

Public-Private Dialogue Series

Eastern Flank's Expectations from the NATO Summit

11th June, 15:00 CET on Zoom

Driving Questions

Group 1. Time to rebalance the Transatlantic relationship – What Europe must do to step up to the mark?

Group 2. Does NATO have the strength and resilience to provide effective deterrence on the Eastern & Northern Flanks?

Main Takeaways

NATO's Role and Relevance:

- ❖ Deterrence is the “*crown jewel*” of the Transatlantic Alliance, but its effectiveness relies on the cohesion of NATO members. Unity among NATO members strengthens collective defence but also sends a powerful message of solidarity and resolve to its adversaries. With relation to the Eastern Flank, the NATO Summit is expected to emphasise the importance of robust deterrence strategies and capabilities in the spirit of supporting Ukraine, and to signal unilateral resolve in countering threats from Russia.
- ❖ NATO's strategic focus is shifting towards Eastern Europe, highlighting the need for stronger leadership in the civilian and military sectors in the region.
- ❖ The 2024 election year is critical, with European Parliament elections showing a rise in far-right, anti-Ukrainian, and pro-Russian sentiment. Despite this, the European People's Party (EPP) is likely to retain control.
- ❖ The EU will finally have a Commissioner for Defence, marking a significant step in its defence policy.

U.S. Influence

- ❖ U.S. Elections: The outcome of the U.S. elections will significantly influence support for Ukraine and Eastern Europe.
- ❖ Summit Focus: The upcoming NATO summit will emphasise deterrence and defence, with a focus on working with the Western Balkans.

Recommendations

Strategic Actions for the EU

- ❖ **Investments in Defence**
 - There is a consensus that NATO's 2% GDP defence spending target should be regarded as the minimum threshold: **“2% should be the floor, not the ceiling... if we want to meet NATO's new budgetary commitments.”** The challenge for the Allies will be to justify increased defence spending to the public; more clarity on how they spend their defence funding is a requirement to bolster public support. Emphasis should be on pragmatic and tangible necessities over numerical targets.

❖ **Implementing a European Defence Industrial Strategy**

- The European Union is extremely reliant on the US for military production. If it wants to continue adapting to hybrid threats and continue to supply Ukraine with equipment and munitions, it must develop its own robust military-industrial base. Boosting collaboration channels with the defence industry, specifically with the private sector and SMEs, will be crucial to ramp up production and develop advanced military technologies, while reducing US dependency. It is important to note that Russia has successfully transitioned to a war economy, but there is potential for the NATO Allies to outpace Russia's defence spending through concerted and coordinated effort.
- Establish a European-wide initiative to identify and enhance key military production facilities and companies capable of rapidly increasing output.
- Create incentives for innovation in defence technologies and ensure a steady supply of critical components through partnerships between governments and the private sector.
- Determine operational and systemic hurdles within the EU government system that can be addressed to expedite the EU's military production efforts.
- Innovative approaches: The defence industry must find ways to boost capabilities without excessive spending.
- Timeliness can be more crucial than financial expenditure in enhancing defence readiness.
- Defence Framework: An integrated approach to procurement and investment, involving both European and American parts of NATO, is necessary.

Strategic Actions for NATO

❖ ***Ukraine's Membership***

- While the Summit will not set a clear deadline for Ukraine's NATO membership, NATO is committed to Ukraine's eventual inclusion.

❖ ***Support for Ukraine***

- NATO needs to move from reaffirming support for Ukraine to concrete, strategic actions. Reaffirming support to Ukraine is important, but it is equally important to follow up such commitments with actionable strategies. The NATO Summit is expected to address ways to expedite sending advanced weaponry and equipment to Ukraine, as well as address striking Russian targets inside Russian territory; it is also expected to address planning robust, long-term defence strategies.
- NATO must take robust actions and provide a predictable framework to support Ukraine, including advanced military equipment and long-range capabilities.
- Training Ukrainian troops and increasing logistical support are crucial. In-country training and removing limitations on equipment usage are necessary to enable Ukraine to defeat Russia, not just defend itself.

❖ ***Deterrence***

- For NATO's deterrence to remain effective and credible, sufficient forces need to be provided. In some cases, they need to be built anew. Time is of essence for this effort, therefore an early specification of requirements by NATO's defence planners is necessary.

- The Alliance's relationship with the private sector has grown, but more support is needed to navigate emerging destructive technologies, especially those proliferated by actors like Russia.
- ❖ **Cyber and Hybrid Threats**
 - The summit is expected to address the need to combat hybrid threats, including cyber-attacks and information warfare. There is consensus in that strengthening NATO's defences against hybrid, non-traditional forms of aggression, especially in NATO's Eastern Flank, requires innovative solutions and increased cooperation with the private sector.
 - Cybersecurity: Increased information sharing on cyber threats with the private sector is essential, along with forming stronger cyber coalitions.
 - Hybrid Attacks: Russia has ramped up hybrid attacks, particularly disinformation. NATO must address these threats comprehensively.
- ❖ **Understanding Russia**
 - NATO needs a more nuanced understanding of Russian perspectives to improve coordination and effectiveness.
 - Clearly defined roles and responsibilities within NATO will enhance strategic coherence.
- ❖ **Strengthen NATO's Strategic and Operational Planning**
 - Streamline NATO's command structures in the Eastern Flank to improve coordination and readiness, sending a clear message of deterrence to Russia.
 - Enhance NATO's role in cybersecurity and hybrid warfare through greater collaboration with the private sector and adoption of advanced technologies.
 - Standardise equipment, roles, and logistical support across NATO States.