern flank are critical. Russia will be deterred if it sees that we are acting from a position of strength and we are there with our allies.

I think in addition to what Peter has just suggested, I think there's huge opportunities in learning from Ukraine's deployment of autonomous systems in the Black Sea, in particular, as well as what our allies have been doing in the Nordic Baltic region to further push back and also provide more ISR capabilities so that we can at least have a red flag warning if we are seeing some sort of confrontation emerging from Russia.

But I think the shadow war or hybrid threats that Russia has been carrying out across Europe are significant, and they are very aggressive, and we have very, very few deterrent capabilities there.

Senator RISCH. Good thoughts from all of you. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you both very much for your testimony.

Dr. Polyakova, I was really struck by your talking about the increased militarization of Russian society, because I have continued to believe that one of the most important reasons to support Ukraine is because it sends a very strong message to not just our allies and partners that we would be there for them, but to our adversaries who threaten the United States.

And it was pointed out to me recently that one of the other really important aspects of that is that we do not want to be in a position 5 or 10 years down the road where Russia actually is able to absorb Ukraine and has access to all of the increased build up that

Ukraine has done and their expertise, technology, innovation to go against NATO and our other allies and partners.

Can you talk about that and how you calibrate that concern against other issues with respect to Russia?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Well, thank you so much for that question, Senator Shaheen.

It is true that the militarization of Russian society is not new, but it has accelerated significantly since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

And what I mean by that is that there is consistent reporting that, for example, children as young as kindergarten age are receiving military drill education. And this continues on through the school ages and of course up to the years of military service. And this is deeply, deeply concerning for a variety of reasons, as you can imagine.

That being said, to your point about what would be the consequences if Russia was able to eventually completely take over Ukraine. The first consequence is how expensive it would be for NATO to then have a Ukraine that is completely occupied and controlled, together with Belarus, together with Russia's positions in Kaliningrad, as well to defend and deter against that. That's going to cost us a lot more than what we're already spending and where our European allies are spending on Ukraine. So, there's a real expense there aside from the security threat.

I think broadly speaking, it's important to remember that Russia is a strategic and direct threat to the United States, not just our allies in Ukraine. It seeks to undermine as a core objective the United States as its position as a global leader. That is what the war in Ukraine is at the end of the day about. It is not about some territory in the Donetsk region. It's not about Crimea. It's about deposing the United States as the leader of the free world, and that is the key objective. And that is why Russia has partnerships with China and others.

Senator SHAHEEN. And do you think this Administration and this President recognize that?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I think there are certainly members of the Administration who do recognize that. Personally, I would like to see that message be very, very clear to our allies at the summit. I think the one question that a lot of our European allies have is are we aligned on the threat perception between all the NATO partners, not just the United States? Do we have the same understanding of the threat that Russia represents? And I think if we can get some movement on that at the summit, that would be very significant.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Rough, can you answer that question as well?

Mr. ROUGH. Well, I would note that American weapons continue to transit via Poland into Ukraine. There is a sanctions regime in place, even if we can quibble about the size and scope of it, as well as sanctions enforcement. And the United States is a member of NATO. Just 2 weeks ago, NATO held a defense ministerial on the sidelines of which the Ukraine-NATO Council met, as well as the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.



Twenty billion Euros in new security systems has been pledged this year. So, while the U.S. is adopting this mediating role, this form of neutrality almost between Ukraine and Russia, it's neutral bending toward Ukraine, I would say.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Are either of you surprised that Russia has not come to the aid of Iran in the current conflict with Israel? That they're not providing the weapons, or at least news reports are that they're not providing the weapons that Iran has requested?

Mr. ROUGH. I do think it was notable that in the phone call the President held with President Putin, there was a heavy section on Iran, and the President even said explicitly in his own readout that they focused very little on Ukraine. So, I do think that President Putin is trying to vector the Americans against the Israelis and to try to shut down the war so that the Iranians can recover.

In that sense, I think he's carrying diplomatic water—the Russians are for the Iranians. But I see no evidence of direct military transfers to date or anything of that nature.

Senator SHAHEEN. Dr. Polyakova.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Just very briefly. I'm not surprised because Russia is not a reliable partner, and we saw this in Syria as well. They tried to protect Bashar al-Assad, but then when the fall of his regime came, the Russians were nowhere to be found. And I think that's the real message that hope we can also convey across the world as the United States.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, both.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator Ricketts.

Senator RICKETTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to our witnesses here to testify today.

At the 75th anniversary of NATO Summit in Washington last year, conversations about the Indo-Pacific took the stage in ways they never had before. The alliance's decision to deepen engagement with regional partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand signals a shift in strategic priorities. This was also recognition that Europe and the Indo-Pacific are linked.

NATO's European members are now deploying assets to the region, signing on to joint exercises, coordinating cyber and hybrid defense cooperation with Indo-Pacific allies. Additionally, the summit's endorsement of the NATO Indo-Pacific Partnership, along with the growing defense industrial links between South Korea, Japan, and the European NATO members, as well as AUKUS, marks an evolution in the alliance's posture.

Mr. Rough, what is the real value of NATO's Indo-Pacific outreach, and what should the future coordination look like?

Mr. ROUGH. Well, for one, I think it's in the American vital interest that there is a pro-American balance of power on both ends of the Eurasian landmass. And if the Russians are going to forge tight links with the Chinese, the North Koreans, and the Iranians, then I think it behooves us to try to bring together lessons learned on both sides of the Asian landmass to learn lessons on defense industrial based cooperation. You'll note that Poland recently signed

a major procurement deal with South Korea for the provision of tanks, for example.

And so, I think there is a lot of mutual support that can be undertaken in the free world amongst partners and allies. And we can share a common threat perception, which I think is also useful. That's one of the reasons why I think NATO should be a Russia focused, continental deterrence organization, nonetheless has a role in being active in the Indo-Pacific because it can see exactly what is taking place, where and how China's aggression is unfolding. And I think that's a useful exercise for our partners.

Senator RICKETTS. Are there practical steps that NATO could do to develop meaningful co-development defense technologies in the region?

Mr. ROUGH. Well, for starters NATO sought to open a liaison office in Tokyo that was ultimately blocked by the French. I think there are opportunities for tighter linkage there. Clearly, Japan and South Korea have first rate, cutting edge technology and defense industrial based capabilities, which our European partners could learn from. And I would just encourage more collaboration in all of those areas.

Senator RICKETTS. In your opening remarks, you mentioned about the five for five, NATO going to a 5 percent of GDP defense spending target, and this will include 3.5 percent for core military spending, and 1.5 percent for broader defense and security related measures. Obviously, at the Wales Summit in 2014, we saw a NATO committing to 2 percent, and it took a decade for most of the allies to start even getting in that direction. Today's threat environment doesn't really allow for a decade to get to 5 percent.

As you mentioned in your written testimony, you said you would ratify a new 5 percent goal should be achieved in 5 year horizon. Can you tell us why it's so important we get that so soon, rather than taking 7 to 10 years to achieve this target?

Mr. ROUGH. Well, simply put, the intelligence assessments all suggest that there is an urgent threat and that Russia is rebuilding. It's standing up the new 44th Army Corps in Karelia opposite Finland. The new targets for the Russian armed forces are to put 1.5 million men under arms. All of that suggests that Russia will be facing NATO once the war in Ukraine is ultimately wound down, if it is wound down.

And so I think it's very important that we begin to take those measures. It's not just the time horizon. But on top of that, I think very carefully crafted what the categories are for 3.5 and 1.5 percent of GDP so that areas like climate spending, for example, don't count toward defense adjacent military expenditures.

Senator RICKETTS. Yes.

Dr. Polyakova, do you have anything you want to add to that with regards to the 5 percent?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I completely agree, and I think the reason that it has to happen much more rapidly than we've seen in the past is that Europe really has no choice at this point. I think there's broad recognition of that. What I'd like to see European allies commit to 5 percent on core defense spending, not the 3.5/1.5 split.

Yes, this is, I see, as a step to get there, but not the ultimate conclusion. I would like to see them continue to spend, but I think

if they move in that direction, we need to also spend more on our defense because we are below 3.5 percent right now. So, that would be the counterpoint there.

Senator RICKETTS. All right. Thanks.

I've only just got a few seconds of time left. Mr. Rough, you wrote a little bit about AI diffusion. Can you talk a little bit about what the previous policy was, for example, so insulting to our allies like Poland?

Mr. ROUGH. Well, in January, the outgoing Biden administration issued an AI diffusion rule that essentially tiered our allies into different categories for AI chips. And Poland, since you mentioned it, was considered a Category 2 partner, meaning it didn't have access to certain AI chips. And this could have implications for the rollout of 6G. It could have implications for the types of software embedded in different weapon systems like the F-35.

And so I think the European Commission, and in particular our eastern European allies who never understood and this is directly, I think, the case for Warsaw, why they were placed in Category 2, are pleased that the Trump administration has lifted that diffusion rule.

Senator RICKETTS. Great. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Senator Merkley.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Dr. Polyakova, in your testimony, you note, "For long term strategic security and stability, there is no better answer than Ukraine's membership in NATO. Ukraine's strategic value to NATO and European defense is profound."

You go on to note the many values that come from that battlefield experience, defense industrial base, countering hybrid threats, geographic location, strategic position. So, given that, how do you assess the impact of Trump administration stated opposition to Ukraine's NATO membership?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you for that question, Senator.

I would say it's not just the United States that opposes NATO membership for Ukraine right now. There is no consensus on that among allies. And we saw that in the previous Administration as well, that there was no consensus on that among allies on the Biden administration.

That being said I think while there is an active hot war in Ukraine, it's difficult to see how Ukraine could become a NATO member. But it is a goal that we should keep open in the future. And the reason for that is not because it's Ukraine, and it's our duty or some sort of moral obligations. Because Ukraine is a huge asset. It's the largest country in Europe. Giving Ukraine over to the Russians would be a huge hit to our military capabilities that would absorb all of their innovative capabilities they've developed for the last 3 ½ years.

So, I think seeing Ukraine as an asset for Europe's defense industrial base, as an asset for our own military versus a vulnerability is the key. But it is a long term path, not a medium path.

Senator MERKLEY. No, that's helpful. And there's even a provision in the NATO protocols that says you cannot bring into mem-

bership a nation that is partially occupied so that we're not bringing NATO into an immediate conflict. But does this give you kind of any reflections on how quickly Trump basically stated support for Russia's position that Ukraine never become part of NATO?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Well, I hope that the President will change that position. I think he has said different things and the message could be more clear. Again, I think the ultimate desire by the Administration, the President, to reach some sort of lasting, peaceful, negotiated solution between Russia and Ukraine has the right instinct.

I think the reality is that Russia plays the obstructionist obstacle here, and the Ukrainians have come to the table at every moment. And I think recognizing that is key. And I think taking things off the table before we are even at the table, so to say, is the real problem.

Senator MERKLEY. Yes, I couldn't agree more.

Let me turn to another piece of the puzzle. And that is, the U.S. certainly provides a nuclear umbrella for NATO, but Trump's statements that imply that our commitment to NATO is perhaps not rock solid. How does that affect the role of our nuclear umbrella and the possibility of nations, other nations starting to consider whether they need a different strategy?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. There is no substitute for the U.S. nuclear umbrella in Europe. The European allies of NATO that do have nuclear capability are far, far below, and it would take many, many years, and a complete rewriting of NATO, frankly, and the founding treaty and the Washington Treaty to have some sort of different arrangement between NATO allies in Europe for them to provide for their own nuclear capability and defense umbrella. So, that's really not even an option.

Frankly, I will say that when I speak to European allies, they're not concerned that the United States will recommit to Article 5. What they're more concerned about, of course, is a very quick drawdown of U.S. presence in Europe, which we believe is going to happen at some point. They understand that's coming. They want it to be thoughtful, strategic, and not sudden. And they are willing to step in and take more responsibility. But I will say, I don't see as much concern, right now anyway, that the United States will not support NATO and recommit to Article 5.

Senator MERKLEY. No, I—and thank you very much.

And Mr. Rough, appreciated your testimony, and I wanted to ask you about the implications for NATO of China's support for Russia's war in Ukraine, and how might Beijing be drawing lessons from the West's response as it considers its ambitions toward Taiwan?

Mr. ROUGH. Well, first of all, China's support to the Russian war effort has been essential. It is a dubious proposition that Russia could maintain the high operational tempo it has without Chinese provision of dual use technologies to the Russian armed forces. And in particular, this applies to the overwhelming support of microelectronics, semiconductors, and machine tools that have been very important to the Russians.

As to what lessons the Chinese are drawing, I'm sure they're scrubbing down the Russian war effort very carefully. We ourselves have stood up so called JATEC, a NATO outfit in Poland, to try

to learn lessons from the war in Ukraine. But I will say, I worry that Russia and Ukraine can iterate at a much faster rate than the United States observing this war from a distance and even from the forward post in Poland can observe.

And I think that is something that the Alliance does need to address. Are we able to keep pace with the cutting edge evolutions in drone technologies, for example? The Ukrainians are more than eager to share their lessons in a way, thanking us for our generosity and support to Ukraine. But that will probably require industry and even presence in Ukraine closer to the action to understand what is happening.

But there's no doubt that the Chinese are watching this very closely, and we've already seen Xi Jinping scrub down his own armed forces to try to push out corruption, doubtlessly aware of the corruption that plagued the Russian armed forces and caused their underperformance in the opening days of the war.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much.

Senator SHAHEEN [presiding]. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and thank both of you for your testimony here.

And Dr.——

Senator SHAHEEN. Senator Van Hollen, I'm sorry——

Senator VAN HOLLEN. That's what I thought.

Senator SHAHEEN. Senator Coons is next, and I know he has got to get back to another hearing, so I apologize.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Senator.

Thank you, Senator. Thank you for your patience.

I'm the ranking member on the Defense Appropriation Subcommittee. We are having the Army budget hearing right now. And the discussion you were just having about innovation, agility, and iteration is actually a big piece of what's being discussed downstairs.

So, Mr. Rough, you agree that Russia is an adversary of the United States and that the Ukrainians have inflicted significant damage?

Mr. ROUGH. Yes.

Senator COONS. My understanding over the last 3 years, Ukraine's imposed enormous costs on one of our principal global adversaries; more than a million casualties, half the Black Sea fleet, thousands of Russian tanks destroyed. I could go on without a single American soldier directly in harm's way for less than 1 percent of our Federal budget, while modernizing our own stocks through replenishment.

I continue to be all in in terms of our support for Ukraine in their war against Russian aggression, as are many of my colleagues, both Republican and Democrat. It's a worthy investment in our national security. But you raised what I think is the critical question. How quickly can we learn from the EW, UAS, counter-UAS experiences of the Ukrainians and implement it not just in the U.S. armed forces, but among our NATO Allied forces? What recommendations do you have about how we can strengthen and increase the speed of that iteration?

Mr. ROUGH. Well, there are a few lessons. The first is, I think, to get defense punch, you do have to have strong top line numbers.

And even the fiscal year 2026 request with reconciliation moneys built in is around 3 percent. That's a long way away from, for example, what Senator Wicker recommended last year, Peace Through Strength, or what the NATO Allies will describe next week as the new defense investment pledge.

But within that, I think it's very important to focus on procurement numbers. The Wales Pledge had a scheme where it was 2 percent of GDP for defense, but 20 percent of those 2 percent went to procurement. And I think that's worth keeping in mind.

What some of my colleagues in the Center for Defense Concepts and Technology at Hudson have described is the value of looking to the commercial base to find solutions for defense problems. This helps reduce costs and also accelerates the speed of adaptation.

Modularity, I think, is also something worth studying rather than expensive, exquisite, bespoke systems. And then the economies of scale that we can achieve through our joint procurement projects is something I think we should look at. Europe has some 12 tanks because, of course, it is a mosaic of nations more than a continent acting in the defense sphere together. And joint procurement would be a worthy thing.

And the last point I would make, which my colleague Mike Gallagher, the former Congressman from Wisconsin, wrote in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* recently, is maybe looking at reforming cost plus contracting as a way to get more bang for our buck. So, all of those elements along with studying the Ukrainian war efforts, which they're so eager to share with us, can really improve our performance on the battlefield.

Senator COONS. Thank you.

Dr. Polyakova, the same sort of question to you, if I might. His reference to 12 different tanks on the continent, the Ukrainians have done a masterful job of managing to service and to keep in the fight a remarkable array of armored personnel carriers, and tanks, and artillery pieces. Dozens of different systems—despite not having the OEM and long supply chain that we insist is necessary. They've MacGyvered their way into capable fighting forces, not just drones, but across all these platforms. What lessons are there for us about our procurement, and what lessons are there for NATO? We're about to go to a NATO Summit where Europe's pledged nearly \$1 trillion in defense spending. What are the opportunities here for joint production and for speeding innovation?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Well, Senator, thank you for that question. And you point to a core issue that I raised in my written testimony as well. I'll just summarize. One, you're right that Ukrainians are operating something like over 400 different kinds of systems from different places. Some domestically produced, many from foreign partners. And that's been incredible to see.

I think the main lesson for us is one, we have to simplify our foreign military sales if we really want to take advantage of what's happening in Ukraine. The big question that our European partners have from the defense industry in particular is how do we actually do joint ventures and co-development, co-production with U.S. defense industrial base?

It is incredibly difficult. ITAR is a huge issue, as you know. On top of that, I think NATO needs to really push forward in joint pro-

curement which is a part of the answer to your question. But how do you translate money into capabilities? Because money isn't everything. It has to be spent on the right things in the right ways, and NATO is the right framework to coordinate those efforts across the alliance to make sure this is complementarity not duplication.

Senator COONS. Last, I just traveled to the Philippines and Taiwan with Senator Ricketts. The upcoming NATO Summit does not include Indo-Pacific partners. I think it's a significant mistake. How do you think the lessons of Ukraine can and should be learned or applied across some of our Indo-Pacific allies and partners?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. This is a fantastic question that we started to discuss earlier. There is already a technology export vector that is taking place directly from Ukraine, capabilities that are being learned on the ground by companies, the private sector directly for export to Taiwan. That's already happening right now.

My concern is, the United States, we are missing out. And I will just point to Ukraine's recent operation. I think you saw the Spider Web Operation, and we cannot defend against that operation. I don't know because I'm not privy to that information. I don't know if we can carry it out, that kind of operation in a country like Russia. So, I think that is all a huge opportunity for us to learn.

And to your point about the European theater and the Indo-Pacific theater being inexplicably linked is the key point. And Taiwan is very, very interested in buying directly from those defense tech companies that have capabilities they've tested in the battlefield, and that they have been able to innovate in a super, super rapid fashion. And they're buying those capabilities as we speak. We should be, too, but we need to do a lot of work to simplify that for through FMS in particular.

Senator COONS. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Now, Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, and thank both of you for your testimony here.

And I'm going to start with you Dr. Polyakova. It's good to see you again. I want to talk about what message we should aim to have come out of the NATO Summit with respect to Ukraine. Because the messages that the Trump administration has been sending for months, in my view, have undermined our position, our collective U.S.-NATO position, in support of Ukraine.

We don't have to revisit the spectacle in the Oval Office with President Zelensky and all those other issues. But more recently we've seen Secretary Rubio acknowledge that Ukraine's need for air defense is significant. But to my knowledge, there's no plan to get Ukraine more air defense. We also saw Secretary Hegseth skip the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting in Brussels. The first time a U.S. Secretary of Defense has done so since Russia's full scale invasion began in 2022.

Secretary Hegseth also confirmed that the proposed 2026 budget request includes cuts to funding for weapons purchases to Ukraine. As you mentioned with respect to the possibility of Ukraine's future, you know, home in NATO, taking that off the table unilaterally is a pretty bad negotiating position.

So, could you just describe what message you think needs to come out of NATO Summit with respect to Ukraine, what kind of united message, and then whether you think—what the prospects are for that, given what President Trump's position has been?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Well, we understand that this summit has a much shorter agenda than usual NATO summits. That the communiqué is also going to be quite short and very simple, and straightforward, really focusing on NATO's core capabilities, and not talking necessarily so much about our other partners and allies.

What I would like to see is, of course, clear messaging from the Administration that we will stand with Ukraine against the Russian aggressor. That's what I would like to see. That being said, I think we can probably get to a communiqué that does mention that Russia's the aggressor, of course, and that Ukraine is the victim and also a partner to the United States. That's what I'm hoping for. Whether it'll be viable, I think, will depend a lot on the conversations between leaders on the ground, as we've seen in the past.

I think one very specific thing that I think this NATO Summit could achieve, which is not necessarily to NATO, but to Ukraine, is to allow the sales of U.S. military equipment to Europeans who can then transfer it to Ukraine as they see fit. We have not provided that yet, that third party transfer, but that's something that I think is very much within reach and something that we can do.

And that in itself will send a clear message that even though we may not be debating a new supplemental in this House, though, I hope that that may change, that the United States will still allow European allies to buy American and then transfer those capabilities to Ukraine.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that.

Let me ask both of you now quickly on the subject of coordinating both with our NATO partners, but also more broadly with the EU partners in terms of our approach to China, right? During the first Trump administration, we worked on a bipartisan basis to try to encourage our colleagues to de-risk their economies from China, especially in critical strategic supply chains.

There seems to be more confusion this time around in the Trump administration. I would note that on June 10, our Ambassador to NATO, Matthew Whitaker, posted on X, "What happens in the Indo-Pacific matters for transatlantic security, that's why NATO works with partners globally." Something I agree with.

But the Deputy Secretary of State Landau then posted and then deleted a reply. His tweet though was, "He obviously didn't get the memo of our deputies committee meeting on this very issue. NATO is still a solution in search of a problem."

What is your view on these sort of different conflicting positions we seem to see within the Trump administration, and how is that hurting our ability to work with our European allies? And finally, when we're putting these large tariffs across the board, tariffs on many of our EU partners, and the question is, how can we be asking them to de-risk from China when we and our actions are putting their economies at such risk?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you for your question, Senator.



Again, I think the messaging, as you say, has not been clear to European allies on a variety of different issues, including terrorists, including our commitment to Ukraine, including our policy on China.

I do think it's early in the Administration, and we can allow them a little bit more time to figure out what those positions are. That being said, it is producing a great deal of stress and anxiety among allies to not really have a clear sense of where the Administration is going to take its policies.

So, I would like to see very clear messaging, on NATO in particular. I agree with some other members of the Administration who said if we didn't have NATO, we'd have to invent it. So, NATO does have a very clear purpose, is to defend and deter Russia in Europe and to allow for lessons to be learned from the Indo-Pacific.

NATO's core function is Europe. But there are many lessons that we've been discussing here for the Indo-Pacific environment and to provide some key technologies and capabilities as well. That's what I would like to see come out of the summit, is coherence and a common threat assessment of what NATO is actually doing and why we have it.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. If Mr. Rough could be able to—

Mr. ROUGH. I would just say rather than grand pronouncements, what really matters is just the hard work, the daily grind of cleaning Chinese infrastructure out of the critical areas in Europe. I think the Chinese have, or Chinese controlled companies have stakes in 33 port terminals across Europe.

CK Hutchinson, thanks in part to President Trump's pressure campaign, is now considering selling 14 of them to a U.S.-Swiss-Italian consortium. The Chinese are all over the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp. They have a 24.9 percent stake in the Port of Hamburg. All of that just needs to be steadily worked on because it does have carryover effects, for example, military mobility and American troop movements in Europe.

I'd also add telecoms to that list. None of the big EU countries are expected to have 5G networks that are entirely free of Chinese products by 2028. We need to try to accelerate those timelines to the extent we can. And that might go below the radar of the grand political declarations at a place like The Hague next week, but I think it's essential for the alliance.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Got it. Thank you.

Thank you, both.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen.

Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you, Chairwoman.

I want to just say that you, Ms. Polyakova, you had a kind of a statement that I want to explore a little bit. You said Russia would be a sitting duck without the United States. It makes me concerned because I hear the President publicly flirting with indulging Russia's maximalist aims, and it seems to make me really, really alarmed.

Last week, a Russian deputy foreign minister said that Ukraine won't end until NATO reduces or eliminates its military footprint in eastern Europe across NATO's Eastern flank. This includes Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bul-

garia, and so on. When I was in Estonia, their concerns for the U.S. alliance and partnership especially under the Trump administration had many people I talked with very alarmed.

And so, I'm wondering if you can expand on this line of thought and maybe impress upon this committee the urgency, the dire urgency of this moment we have right now before us with Russia, and with the President whose posture at times really worries me.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you so much, Senator Booker.

It is an urgent moment as I outlined in my written testimony, mainly because Russia is on a war footing, and confrontation with NATO seems increasingly more inevitable unless the United States continues to take up a leadership position, NATO continues to deter and defend in the European theater. So, Russia has in fact been the main obstacle to peace in Ukraine.

President Putin's maximalist positions, that he's not stepped away from, I think signal a very basic truth that we've learned around many Administrations, that a reset with Russia doesn't get you anywhere. I think this Administration has been learning that in fact and like other Administrations have tried to reset with Russia, and I hope that they will pivot to a different strategy.

That means that we need to apply pressure to the Russians to come to the table, economic pressure, military pressure, and also pressure on their partners and allies that have been feeding Putin's war machine over the last several years. I hope that is the thinking that the Administration is going to pursue the next several months, because obviously, the incentive model has not worked to produce results.

Senator BOOKER. And my staff corrected me, for the record that I said Russia, but Europe would be a sitting duck. And so, you said that your view of the Trump administration is that they understand the urgency for the American engagement involvement. Am I right to assume that that's what you were implying?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. To be frank, I don't know if that is the coherent view of everyone in the U.S. Government and in the executive branch. I do think there are some certainly that understand the threat, yes.

Senator BOOKER. It's very diplomatic of you.

I want to shift in my remaining time and talk about sort of the Arctic strategy. I was really surprised on my visit last year to Iceland to understand the extent of the urgencies, and the need for America to have a greater Arctic strategy, and pay close attention to really what's happening in the Arctic right now. The shortest flight path between Russia and the United States is through the Arctic. The combination of melting ice caps, as you know, critical natural resources being removed and fought over, Russia's military build up, and increasing cooperation between Russia and China and the Arctic have really a lot of potential to increase tensions and expose a lot of the vulnerabilities in that area.

Now, Sweden and Finland joining NATO provides to what I believe is just a great boost to the collective defense in the High North. Now, seven of the eight Arctic states are part of NATO, which is incredible stride, I believe from Russia's ghost fleets that sabotage undersea cables and critical infrastructure to protecting

strategic ports. I just believe we need to expand NATO's capabilities.

Now, I'll tell you I was hearing reports when I was there that the Chinese have been doing, pun intended, fishy things in that area. And so, I'm wondering from both of you, what new and emerging capabilities should NATO be considering when it comes to protecting allied interest in the Arctic? And are there gaps, as you see them, in NATO's current approach to challenges in the Arctic?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I was hoping somebody would ask the question about the Arctic. I hope you might come with us again to the Arctic this August. I'll be in touch about that. That being said, you're absolutely right that we have a huge opportunity with the kind of strategic depth that Finland and Sweden joining the alliance has provides us. Now, we have a land mass connecting the Arctic Sea and the Baltic Sea, and we haven't quite understood what the opportunity there is to deter and defend.

I think we have significant challenges in our logistics, operations, communications that are well suited for that harsh environment that we haven't quite thought through. I think there's a huge amount more that we can do to ensure that we have a defense and security hub that is closely coordinated with the Nordic, Baltic aid grouping that is closely coordinated with the NATO framework to position ourselves as the Arctic nation the United States is and China is not in particular.

The Chinese have for years seen significant interests emerge for themselves in the Arctic, and have declared themselves a near, I think, a near polar or near Arctic nation, which of course they're not. And they're doing a lot through their proxies. The Russians now try to plant a flag, and try to influence, and undermine a strategic cohesion, the Arctic. But we have the upper hand there, because now the seven of the eight Arctic states are NATO members, and we should take advantage of that.

But I think exercise is number one, logistics and comms number two, and then we can think about maybe positioning of some additional resources and kit in the region.

Senator BOOKER. Mr. Rough.

Mr. ROUGH. You are right, Senator. This is a real opportunity. At the Madrid Summit in 2022, the Arctic was mentioned for the first time in the NATO Summit communiqué. In 2010, at the last time—or it's not the communiqué, the strategic policy document for the alliance—at that last go around, the alliance could not agree because of the Norwegians wanted more NATO, the Canadians wanted to keep this a national issue. We now have more consensus in the alliance, and we've seen the Nordic powers really begin to work more with one another as well. It's the first time since the Kalmar Union of the 16th century that all the Nordic powers are in one alliance, which is a real opportunity.

And there, I would just say that the Arctic Council is essentially dead. But the Arctic seven are all in NATO, and we have capabilities that have now come on board. The Finns are world leaders in icebreaker design. They and all of the Arctic powers have skills in cold weather operations, and I'd like to see us cooperate more also on Russian anti-submarine capabilities and exercises. The GIUK

gap is of course central here, where Russians from Murmansk would try to break out from the Norwegian Sea into the Atlantic where they can threaten the American Atlantic seaboard.

Tony Radakin, the chief of staff of the British Armed Forces, just a few years ago, right before the outbreak of the full scale invasion of Ukraine, described a phenomenal increase in Russian submarine activity. In April, General Cavoli testified similarly in front of the House Armed Services Committee. These are areas where cooperation, I'd like to see us work more with the Arctic seven, within the NATO alliance, and probably leave the Arctic Council, which of course includes Russia, in its latent state.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you very much. That urgency is something I'd love the committee to focus a little bit more on.

And I want to say I've never seen, Mr. Rough, a witness throw my staff under the bus. They didn't put in my briefing document about the Arctic, the Kalmar Treaty of 16th century. I'm going to be on my staff very upset about that lack of in my briefing.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, what I am struck by, Senator Booker, is the similarity in approach that both of our witnesses have today, which I think speaks to the importance of NATO and how we should respond.

I actually want to do another round before we close, because I want to start, Mr. Rough, with asking you about the idea of a financial or a finance ministerial for NATO. Because I think that's a really interesting idea as we think about how we really shut down our adversaries. It's not just militarily, it also needs to be economically.

And one of the huge loopholes that exists is the ability for cryptocurrencies to pay for what our adversaries are doing, but also their ability to put their laundered money into our Western financial systems. So, talk a little bit about how you see that ministerial being structured and the extent to which NATO has to this point discussed this idea and what the challenges are.

Mr. ROUGH. Well, for starters, NATO really is run by five defense ministerials that take place during the course of the year. And I don't know when it became written in stone, Senator, that we have to have an annual NATO Summit. There were, I think, three summits all through the cold war. They're enormously time consuming. They're expensive. Moving the President to The Hague alone is a big undertaking.

They create a lot of bureaucratic angst, and at times that can even be counterproductive as bureaucrats run around the corridors of Brussels looking for low hanging fruit to pluck to put into a communiqué. So, I think letting the defense ministers run NATO, as they have in the past, and supplementing it with the finance minister only because defense ministers oftentimes can't make budgeting promises the way that finance ministers actually have to.

Moreover, I was heartened to see Mark Rutte either in the press conference following his Chatham House remarks last week or after the defense ministerial say that he will have annual plans as the allies ascend the step stair to 5 percent to keep them to it, because it's very easy as a politician, I think, to make a 10 year horizon plan when your successor actually has to find a way to pay for

it. So, I think this is just a way to actually put brass tacks behind the pronouncements that are made to force allies to really concentrate on how they will make their way there.

And I would welcome the inclusion of some of these other components, like for example, the implications of cryptocurrency. How do banking systems, traditionally a domain of the European Union and the member states, play when it comes to NATO security and defense? How should we think about all of this? And I think that's a worthy area for investigation.

And before I get in trouble, Senator, I should mention this idea I've stolen from a colleague of mine, Luke Coffey at Hudson Institute, who shared it with me some time ago.

Senator SHAHEEN. We will give him attribution.

Dr. Polyakova, do you want to add to that as you think about this potential?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I would just add that many European NATO member states, including Germany, you know, traditionally the defense ministry has played a relatively minor role. And it's really been the finance ministry that has led the way and has had a powerful head. Like, nobody wanted defense ministry in German politics for years. So, I think now is the moment to rebalance that.

And I think this is a very good idea that I'm just hearing for the first time actually. But I think it makes a lot of sense, for Europeans in particular, because the money's going to have to be allocated. It's going to have to come from somewhere. And who controls those purse strings well as parliaments, but it's really the finance ministers.

Senator SHAHEEN. And to what extent has this been discussed? Are you aware of any conversations about this? Any particular NATO member who is pushing this idea?

Mr. ROUGH. I don't believe so, Senator. I think this is still a somewhat nascent incipient concept.

Senator SHAHEEN. Interesting. Well, I think it's a great idea. I think we should think about how we push it.

Dr. Polyakova, you and Mr. Rough both mentioned the hybrid threat from Russia to our NATO allies. Can you expand on that a little bit? Because one of the things that has struck me is that it is an area that we have, particularly around the information space, where we have not at all either been able or willing to match what our adversaries are doing. And we've heard that that applies not just to the United States, but to other NATO countries. So, can I ask both of you to speak to that and to what more we ought to be thinking about there?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Oh, thank you so much, Senator for that question.

I will preface my answer to your specific question on the information influence operations to say that what Russia's currently carrying out against our European allies in NATO, we have not seen even in the cold war. It's not even hybrid or non-conventional. This is warfare.

We call it in my institution "shadow warfare" because it does include assassinations, it does include very well documented attacks on critical infrastructure that is costing lives and producing mass civilian as well as military disruption and destruction. And this is

something very new that we have not grasped as an alliance, and that we must.

I think, increasingly, information influence operations are even less needed, I would say, because the Russians have unleashed their intelligence agencies to wreak havoc across Europe and all these other various ways. That being said, they haven't gone anywhere. Certainly not. I mean, the use of propaganda type tools has been around for all of humanity and was effectively used by the Russians. I think that the unfortunate situation we find ourselves in now is that I think with some of the cuts that the Administration has made and also that Congress has not, for example reconstituted funding, the Global Engagement Center as one, but also some of the cuts to VOA, RFE/RL are diminishing our ability to compete in the information space. I think there's no question about that, not just in Europe, but across the world. And I hope that's something that we may reconsider in the near term.

Senator SHAHEEN. I certainly agree.

Mr. Rough.

Mr. ROUGH. Yes, just maybe on the Baltic Sea, since it's much in the news. This is a vast body of water, something like 15 percent of global traffic transits it, and it's very shallow at 52 or 55 meters, which means it's rather inexpensive for a part of Russia's shadow fleet to drag a rusty anchor across its seabed and destroy data, transmission, or communications, or even power cables.

A third of the EU's natural gas is imported via undersea pipelines from Norway, for example, which could prove rather damaging to the economy, and to repair these data cables, transmission lines is rather expensive; somewhere between 5, to 10, to 150, to \$200 million. There's only 60, 70, 80 repair vehicles available in the world.

All this is a huge problem, which means that really, when it comes to the balance of threat, the Russians know the political economy works in their direction. It's inexpensive for them, and it's expensive for us, which I do think means, as much as I hate to say it, that we should consider countermeasures to try to put the Russians on their back heel.

Maybe it's worthwhile considering the lights going off in the Moscow Metro for half a day or something like that to send a message to Vladimir Putin. He cannot act with impunity and just expect us to play defense all of the time. That's just not going to be an effective way for us to go forward.

Senator SHAHEEN. I totally agree with that. I thought it was very interesting, I think it was Finland who the last time the cables, the undersea cables were interrupted in the Baltic Sea, took the ship and all of its crew into port and arrested them basically, and said, we're not going to let you get away with it. We've got to get much tougher on those kinds of measures.

Well, thank you both very much for being here. We really appreciate your testimony and the ideas that you've shared with us.

I don't think that we'll have any questions for the record, but if we do, we would ask that you might be willing to respond to those as quickly as possible.

So, with that, this hearing is adjourned.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:10 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

### Additional Material Submitted for the Record

RESPONSES OF MR. PETER ROUGH TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

*Question.* Nearly all members of NATO have announced that they will fulfill the 2 percent GDP defense spending pledge by the end of this year. One of the most important outcomes of this year's NATO summit will be a new pledge to spend 5 percent.

Directing more funding and resources toward defense is critical, but what are the primary practical obstacles to modernizing NATO readiness and what actions must we take to overcome them?

*Answer.* Even NATO's stronger militaries will struggle to handle the requirements assigned to them under the DDA (Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area) Family of Plans adopted at the NATO Summit in Vilnius in 2023. The alliance must move with greater urgency and speed, which means doubling down on the transatlantic defense industrial base rather than chasing the illusion of strategic autonomy. In the Netherlands this week, the alliance should focus on greater transatlantic collaboration in (1) procurement, (2) standardization, and (3) production capacity.

*Question.* While Article 5 remains rock-solid, we must continue to invest in military readiness to keep it strong and credible. Russia spends 6–8 percent of its GDP on defense and has largely transitioned to a wartime economy. Some speculate it will reconstitute its military in the next 5 years and could invade a NATO ally.

Beyond strengthening our hard-power capabilities, what actions can NATO take to send a strong and clear message that Article 5 is strong, and NATO will not give up one square inch of Ally territory?

*Answer.* First, NATO has proven rather tepid in its response to Russia's hybrid warfare. The alliance should consider a range of countermeasures to reestablish deterrence lest this issue spirals out of control and triggers an Article V-style contingency.

Second, NATO should consider upgrading the Forward Land Forces in Estonia into a brigade-sized force.

Third, NATO should consider intercepting Russian missiles and drones heading toward NATO airspace, even if still flying over western Ukrainian. As my colleague, Luke Coffey, has suggested, this would underscore to Russia that it cannot fire weapons toward the alliance with the potential of drones crashing into Romania or missiles falling into Poland. If properly organized, the risk of escalation for such an air defense mission would be low, given Ukraine's size and the distance between Poland and Romania on the one side and Russian forces on the other.

*Question.* To get to a new pledge to spend 5 percent of GDP on defense, allies have suggested a pledge of 3.5 percent on military expenditures and 1.5 percent on defense-related investments.

How could NATO strictly define the category of "defense-related" spending to make sure countries' spending actually serves our collective defense?

*Answer.* NATO has had a common definition of what counts as defense spending since the 1950s. Even that defense category could be tightened, however. For example, retirement pensions for civilian employees in ministries of defense are included in spending targets across the alliance. So, too, are expenditures for "humanitarian operations." For starters, therefore, the alliance should tighten the actual defense spending category.

As a second step, NATO should define "defense-related" as directly relevant to warfighting. For example, investments in infrastructure that allow heavy armour to flow across the continent or spending on cyber defenses to ensure stable command and control should clearly count toward the 1.5 percent. By contrast, energy security may be a worthy undertaking but should not count as "defense-related."

*Question.* U.S. troop presence is a pillar of NATO deterrence in Europe. Eastern Flank allies say there is nothing that shows the strength of Article 5 like the presence of U.S. troops.

How can the U.S. maximize our troops' cost-effectiveness and more effectively posture our troops in Europe?

*Question.* How can European host nations help shoulder the burden and make it easier for the U.S. to keep troops there?

Answer. U.S. forces benefit from host-nation support, which helps defray costs. Moreover, approximately 90 percent of U.S. ground forces and two-thirds of the U.S. Navy are already in CONUS and assigned to the Indo-Pacific, respectively.

It would be difficult to cut troops from central and eastern Europe without signaling weakness to Russia. It would be equally difficult to cut forces from western Europe, where U.S. soldiers benefit from top-flight facilities located in strategic locations that allow America to project power around the world.

Ultimately, however, our posture in Europe should be guided less by the total numbers of soldiers and more by the strategic enablers our allies cannot yet provide.

*Question.* The Russia-Ukraine war continues to alter the security landscape of Europe. Russia's military was weakened early in the conflict but is now regrowing at an alarming pace. It continues to recruit manpower at a rate that more than keeps pace with the massive casualties its forces have suffered. Russia has also shed many outdated capabilities and is now developing new ones, like drones and hypersonics, to which we must develop new responses.

How should NATO's defense readiness plans reflect the evolution in Russia's military posture?

Answer. NATO recognizes the threat of Russia. The Strategic Concept, DDA Family of Plans, Defense Planning Process, Capabilities Targets, and Investment Pledges are all focused laser-like on one issue above all others: deterring a major war in Europe.

To counter Russia's reorganization of its military districts, recruitment drive to enlarge its armed forces, and strategic steps like the absorption of Belarus, NATO will need to make its forward deployments into the Bucharest 9 states permanent and intensify work with the Nordic-Baltic 8 now that all of these states are inside one alliance for the first time in centuries.

It is past time for NATO to acknowledge what is already widely appreciated; namely, that the NATO-Russia Founding Act is a dead letter.

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RESPONSES OF MR. PETER ROUGH TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR DAVID MCCORMICK

*Question.* Many Senators on this Committee are concerned about the metastasizing cooperation among the People's Republic of China, Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. These countries are the foremost adversaries of the U.S. and instigators of global instability from Ukraine to the South China Sea. I was happy to partner with Senator Coons to introduce S. 1883, which would require the executive branch to develop an interagency strategy to disrupt this axis of chaos. I don't advocate for NATO to be the world's policeman but given the proliferation of Iranian drones and North Korean munitions used against Ukrainian civilians these events are not happening in a vacuum, and they are directly impacting European security.

How should NATO cooperate to counter both the strategic challenges posed by this four-country axis as well as the operational challenges like technological cooperation in missile development, AI, and cyber warfare?

Answer. Russia would not be able to maintain its operational tempo in Ukraine absent the support of its three major partners: the DPRK, Iran, and the PRC. The most recent reporting suggests North Korea may even deploy troops into Ukraine.

There is scope for greater cooperation amongst America's allies around the world to counter this "axis of chaos." For example, Polish-South Korean partnership in defense technology is a good model for future NATO collaboration with the IP-4 states. Moreover, the U.S. should push our European and Asian allies to synchronize tighter export controls, intellectual property protections, and outbound investment restrictions toward the PRC in dual-use areas. NATO countries should not be empowering China while Beijing helps undermine European security.

Finally, NATO allies should recognize the contribution Israel has made in eroding Iran's ability to project power. The Israeli campaign against Iran has sown doubts in Tehran about Russia's reliability and utility as a partner. This is a good thing.

*Question.* Since invading Ukraine, Russia has employed "gray zone" tactics against NATO allies to disrupt their support for Ukraine without escalating to outright conflict. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Russia's campaign of subversion and sabotage against European and U.S. targets has nearly tripled between 2023 and 2024, following a quadrupling from 2022 to 2023.



Targets have included transportation hubs, critical infrastructure, factories, energy terminals, and undersea cables.

How can NATO enhance its intelligence-sharing mechanisms to detect and counter Russian gray zone tactics, such as sabotage actions, misinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks, in real time?

Answer. The alliance has debated the challenges posed by Russia's gray zone tactics at nearly every ministerial in recent years. It is improving its intelligence-sharing on hybrid operations and has begun to impose costs on Russia, including through legal action against Russia's shadow fleet.

At base, however, the economics of hybrid warfare cut against NATO. It costs far less to bribe a captain, for example, to drag an anchor across the Baltic Sea than it does to repair the resulting damaged infrastructure. To restore deterrence, NATO may need to consider offensive operations of its own, perhaps in the cyber realm and carefully scoped so as to limit the risk of escalation.

*Question.* What role should NATO play in protecting domestic critical infrastructure, and how should those responsibilities be coordinated among the alliance?

Answer. Last month, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte set a broad defense spending target of 5 percent of GDP. This includes NATO members raising their defense spending to 3.5 percent of GDP, along with an additional 1.5 percent for broader security-related items by 2032. These targets have already faced some skepticism, particularly because some NATO allies still struggle to meet the existing 2 percent threshold.

*Question.* What specific mechanisms should exist to ensure accountability for these new spending targets?

Answer. As the Hague Summit Declaration notes: "Allies agree to submit annual plans showing a credible, incremental path to reach this goal." These annual plans, reviewed by the Secretary General, are the central mechanism by which the alliance will measure the commitment to increased defense spending.

Furthermore, NATO should consider complementing its defense ministerial process with a finance ministerial, comprised of ministers of finance, many of whom control the purse strings in parliamentary democracies.

*Question.* As the U.S. seeks to rebalance its commitment and presence to Europe, key partners—such as France and the UK—have voiced a willingness to create a "reassurance force" to backstop a cease-fire in Ukraine with "tacit support" from the U.S.

How should the U.S. define terms of support for such a European reassurance force and what would its coordination with NATO look like to avoid unwanted escalation?

Answer. It is unlikely that a European force will backstop a cease-fire in Ukraine. If it does materialize, such a force is more likely to resemble a training mission, based mostly in western Ukraine, and numbering in the hundreds rather than thousands of personnel. In the event of renewed hostilities between Russia and Ukraine, such a force would go to barracks rather than risk war with Russia. The only true deterrent to renewed aggression will be the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

European partners have asked for strategic enablers to support such a force, but it is unlikely to include any American troops on the ground.

*Question.* Mr. Rough, you mentioned in your testimony that NATO commanders have asked alliance members to raise their military capability targets by 30 percent.

What specific capabilities should European partners focus on, and which European nations are best positioned to lead defense production for certain systems?

Answer. The NATO Defense Planning Process has set capabilities targets for each of the allies within the framework of the DDA (Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area) family of plans ratified at the Vilnius Summit.

Europe should focus on (1) fulfilling the targets set by SACEUR in those plans and (2) building capabilities in those areas where Europe is entirely dependent on the United States. In the event of hostilities in the Indopacific, for example, key U.S. capabilities will leave Europe abruptly. Our European allies should therefore invest in acquiring those systems on which it has historically relied entirely on the United States. In the short-run, that will mean increased European investments in the U.S. defense industrial base; in the long-run, it will ideally mean the development of complementary European capabilities.

RESPONSES OF DR. ALINA POLYAKOVA TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

*Question.* Nearly all members of NATO have announced that they will fulfill the 2 percent GDP defense spending pledge by the end of this year. One of the most important outcomes of this year's NATO summit will be a new pledge to spend 5 percent.

Directing more funding and resources toward defense is critical, but what are the primary practical obstacles to modernizing NATO readiness and what actions must we take to overcome them?

*Answer.* Increased spending is an important step forward for NATO's European allies, but it is critical that NATO allies ensure that the funding is translated into concrete national level investments that complement the alliance as a whole.

In particular, a core problem for Europe is a highly fragmented defense industry, which presents challenges for alliance interoperability. A more integrated, alliance-wide industrial strategy, potentially including joint procurement and stronger standardization processes, are necessary to overcome fragmentation and ensure interoperability and scale.

To regularly identify gaps and interoperability issues, the alliance should hold uninterrupted NATO exercises, maintaining increased tempo and scale, which is vital for readiness and cohesion.

*Question.* While Article 5 remains rock-solid, we must continue to invest military readiness to keep it strong and credible. Russia spends 6–8 percent of its GDP on defense and has largely transitioned to a wartime economy. Some speculate it will reconstitute its military in the next 5 years and could invade a NATO ally.

Beyond strengthening our hard-power capabilities, what actions can NATO take to send a strong and clear message that Article 5 is strong, and NATO will not give up one square inch of Ally territory?

*Answer.* NATO Summits are a key political opportunity for deterrence. Reaffirming US commitment to NATO and Article 5 is just as important for allies as it is for sending a clear message to adversaries.

U.S. presence in NATO's Eastern Flank is also key for defense and deterrence against Russia.

In addition, NATO should take up a much more forward learning approach to Russia's shadow war—Russia's increasing kinetic attacks on critical infrastructure, such as undersea cables, as well as sabotage campaigns in the cyber domain are undermining alliance cohesion and exposing deep security vulnerabilities. In particular, NATO should take an active role in surveilling and monitoring Russian "shadow fleet" activities in the Nordic-Baltic domain and the Arctic, ensuring that Russia does not have open opportunities to attack allies' assets.

*Question.* To get to a new pledge to spend 5 percent of GDP on defense, allies have suggested a pledge of 3.5 percent on military expenditures and 1.5 percent on defense-related investments.

How could NATO strictly define the category of "defense-related" spending to make sure countries' spending actually serves our collective defense?

*Answer.* This will be a key issue for allies assuming that the 5 percent commitment with the 1.5 percent defense related proportion is made. Defining what counts toward defense related spending is likely to vary across nation states, but NATO can and should provide clear guidance on what constitutes legitimate spending and what does not. Importantly, NATO should set a benchmark of how much of the 1.5 percent should be new spending rather than counting existing expenditures toward defense.

*Question.* U.S. troop presence is a pillar of NATO deterrence in Europe. Eastern Flank allies say there is nothing that shows the strength of Article 5 like the presence of U.S. troops.

How can the U.S. maximize our troops' cost-effectiveness and more effectively posture our troops in Europe?

*Answer.* There are several ways to maximize costs and effectiveness of US presence in Europe. First, consistent and comprehensive resources, policies, and authorities ensure sustained funding and investment by the US and its allies and partners in infrastructure needs, training, exercises, and capability.

Second, the debate over rotational versus permanent presence of US forces continues. Finding the right balance between a rotational presence, which can increase readiness and agility of US posture, and permanent presence which can increase long-term deterrence and increased capability of allies and partners, with continual US leadership, is critical.

Third, effective posture of US troops in Europe considers the forward projection of US capabilities for other regions including the Middle East and Africa. The US should have a comprehensive strategy for long-term presence to achieve global national security priorities. (for more, please see CEPA's work on The Future of US Bases in Europe.)

*Question.* How can European host nations help shoulder the burden and make it easier for the U.S. to keep troops there?

Answer. European allies should contribute more to maintaining US troops in Europe—many already commit to building and maintain the infrastructure needed for US troops, such as housing, roads, schools, etc. Going forward, more European allies should take up the cost that the US carries for base maintenance, new base development, as well as making other additional contributions (for more, please see CEPA's 2021 Military Mobility Project.)

*Question.* The Russia-Ukraine war continues to alter the security landscape of Europe. Russia's military was weakened early in the conflict but is now regrowing at an alarming pace. It continues to recruit manpower at a rate that more than keeps pace with the massive casualties its forces have suffered. Russia has also shed many outdated capabilities and is now developing new ones, like drones and hypersonics, to which we must develop new responses.

How should NATO's defense readiness plans reflect the evolution in Russia's military posture?

Answer. NATO's defense plans should continually evolve to achieve a successful deterrence and denial mission. With the upcoming capability targets being released this Fall to reflect the regional defense plans, allies should prioritize these targets to better align on planning and defense.

As Russia continues to increase its presence and capability in the Arctic/High-North, seize on vulnerable regions of Europe including the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus, continue to threaten allies and partners on its borders, and continue its illegal invasion of Ukraine—Russia's military posture will continue to be stretched thin. But as Russia continues on its war footing re-arming itself from its losses in Ukraine, its posture priorities will have to be evaluated at regular intervals. These evaluations, in conjunction with alliance priorities and investments must weigh immediate needs of the alliance with long-term planning and threat assessments of adversaries.

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RESPONSES OF DR. ALINA POLYAKOVA TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR DAVID MCCORMICK

*Question.* Many Senators on this Committee are concerned about the metastasizing cooperation among the People's Republic of China, Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. These countries are the foremost adversaries of the U.S. and instigators of global instability from Ukraine to the South China Sea.

I was happy to partner with Senator Coons to introduce S. 1883, which would require the executive branch to develop an interagency strategy to disrupt this axis of chaos. I don't advocate for NATO to be the world's policeman but given the proliferation of Iranian drones and North Korean munitions used against Ukrainian civilians these events are not happening in a vacuum and they are directly impacting European security.

How should NATO cooperate to counter both the strategic challenges posed by this four-country axis as well as the operational challenges like technological cooperation in missile development, AI, and cyber warfare?

Answer. The growing partnership between Russia, China, Iran and North Korea presents a serious long term challenge to the US and our allies. In the NATO domain, Russia has been the primary threat to European allies but China has been actively seeking opportunities to undermine alliance cohesion while positioning itself as a military player. The Arctic is a key area where both Russia and China have strategic security interests that undermine US and NATO interests.

To better counter this "meta-threat," NATO allies should develop a common threat perception and strategy to address each country individually and all four as an intertwined challenge. Such a joint strategy does not currently exist. NATO should also actively seek to integrate the innovation insights in the applications of AI and defense technology being deployed in Ukraine. Lessons learned from the current conflict in Ukraine and overall understanding of the threat and application of

the alliance's regional defense plans will ensure that the alliance is ready to fight any potential future wars.

Furthermore, joint venture projects between US and European defense companies, including co-development and co-production, will be critical for alliance interoperability including harmonization of production lines and product.

*Question.* Since invading Ukraine, Russia has employed “gray zone” tactics against NATO allies to disrupt their support for Ukraine without escalating to outright conflict. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Russia's campaign of subversion and sabotage against European and U.S. targets has nearly tripled between 2023 and 2024, following a quadrupling from 2022 to 2023. Targets have included transportation hubs, critical infrastructure, factories, energy terminals, and undersea cables.

How can NATO enhance its intelligence-sharing mechanisms to detect and counter Russian gray zone tactics, such as sabotage actions, misinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks, in real time?

*Answer.* Russia's shadow war against NATO has accelerated significantly since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) is currently engaged in a comprehensive research project to identify a deterrence strategy for such kinetic nonconventional threats.

One initial insight from the research is that Russia's intelligence services, who are driving and executing the shadow war, have been unleashed to a level not seen even during the cold war. NATO countries' intelligence agencies have simply not kept up in terms of counterintelligence and deterrence.

A second insight is that NATO can do much more on the most immediate threats in the Baltic Sea in particular where there have been more than a dozen attacks on undersea cables in the last 2 years. NATO can and should conduct regular surveillance of critical infrastructure that could include patrols, ISR capabilities, and the use of autonomous undersea drones.

*Question.* What role should NATO play in protecting domestic critical infrastructure, and how should those responsibilities be coordinated among the alliance?

*Answer.* As part of the 1.5 percent defense spending commitment agreed upon at the 2025 NATO Summit at The Hague, allies need to invest in domestic capabilities including infrastructure, logistics, etc. As the alliance has noted for many years, the interoperability of critical infrastructure for allies is a long-standing challenge. NATO has an opportunity to lead efforts to coordinate and collaborate with allies as they make these investments connecting these resource decisions to the NATO regional defense plans and accompanying capability targets.

In addition, addressing security challenges including cyber, space, and data, NATO can play a critical role in coordinating defense and deterrence among all domains. In protecting and enabling strong domestic critical infrastructure, those investments will have wide-ranging effects on alliance-wide critical infrastructure and security. NATO will need the ability to monitor and coordinate these efforts across allies either with existing methods or strengthened leverage to advise and support these investments.

*Question.* Last month, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte set a broad defense spending target of 5 percent of GDP. This includes NATO members raising their defense spending to 3.5 percent of GDP, along with an additional 1.5 percent for broader security-related items by 2032. These targets have already faced some skepticism, particularly because some NATO allies still struggle to meet the existing 2 percent threshold.

What specific mechanisms should exist to ensure accountability for these new spending targets?

*Answer.* The agreement from the Wales Summit in 2014, instilling 2 percent GDP on defense spending as well as 20 percent on equipping was difficult to track. NATO allies used a diverse set of factors to provide information on their defense spending. The new targets should go hand in glove with the alliance's capability targets for its regional defense plans.

NATO has the opportunity to lead the allies on security investment targets and spending as opposed to individual allies leading the effort. This leadership must originate in the ability to hold allies accountable on each of their spending and budgeting. While the individual defense spending decisions are with individual allies, we saw from the work of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, started at the beginning of Russia's illegal invasion in Ukraine in 2022, the ability for leadership to demand support and contributions to that effort can be applied in a NATO setting. The situation is urgent, the adversary is on a war footing, and the alliance must meet the moment.

*Question.* As the U.S. seeks to rebalance its commitment and presence to Europe, key partners—such as France and the UK—have voiced a willingness to create a “reassurance force” to backstop a cease-fire in Ukraine with “tacit support” from the U.S.

How should the U.S. define terms of support for such a European reassurance force and what would its coordination with NATO look like to avoid unwanted escalation?

*Answer.* The US should support the efforts of the European led force while encouraging other allies to join this coalition of the willing. The specific action that the US could take would be to commit to serving as the “backstop” to European forces, which could include strengthened air defense, comprehensive enablers, increased intelligence sharing and domain awareness, and prepositioned capabilities in Europe. Short of that, the US can provide capabilities, operations, training, and logistical support to the European led effort.

