



## Briefing Paper No.117

16 July 2024

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### The 'most successful alliance in history' turns 75, announces 'bridge to membership' for Ukraine and locks horns with China in the Indo-Pacific

Analysis of the NATO Washington Summit, 9-11 July 2024

#### Key decisions:

- The summit adopted an **official text**: the 38-paragraph [Washington Summit Communique](#).
- A plan was approved for **NATO to lead the coordination of security assistance and training to Ukraine**, with a command led by a three-star general, and around 700 personnel working at a NATO headquarters in Germany, and at hubs in the eastern part of the alliance. In addition to coordinating the training of Ukrainian forces, this command will plan and coordinate donations and manage the transfer and repair of equipment. This will give Europe greater responsibility for aiding Ukraine amid uncertainty over the upcoming US presidential election.
- A **financial pledge** to Ukraine was agreed, with 40 billion euros as a minimum baseline within the next year, to be reviewed at the 2025 summit.
- Further steps were taken to bring Ukraine "**even closer to NATO**" on its "irreversible path to NATO membership". These included NATO support and advice on the design and implementation of an integrated air and missile defence architecture for Ukraine, the establishment of a NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training, and Education Centre in Poland and the appointment of a senior civilian representative in Kyiv to act as a focal point for NATO's engagement with senior Ukrainian officials.
- Ukrainian President Zelenskyy joined the summit for a **meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council**, which published a [statement](#) setting out what had been agreed.
- The NATO Secretary General claimed that China is a "decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine" and the summit declaration referred to the strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing as a "cause for profound concern".
- A new US **ballistic missile defence** site in Redzikowo, Poland is now operational.
- A new [NATO Industrial Capacity Expansion pledge](#) was agreed to **scale up military production** and solidify long-term cooperation with industry.
- Defence Ministers from 24 NATO member states signed a **series of multinational initiatives** at the NATO Summit Defence Industry Forum, including: the Alliance Persistent Surveillance from Space (APSS) programme ("the largest multinational investment in space-based capabilities in NATO's history"); the Allied software for Cloud and Edge (ACE) services to ensure unified communications and data sharing across land, air, maritime, space and cyberspace domains; and a Nordic Declaration of Cooperation on Cross-Border Airspace.

- A new **NATO Integrated Cyber Defence Centre** will be established at NATO's strategic military headquarters at SHAPE in Belgium.
- NATO released a [summary](#) of its revised **artificial intelligence (AI) strategy**, which aims to accelerate the use of AI technologies within NATO. The full strategy document remains classified.
- NATO's Updated Policy Guidelines on **Counter-Terrorism** and Updated Action Plan on Enhancing NATO's Role in the International Community's Fight Against Terrorism were endorsed but remain classified.
- A commitment was made to deepen cooperation with **Indo-Pacific partners** Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea that participated in a NATO Summit for the third time. Four new Flagship Projects were launched focusing on support for Ukraine; enhancing cooperation on cyber defence; exchanging information on the challenges posed by disinformation; and engaging on Artificial Intelligence through an expert group.
- A NATO **action plan towards its southern neighbourhood** was adopted. The plan was not made public.
- As part of NATO's commitment to reinforcing engagement and cooperation with its partners in the Middle East and North Africa, a **liaison office will be established in Amman**, Jordan – its first ever in the region.
- The NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) has broadened the scope of its support to the Iraqi Security Institutions, but no further details were forthcoming.
- A new **NATO Policy on Women, Peace and Security** was endorsed and [published](#) at the summit.
- The **next NATO Summit** will be held in The Hague, Netherlands in 2025.

## Introduction: the agenda

The NATO Washington Summit took place on the 9-11 July 2024. It was the fifth NATO summit since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with the first held virtually on 25 February 2022, just one day after the attack, followed by meetings in Brussels, Madrid and Vilnius. [Concerns](#) about host US President Joe Biden's age, health and ability to win the 2024 presidential election formed an unwelcome [elephant in the room](#) at the summit. Indeed, the growing power of far-right forces unfriendly to NATO, not only in the United States but in other member states including France, was likely a [dominant topic](#) behind the scenes.

It was the first summit [Sweden attended](#) as a full member of the alliance and the last summit for Jens Stoltenberg as NATO Secretary General (the NATO leaders [agreed](#) a year ago to extend his mandate until 1 October 2024). Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, whom Stoltenberg [says](#) is an "excellent person to take on the task," will take over.

In a [pre-Summit press conference](#) on 5 July, Stoltenberg stressed that support to Ukraine will be NATO's "most urgent task". He expected heads of state to agree "a substantial package for Ukraine" that would "constitute a bridge to NATO membership". While the text of the NATO summit communique was largely agreed in advance, debate over the final language about Ukraine's eventual membership was still under discussion in the run up to the summit.

On the 8 July the NATO Secretary General [met](#) with US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd J. Austin III, conducted a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery and later [received](#) the US Department of Defense's Medal for distinguished Public Service.

On the eve of the summit (9 July), a Women, Peace and Security [roundtable](#) took place, while the NATO Secretary General gave a keynote [speech](#) at the Defense Industry Forum, hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce. Later in the day, a NATO 75th Anniversary [Celebratory Event](#) was held at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium, where the

North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949. In his [speech](#) at the event, the Secretary General described NATO as the “most successful alliance in history”. In his [remarks](#), US President Joe Biden announced the “historic donation” of further air defence equipment for Ukraine (see below) and presented Jens Stoltenberg with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States’ highest civilian honour.

On the 10-11 July, running parallel to the Summit, a [NATO Public Forum](#) was held. The Forum was co-hosted by the alliance and the US government in collaboration with five openly pro-NATO think tanks: the German Marshall Fund, the Atlantic Council, the Center for a New American Security, GLOBSEC, and the Hudson Institute. It consisted of a series of panel discussions, debates, and interactions sessions on various topics from the NATO Summit agenda.

### ***Day 1 of the Summit***

The Summit began in earnest with the NATO Secretary General delivering a [doorstep statement](#) and this was followed by the scheduled arrivals and doorstep announcements of leaders.

After the NATO Secretary General’s [address](#) at the NATO Public Forum, a bilateral meeting Between Stoltenberg and the new UK Prime Minister and an official photo of the NATO Secretary General and the Heads of State and Government (only three of whom are women; two less than at the Vilnius Summit), the first session of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) at the level of Heads of State and Government took place. Aside from some [opening remarks](#) by the NATO Secretary General and US President, the NAC meeting took place behind closed doors. The NAC meeting focused on all three main topics: support for Ukraine; deterrence and defence; and strengthening global partnerships. The [Washington Summit Communiqué](#) was published at the close of the NAC session, and the NATO Secretary General held a [press conference](#) in which he outlined what had been agreed.

In the evening there were three social dinners: one for Heads of State and Government and their spouses, hosted by the US President and the First Lady; one for Foreign Affairs Ministers hosted by the US Secretary of State; and one for Ministers of Defence hosted by the US Secretary of Defense.

### ***Day 2 of the Summit***

The second day of the Summit began with the arrival of national leaders, and was followed by the NATO Secretary General making some public opening remarks with three of the leaders from the Indo-Pacific partners: [New Zealand](#); [South Korea](#) and [Japan](#). A final meeting of the NAC took place at the level of Heads of State and Government, with Indo-Pacific Partners (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea) and the EU. Aside from some very brief [opening remarks](#) by the NATO Secretary General, this was another closed meeting.

After the NAC meeting, the NATO Secretary General held a bilateral meeting and [joint press conference](#) with President Zelenskyy. This was followed by a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council, at which the [opening remarks](#) by the NATO Secretary General were the only part of the meeting that was open to the media. After the meeting an official 11-paragraph [Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Council](#) was issued. The Summit concluded with a [final press conference](#) by the NATO Secretary General.

The following more detailed analysis of key aspects of the Summit draws on a combination of the above links, wider press reporting of the Summit and NATO Watch insights in attempt to fill the information gaps. The remainder of this briefing discusses key developments at the Summit under the following three headings:

- I. Ukraine membership and security assistance;
- II. Strengthening NATO’s long-term deterrence and defence; and
- III. Global partnerships, China and the Indo-Pacific.

## I. Ukraine membership and security assistance

### ***Backstory***

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in a major escalation of the armed conflict that began in 2014. On the eve of the summit, [Russia attacked Ukrainian cities](#) with missiles, hitting a children's hospital in Kyiv. At least 31 people were killed in the Russian attacks.

NATO member states are fully committed as co-belligerents in the war, having provided significant quantities of weapons to Ukraine, including main battle tanks, missiles, ammunition, [cluster munitions](#) and combat aircraft. Of the \$206 billion in military and nonmilitary aid allocated to Ukraine by countries around the world, \$79 billion has come from the United States, according to the [Ukraine Support Tracker](#) database

While the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meetings have resulted in significant battlefield support for Ukraine, they have been ad-hoc and unpredictable. The NATO Secretary General has been pushing to have NATO take up some of the slack by coordinating the security assistance and training process, partly by using NATO's command structure and drawing on funds from its common budget.

Hungary remains an outlier on this proposal and opposes NATO efforts in providing more military or financial assistance. In June the NATO Secretary General [agreed an opt out](#) for Hungary in exchange for not blocking NATO efforts.

In terms of Ukraine's future NATO membership, there continues to be little or no movement. At the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest the alliance stated that Ukraine (and Georgia) would become members but avoided any specific timetable or pathway. Ukraine formally requested an accelerated procedure for NATO membership in September 2022. At the 2023 summit in [Vilnius](#), the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine was dropped and a new NATO-Ukraine Council was established for crisis consultations and

decision-making, giving Ukraine slightly more leverage in the NATO bureaucracy.

Since then, there has been no timeline for Ukraine's path to possible membership, which remains extremely unlikely while the war with Russia continues. The official line has been that Kyiv will become a member sometime in the undefined future. Ukraine continues to push for NATO to firm up the language on its eventual membership. Despite support for membership among some, mainly eastern members of the alliance, NATO and policy experts remain divided on the issue. For example, [dozens of foreign policy experts](#) called on NATO to avoid advancing toward Ukrainian membership at the summit, warning it would endanger the US and its allies and split the coalition.

### ***What was agreed in Washington?***

The NATO leaders [pledged](#) to support Ukraine on an “irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership”. However, as expected, they once again left open when exactly that membership would come, instead noting that they “will be in a position to extend an invitation . . . when Allies agree and conditions are met”. In addition, the Secretary General has appointed a NATO Senior Representative to act as a focal point for NATO's engagement with Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv. And in his [press conference](#) on 5 July Stoltenberg said that the latest package of measures for Ukraine would contain five elements—a NATO command; more funding; more military support; more security agreements; and more interoperability—that together would “constitute a bridge to NATO membership”..

### ***The new NATO command: security assistance and training for Ukraine***

The leaders agreed to take over the coordination and provision of most of the international security assistance to Ukraine. The NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine will be a command led by a three-star general and around 700 personnel working at a NATO headquarters (a US military base) in Wiesbaden, Germany, as well as at hubs in the

eastern part of the alliance. NATO will coordinate the training of Ukrainian forces at facilities in member states, plan and coordinate donations and manage the transfer and repair of equipment.

It is unclear whether the option of deploying NATO or NATO member state military trainers on the ground in Ukraine (see [NATO Watch Briefing 114](#)) was discussed. There were NATO trainers in Ukraine for several years before and even in the run-up to Russia's full-scale invasion of the country in February 2022. Some countries, notably Estonia and France, have not ruled out deploying noncombat troops to western Ukraine as trainers, while some experts [suggest](#) deploying Western special forces in advisory and training roles, although neither option seems likely in the short-term.

#### *A long-term financial pledge*

A new financial pledge was agreed: 40 billion euros (\$43 bn) as a minimum baseline within the next year to be reviewed at the next summit in 2025. It was also agreed that this burden would be shared fairly, taking into account the size of member states' GDP. The NATO Secretary General initially made this [proposal in April](#), with the aim of taking the politics and uncertainty out of military aid to Ukraine (especially in the context of upcoming US presidential elections).

#### *More military support*

The leaders announced more immediate military support to Ukraine, that included air defences, F-16 combat aircraft and ammunition. In a [joint statement](#), the US, Germany and Romania announced that each of them will provide a Patriot battery, while the Netherlands will work with other countries to enable an additional Patriot battery to be supplied. In addition, Italy will provide a SAMP-T long-range air defence system. The statement said the air-defence systems "will help to protect Ukrainian cities, civilians, and soldiers, and we are coordinating with the Ukrainian government so that these systems can be utilized rapidly". Negotiations over how to procure these systems have been ongoing for several months, with some member states

reluctant to part with the sophisticated defensive weapons until replacements could be found. According to the [statement](#) from NATO-Ukraine Council meeting, NATO will also support and advise on the design and implementation of an integrated air and missile defence architecture for Ukraine.

Denmark, the Netherlands and the US [declared](#) that the first of about 85 F-16 combat aircraft were in the process of being transferred to Ukraine—more than 18 months after President Zelenskyy began asking for them. Dick Schoof, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, and Mette Frederiksen, his counterpart from Denmark, [said](#) the "transfer process" of F-16s to Kyiv was under way after months of pilot training and political negotiations. The two leaders added that "Ukraine will be flying operational F-16s this summer".

#### *Bilateral security assistance*

About 20 countries have concluded bilateral security agreements with Ukraine. Arguably the most important one was concluded on the 13 June between the United States and Ukraine on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Italy. US President Joe Biden and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy [signed](#) a 10-year bilateral security agreement that is intended to help develop Ukraine's armed forces and serve as a step towards Ukraine's eventual NATO membership. Zelenskiy called the agreement historic and a bridge toward his country's eventual NATO membership. It will allow the two countries to share intelligence, hold training and military education programmes and combined military exercises.

#### *Increasing interoperability*

Military interoperability with Ukraine is also expected to deepen with the creation of a new NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre in Poland.

#### ***Analysis***

Ukrainian officials appeared to be satisfied with the result of the summit, although President Zelenskyy continued to push for restrictions to be lifted on the use of US

weapons to attack military targets inside Russia. “If we want to win, if we want to prevail, if we want to save our country and to defend it, we need to lift all the limitations,” Zelenskyy said in his [joint press conference](#) with the NATO Secretary General. Andriy Yermak, a close advisor to President Zelenskyy, [said](#) “The language of the document is really strong. The alliance made real steps forward ... The next step is Ukraine needs to receive the invitation”.

However, there remains no consensus for giving a country in the middle of a war Article 5 guarantees (making an attack on any NATO member an attack on all). Instead, the issue was creatively fudged again: despite describing the country as on an “irreversible path” to joining NATO in the summit communique, in practical terms Kyiv is no nearer to doing so than after the Vilnius Summit in 2023. Moreover, the new weapons committed at the summit are unlikely to change much on the battlefield. Indeed, no amount of military aid is likely to be sufficient to help Kyiv recover its lost territories and win the war, although it might help to prevent Ukraine from losing it (despite some hawkish [critics](#) labelling the summit as a “route map to defeat”). Thus, the net result is likely to be a continuation of an open-ended war of attrition with little prospect of a diplomatic outcome soon.

In his [pre-ministerial press conference](#), the NATO Secretary General said Ukraine cannot be forced to give up land or future NATO membership in return for ending the war. “We cannot have Minsk 3”, he said, referring to earlier failed peace agreements between Moscow and Kyiv. “There's no sign that Putin is ... ready to negotiate for peace”, he added.

The two [Minsk agreements](#) signed in 2014 and 2015 sought to stop Russia's first incursion into Ukraine in 2014, imposed a ceasefire and allowed self-government in parts of eastern Ukraine. However, the agreements were seen in Kyiv as sealing Russian influence over parts of Ukraine and were never fully implemented.

Stoltenberg described “a pattern of Russian aggressive behaviour against Ukraine”, adding that “the war didn't start in 2022, it started in

2014 when they first illegally annexed Crimea, then some months later, went into eastern Donbas, agreed a ceasefire—the Minsk 1—violated that, moved ... even further west, agreed Minsk 2, waited for seven years, and then launched a full-scale attack, and took even more”.

Stoltenberg concluded that “What we need now is actually something credible, where the war stops, and Russia stops its aggression, and therefore when the fighting ends, we need security, we need to enable the Ukrainians to deter, but we also need some kind of security guarantees for Ukraine”.

However, also lacking credibility is the current vague policy of supporting Ukraine for “as long as it takes” while leaving the endgame unclear. The refusal of the Secretary General, and the West more generally, to entertain a genuine diplomatic solution to the war is baffling. As Zachary Paikin, a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Peace & Diplomacy, [writes](#):

“Repeatedly dangling the prospect of NATO membership before Ukrainians, without any veritable prospect of fulfilling it, has created unrealistic expectations in both Kyiv and Moscow – and helped to reduce the security of all nations from Vancouver to Vladivostok. An imperfect but nonetheless more stable equilibrium must be based on a mixture of coercion and compromise – on both sides. One such compromise should be to drop the fiction that Ukraine will ever join the NATO alliance.”

## II. Strengthening NATO’s long-term deterrence and defence

### *Backstory*

To fulfil NATO’s three core tasks (deterrence and defence; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security, as set out in the [2022 Strategic Concept](#)), the alliance employs a mix of mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities. At successive summits since 2014, NATO leaders have agreed a range of measures to enhance their deterrence and defence

posture, including the establishment of an [enhanced Forward Presence](#). This Forward Presence was initially based on four multinational battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic states, and then, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was agreed to expand it to include four more in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. NATO also previously recognised that credible deterrence required these relatively small multinational forces to be underpinned by a robust reinforcement strategy.

The 2022 Madrid Summit [further strengthened](#) conventional deterrence on NATO's eastern front in four ways: (a) a massive increase in the NATO Response Force (NRF) from 40,000 to 300,000 troops with the expectation that the NRF would be placed on high readiness during 2023; (b) more pre-assigned forces, with the eight battlegroups in the eastern part of the alliance (the Forward Presence) increased up to brigade levels—about 3,000 to 5,000 troops in addition to local forces—with foreign forces pre-assigned to specific locations, but not permanently deployed; (c) more pre-positioned heavy weapons, logistics and command-and control assets; and (d) an increase in the US long-term military presence in Europe. Since February 2022, the United States had already deployed or extended over 20,000 additional forces to Europe in response to the Ukraine crisis, adding additional air, land, maritime, cyber, and space capabilities, bringing its total commitment to more than 100,000 service personnel across Europe. At the Madrid Summit President Biden [announced](#) additional long-term commitments to Europe, including a permanent US 5th Army Corps headquarters in Poland—the first permanent US forces on NATO's eastern flank—and an enhanced rotational force presence in Poland, Romania and the Baltics.

Further strengthening of conventional deterrence on NATO's eastward flank was undertaken in Vilnius with the agreement of a new "family" of regional defence plans containing thousands of pages of secret military strategies that detail for the first time since the Cold War how the alliance would respond to a Russian or a terrorist attack. Most

of these plans were drawn up behind closed doors by the permanent [Military Representatives](#) at NATO headquarters in Brussels and other NATO and national defence officials, without any prior scrutiny by parliamentary bodies and independent experts. (On criticism of the opaqueness of this process, see [here](#)).

There are three regional plans: The High North and the Atlantic (led by Joint Force Command Norfolk, United States); Central (covering the Baltic to the Alps, and commanded from Brunssum, Netherlands); and South-East (covering the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and commanded from Naples). Each plan reportedly sets out in more detail what is required given the geography of those regions to deter and defend against the threats. From those plans, force requirements are drawn up setting out the capabilities required in all domains—space, cyber, land, maritime, and air—to execute those tasks. It is expected to take several years to execute the plans, which remain classified.

### ***What was agreed in Washington?***

The Summit Declaration reemphasized much of what had previously been agreed, including the need for "the necessary forces, capabilities, resources and infrastructure for our new defence plans, to be prepared for high-intensity and multi-domain collective defence", while also calling for the "modernization of NATO for a new era of collective defence" and ensuring "high readiness forces across all domains". NATO operates in five domains—land, air, maritime, cyber and space—and the declaration stressed the need to "take urgent action to increase capabilities in accordance with the NATO Defence Planning Process," with a focus on "accelerating transformation and the integration of new technologies and innovation". NATO, for example, is currently implementing a [digital transformation](#) strategy to enhance decision-making and interoperability.

The Declaration also acknowledged the growing significance of space by calling for the "acceleration of the integration of space into

our planning, exercises, and multi-domain operations” It also reemphasized the importance of “national and collective resilience” as a foundation for credible deterrence and defence.

The NATO Secretary General also [reiterated](#) that strengthened defences have been made possible because member states are spending more. 23 of them, a record number, now invest at least 2 percent of GDP in defence (compared to 3 in 2014 when the pledge to invest 2% of GDP was made), and military spending across European allies and Canada increased by 18 per cent in 2024 alone.

The Summit also reaffirmed NATO’s “commitment to integrating its ambitious Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Human Security agendas across all core tasks”. The summit also saw the formal endorsement and [publication](#) of a revised NATO WPS policy, that addresses emerging threats like technology-facilitated gender-based violence, the misuse of new technologies, conflict-related sexual violence and climate security. It also recognizes the specific dangers posed to women by the war in Ukraine. (NATO’s first ever policy on WPS was adopted in 2007.)

In addition, the following five new announcements were made:

#### *The NATO Industrial Capacity Expansion Pledge*

This [pledge](#) was the most significant new announcement and aims to strengthen transatlantic defence industrial cooperation and boost production.

The pledge includes long-term actions such as developing national plans to strengthen industrial capacity, accelerating multinational procurement, enhancing the implementation of standards to increase interoperability, removing barriers to trade and investment, and securing critical supply chains. The initial focus will be on munitions and air and missile defence systems to execute NATO’s defence plans and to support Ukraine. The pledge builds on the Defence Production Action Plan agreed at the Vilnius Summit in July 2023. In the margins of the Summit, the NATO Support

and Procurement Agency (NSPA) placed an [order](#) for Stinger anti-aircraft missiles worth \$700 million. Over the next five years, the European NATO member states and Canada plan to acquire thousands of air defence and artillery systems, 850 modern aircraft, mostly 5th generation F-35s as well as other major weapon systems.

#### *A new missile defence base in Poland*

NATO’s ballistic missile defences were enhanced with a [new](#) US-developed ‘Aegis Ashore’ base becoming operational in Redzikowo, Poland. The site is part of a larger NATO missile shield and is designed to detect, track and intercept short-to-intermediate range ballistic missiles.

#### *The launch of a series of multinational technology and cooperative initiatives*

Defence Ministers from multiple NATO member states [signed a series of multinational initiatives](#) at the NATO Summit Defence Industry Forum, including:

- The Alliance Persistent Surveillance from Space (APSS) programme, which has now transitioned into the implementation phase with 17 NATO member states contributing the equivalent of more than \$1 billion to leverage commercial and national space assets over the next five years;
- The Allied software for Cloud and Edge (ACE) services (supported by 22 member states) aims to integrate allied software solutions with cutting-edge cloud and computing technologies; and
- A Declaration of Cooperation on Cross-Border Airspace signed by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden to enable more airspace from the five participating countries to be used for NATO training and exercises,

#### *A revised AI strategy*

NATO released a [summary](#) of a revised artificial intelligence (AI) strategy, which aims to accelerate the use of AI technologies within NATO. It builds on one agreed in 2021 and takes account of recent advances in AI technologies, such as generative AI, and AI-



enabled information tools. The strategy identifies several priorities, including: advancing the implementation of NATO's Principles of Responsible Use; increasing interoperability between AI systems throughout NATO; the combination of AI with other emerging disruptive technologies; and expanding NATO's AI ecosystem through closer cooperation with industry, academia, NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator DIANA, the NATO Innovation Fund and like-minded partners. For the first time, the strategy also identifies AI-enabled disinformation, information operations and gender-based violence as issues of concern. The strategy document itself remains classified.

#### *A new NATO Integrated Cyber Defence Centre*

The leaders agreed to establish a new NATO Integrated Cyber Defence Centre ([NICC](#)) to inform NATO military commanders on possible threats and vulnerabilities in cyberspace, including privately-owned civilian critical infrastructures necessary to support military activities. The Centre will bring together civilian and military personnel from across NATO and its member states, as well as experts from industry. The Centre will be based at NATO's strategic military headquarters at SHAPE in Belgium. Details on the structure and functions of the Centre will be developed in the coming months.

#### ***Analysis***

After the Vilnius Summit, which gave the political green light to move forward with the three regional defence plans, NATO Watch criticised the lack of transparency and accountability in the process, and called for the plans to be made open and visible. A recent [policy brief](#) by the European Leadership Network, and written by two former NATO insiders, reached a similar conclusion, arguing that the plans are demanding and complex and should be the subject of detailed parliamentary scrutiny by the various individual national parliaments, with the aim of identifying the true costs of implementing the plans, both nationally and collectively.

What is clear from the Washington Summit is that the system for securing national military and political commitments for NATO is becoming increasingly complex and appears to give too much power to the NATO bureaucracy. Once again, key documents—such as the revised AI strategy—have not been made public and cannot be subjected to detailed parliamentary scrutiny. More must be done to create awareness and understanding of NATO plans among the public. Not only would this increase trust in national and NATO responses, but greater open access to such plans would also serve as a deterrent to those that threaten us.

Finally, as the Quincy Institute has [argued](#), a more nuanced assessment of the Russian threat to Europe is required. It seems likely that Russia has neither the capability (being at a decisive conventional military disadvantage against NATO) nor the intent to launch a war of aggression against NATO member states. The current risk of military escalation over Ukraine needs to be soothed by complementing military deterrence with a new diplomatic effort to address tensions.

### **III. Global partnerships, China and the Indo-Pacific**

#### ***Backstory***

NATO has increasingly turned its attention to the Indo-Pacific in recent years, particularly as China has emerged as an important partner for Moscow. The region's growing importance was reflected in the attendance at the summit of leaders and senior officials from Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea for the third year in a row.

The question of what role NATO should play in the growing US-China competition remains an open one. The United States wants to forge closer linkages between its European and Asian alliance networks, while some European members states remain uneasy about linking the two strategic theatres.

The first minor reference to China in a NATO [statement](#) was at the London summit in 2019,

but transatlantic concerns have accelerated since then. NATO's recent emphasis on China is in part the realization of President Biden's [strategy](#) to build a coalition of like-minded nations to confront China over its activities. The Pentagon has been publishing [annual reports](#) on China's growing military capabilities since 2000, and sees it in the longer term as posing a greater strategic threat than Russia. At the previous summit in Vilnius a wide range of concerns about China's behaviour were highlighted in the communique, including the "deepening strategic partnership" between China and Russia".

### ***What was agreed in Washington?***

#### ***Locking horns with China***

After decades of viewing China as a distant threat, the [summit communique](#) described China's supply of military components and chemicals to Russia as "a decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine". The declaration also expressed concerns over Beijing's nuclear arsenal and its capabilities in space.

Beijing insists that it does not provide military aid to Russia but has maintained [trade ties](#) throughout the conflict. It also accuses NATO of overreaching and inciting confrontation in the Indo-Pacific region. The Chinese embassy in Washington on 10 July [said](#) China is neither a creator of nor a party to the Ukraine crisis. "China does not provide weapons to the parties to the conflict and strictly controls the export of dual-use articles, which is widely applauded by the international community," said Liu Pengyu, the embassy spokesman.

When asked about China's ongoing military exercise with Belarus, Stoltenberg [said](#): "The Chinese exercise together with Belarusian forces ... just confirms how authoritarian regimes are aligning more and more, and also how China is coming closer to NATO, in Europe, in Africa and the Arctic and elsewhere". The Chinese-Belarusian anti-terrorism [exercises](#), conducted not far from the border with NATO ally Poland, coincided with the NATO summit.

"We need to remember what kind of regimes we are speaking about," Stoltenberg said. "We

are speaking about authoritarian regimes. China is oppressing its own people, cracking down on democratic voices ... in Hong Kong, more assertive behaviour in the South China Sea, threatening neighbours, threatening Taiwan". "And China is conducting a huge military buildup with no transparency and investing heavily in modern missiles [and] nuclear weapons," he added.

However, there were very few practical measures agreed with NATO's "like-minded" partners in the Indo-Pacific. According to Stoltenberg, new cooperative projects on disinformation, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence, as well as support to Ukraine, were launched. In addition, discussions focused on "expanding the scope of defence industrial cooperation and how to improve intelligence sharing".

#### ***The Southern neighbourhood action plan and a new liaison office in Jordan***

The summit communique states that NATO has "adopted an action plan for a stronger, more strategic and result-oriented approach toward our southern neighbourhood, which will be regularly updated". The plan has not been made public. One of the other few practical partnership outcomes was the [agreement](#) to open a NATO Liaison Office in Amman, Jordan. This decision builds on nearly three decades of bilateral relations, particularly through the Mediterranean Dialogue.

### ***Analysis***

The development of security ties between NATO and Washington's East Asian allies has gained momentum as they seek to counter security threats posed by the perceived revisionist ambitions of authoritarian Russia, China and North Korea. However, NATO's drift into the Indo-Pacific is likely to heighten tensions in an already tense regional environment. As the Quincy Institute has [argued](#) both regions should prioritize conflict resolution and management without needlessly interlinking the two.

There is a real danger of NATO's approach entrenching a systemic three bloc rivalry

between China, Russia and NATO-EU-US, with all the attendant risks – from nuclear war to missed opportunities to address the existential threat of climate change and future pandemics. To avoid NATO being drawn into a great power competition, further public and parliamentary scrutiny of the motivations, advantages and shortcomings of this strategy is needed.

## Conclusions

Despite the self-congratulatory atmosphere of NATO's 75th anniversary summit, basic issues about the future of war and peace in Europe remain unanswered. NATO leaders purportedly focused in Washington on "Trump-proofing" the alliance out of fear that former President Donald Trump could be re-elected and fracture the alliance. Given such purposely reduced expectations only incremental announcements were made both in the ongoing transformation of NATO's defence and deterrence posture, and on support to Ukraine. There was little space for new thinking or innovation (as reflected in a 38-paragraph communique, compared to 90 paragraphs in Vilnius).

Complicated political dynamics within several NATO capitals will undoubtedly influence the nature of transatlantic cooperation in the future. Moreover, the shifting distribution of world power has led to growing strains among the transatlantic allies with [Hungary seeking closer ties](#) with Russia and China, and [Turkey taking more strident views](#) on the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza conflicts.

Having said this, opinion polling by both the [Pew Research Centre](#) and by [NATO](#) itself suggests that an overwhelming majority of citizens see NATO positively. However, this support is probably shallow. None of the 32 NATO member states carries out systematic parliamentary scrutiny of NATO proposals before they are endorsed at summits, and post-parliamentary review of NATO decisions is sporadic and ineffective. Legislators know little about what goes on in NATO intergovernmental working groups, and their limited knowledge makes it hard if not

impossible for them to scrutinize their government's involvement in NATO effectively or hold anyone to account for decisions taken within the alliance.

This long-standing [democratic deficit](#) within the alliance needs to be addressed. NATO should be adopting an information openness policy consistent with the access to information laws already in place in the alliance's 32 member states, including guidelines for proactive publication of core information, a mechanism by which the public can file requests for information, and an independent review body for hearing appeals against refusals or failures to make information public within a short timeframe. However, the issue of improving transparency and accountability in NATO was once again overlooked at the Washington Summit.

The summit outcomes continue NATO on a path that is likely to lead to a further deterioration in relations between the world's 'great' powers. It is a path that seeks to protect the interests of some of the most militarised states in the world rather than one that protects humanity. At a time when humanity and the planet face an array of profound and pressing common challenges—the issue of [climate security](#), for example, barely featured at the summit—it is hard to escape the conclusion that international cooperation to address those challenges likely became even harder because of the Washington Summit.

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