

The 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw

Expectations and priorities

SUMMARY

The 2016 Warsaw Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will convene on 8–9 July, bringing together member countries' heads of state or government in order to facilitate dialogue, and establish new policies and strategies for the Alliance. The main issues on the agenda will include balancing the Alliance's policies towards the east and the south; EU-NATO relations; and ensuring that Allies are fulfilling their defence budget commitments. In the face of emerging and complex threats in the European security environment, the challenge is for NATO to maintain and project a cohesive, united and effective vision for transatlantic security.



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A critical summit

The 2016 Warsaw Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will convene on 8-9 July, bringing together member states' heads of state and heads of government in order to facilitate dialogue and establish new policies and strategies for the Alliance. NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, and Deputy Secretary-General, Alexander Vershbow, have labelled the 2016 Warsaw NATO Summit as a 'landmark' one, due to the [rapidly changing security climate](#). According to a NATO [statement](#), the main challenge facing the summit will be how to strengthen and modernise NATO's defence and deterrence posture, as well as to assess the long-term implications of the Ukraine crisis on NATO's [relations with Russia](#). The latter will also include decisions on how to enhance multinational presence in the eastern areas of the Alliance.

Background

Since the first NATO Summit in Paris in 1957, 26 [summits](#) have taken place at key junctures in the history of the Alliance. Each summit is hosted by a member country on a volunteer basis, based on a decision by the [North Atlantic Council](#) (NAC), the principal political decision-making body of the Alliance. Decisions taken at the summits are issued in the form of declarations and communiqués and then translated into action by the relevant actors, namely the NAC's subordinate committees and NATO's command structure, which cover the whole range of functions and activities of the Alliance. NATO summits are normally attended only by member countries, but occasionally convene in different formats, including, for example, meetings of defence or foreign ministers, heads of state or government of countries belonging to the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the NATO-Russia Council, the NATO-Ukraine Commission or the NATO-Georgia Commission. They can also include leaders from countries contributing troops to a NATO-led operation¹ or high-level representatives from international organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union or the World Bank.

The 2014 NATO [Summit in Wales](#) was marked by the crisis in Ukraine, growing instability in the southern neighbourhood and rising transnational threats, such as ISIL/Da'esh (or 'Islamic State'). While, at that summit, Allied leaders had been expected to focus on NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan at the end of 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine shifted their focus. NATO leaders examined the response to Russia's involvement in the Ukraine crisis and re-engaged in the fundamental debate over NATO's strategic approach to Russia, its deterrence and defence posture as well as its core purpose, reaffirming NATO's core mission of [collective defence](#) as enshrined in [Article 5](#) of the Washington Treaty.

Since Wales, the Alliance has been facing several [issues](#) that will have an impact on the priorities expected to shape this year's summit. NATO is experiencing challenges derived from the east and south of its borders. As they differ greatly, these challenges result in strategic divisions: in the east, Russian aggression following the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and Russia's use of hybrid warfare tactics that [threaten](#) regional stability; in the south, the consequences of the war in Syria, including continued Islamist violence, have led to Europe's migration and refugee crisis and a rise in Jihadist terrorism within

Key decisions – 2014 Wales Summit

- [Wales Summit Declaration](#)
- [Joint Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission](#)
- [Wales Summit Declaration on Afghanistan](#)
- [The Wales Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond](#)
- [Readiness Action Plan](#) (RAP)

the Alliance's borders. Other issues that are likely to have an impact on this year's agenda are the future of NATO partnerships; further NATO enlargement, especially in the near future, with states such as [Montenegro](#) gaining membership; and [the future of deterrence](#), what it means and how nuclear weapons, missile defence systems and cybersecurity play a role.

Warsaw agenda and challenges

Although NATO has not released an agenda of events and topics to be discussed at the summit, there are several recurring subjects which NATO officials and member countries, as well as analysts on both sides of the Atlantic, have highlighted. The following can be expected to be this year's topics for prioritised policies and strategic improvement.

Strengthening NATO's presence in the eastern part of the Alliance:

Poland's President, Andrzej Duda, announced that the establishment of new military bases in eastern Europe (notably in the Baltic region and Poland) will be a priority for the Warsaw Summit. This will be based on the implementation of strengthened military capabilities which were agreed upon at the Wales Summit in 2014. In order to strengthen deterrence on the eastern flank, NATO Allies will need to [discuss](#) how to financially and operationally support the enhancement of their ability to deploy forces to the east. At the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in early June, the Secretary-General announced that member countries will agree to [deploy](#), by rotation, four multinational battalions in the Baltic countries and Poland. These battalions will be part of a larger NATO response force, a new spearhead force, and eight new small headquarters across the eastern part of the Alliance. Increasing NATO's presence in the east will be necessary when deliberating [a strategy for combatting hybrid war](#), which the Polish government expects to be presented at the Warsaw Summit. In addition, there is likely to be discussion over NATO's [engagement](#) with Russia and the benefits and implications for continued [dialogue with it](#), as a way to ensure deterrence. These plans are subject to the final political consultations before action takes place. The summit is also likely to designate [cyberwar](#) as the fifth domain of warfare (the others being air, sea, land and space) as the USA did in 2011. This would give NATO the option to treat certain cyber-attacks as military attacks, and respond accordingly under [Article 5](#) of the Washington Treaty. [Information-sharing](#) among Allies is also likely to be discussed.

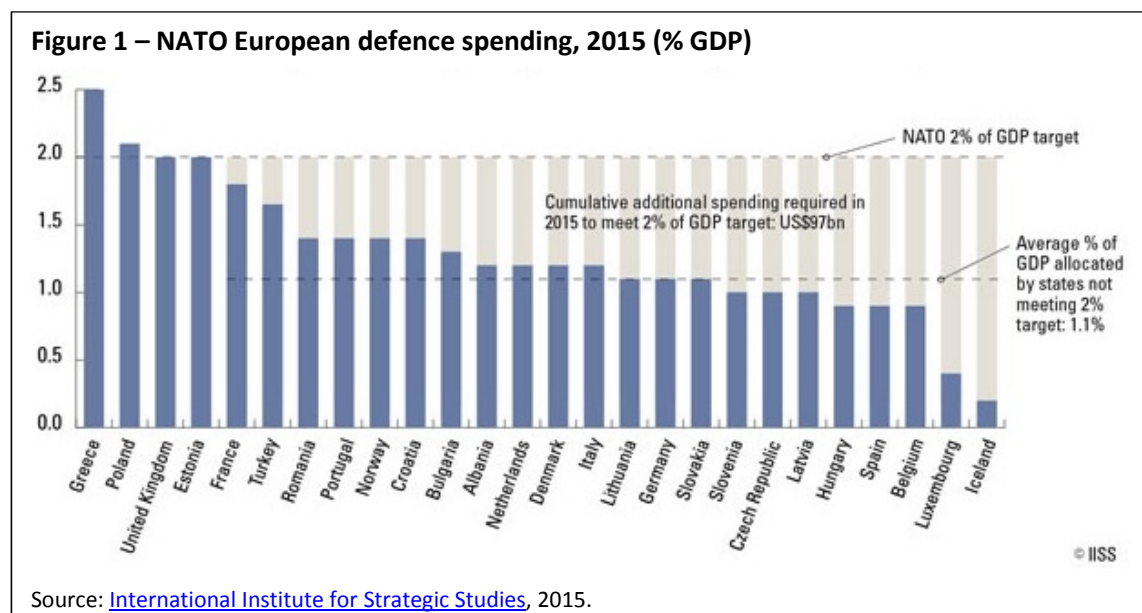
Enhancing collective defence and projecting stability beyond NATO borders

The multiple crises on NATO's east and south have spurred considerable concerns about fragmentation among its members and conflict of priorities. The Alliance is faced with the challenge of achieving consensus within and projecting [stability](#) beyond its borders. This is directly linked to managing support for the Alliance's partners both east and south (for instance, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia), and with assisting partners in their efforts to build stronger defence institutions and training forces. The summit will also address the issue of how NATO works with various different [partners](#) on issues of mutual interest. NATO has built a network of partnerships with more than 40 countries worldwide, including in North Africa and the Middle East; with non-NATO members in Europe, such as Finland and Sweden, both of which are NATO 'enhanced opportunity partners'; and with countries such as Australia, Japan and South Korea. NATO is now looking at various ways to deepen and broaden these partnerships. It might, for example, intensify political consultations by making them more frequent and more focused, or it could engage certain interested partners on specific subjects of

common concern by using established forums, such as the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, as well as smaller, more flexible formats. Earlier in June 2016, EU High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, [outlined](#) the EU's role in working within NATO frameworks in order to assist with the promotion of regional stability in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions, where regional instability has resulted in the migration and refugee crisis. In addition, through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU has an advisory presence in [Ukraine](#), assisting with the country's security sector reform. EU-NATO cooperation in the promotion of regional stability could be beneficial to both the EU and NATO. At the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Tirana in May 2016, Eva Kaili (S&D, Greece), who heads the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (DNAT), [asked](#) about ways to substantially enhance cooperation between the EU and NATO. The NATO Deputy Secretary-General stated that, recently, there had been a huge amount of progress in EU-NATO cooperation, for instance in the area of maritime security (through the NATO operation in the Aegean Sea and possibly also in the central Mediterranean), hybrid warfare, capacity-building in the MENA region, and support to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. He outlined future cooperation areas, such as the fight against terrorism, illegal migration and countering disinformation campaigns and other forms of hybrid warfare.

Reviewing and reconfirming the defence investment pledge:

The Wales Summit saw extensive [commitment](#) from European NATO member countries to stop the decline in defence budgets. The 'defence investment pledge' – the defence spending levels that NATO Allies have pledged to reach by 2024 – ensures that member countries are spending, or aiming to spend, 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on



their defence budget.

In addition, Allies have pledged to spend 20% of defence expenditure on procurement and programme-specific research and development by 2024. Defence spending has been an area of contention within NATO, especially for the United States, which constitutes the largest direct contributor to NATO in absolute terms. After many years of decline, 2015 was the first year when the Alliance registered a small increase in

defence spending. In spite of the discernible upward [trend in defence budgets](#), member countries need to continue working to ensure that they are fulfilling their original commitment, with only the United States, Greece, Estonia, Poland and the United Kingdom having so far met the 2% [target](#). According to the EU [Institute for Strategic Studies](#), another question is whether spending more is a replacement for, or a complement to, spending better. Burden-sharing and capacity-building will be at the top of the Obama administration's list of [priorities](#) for the summit, as the USA has been vocal about its wish that Europe as whole make a greater military effort towards its own defence. Through NATO, the USA has also [conducted](#) the largest military exercise and sent the largest number of ammunition shipments since 2005 in order to counter Russian aggression in the east of Europe.

Enhancing NATO-EU relations

NATO shares with the EU a majority of its member countries (22), but also common values that are entrenched within the idea of liberal democracies, and common concerns that span a range from international terrorism to cyber-defence. As of 2002, NATO and the EU have had a [strategic partnership](#) established through the European Union-NATO Declaration on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and the 'Berlin Plus' arrangements. Following the release of the EU's [Global Strategy](#) a week before the Warsaw Summit, it is anticipated that further dialogue regarding increased EU-NATO cooperation will be on the agenda. The EU and NATO are expected to make a joint statement in Warsaw, [identifying areas of cooperation](#) such as fighting hybrid and cyber-threats, supporting the EU's defence capacity-building, and increasing maritime security.

At the NATO Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in December 2015, the EU's HR/VP [stated](#) that the EU and NATO are complementary and discussed the importance of cooperation based on the common challenges they face inside and outside Europe, and at its borders. On that occasion, the EU and NATO agreed to cooperate in the areas of hybrid threats, support the security sector in partner countries, and implement operational decisions that were made by the heads of state or government earlier in 2015. The importance of EU unity for security in Europe was also [highlighted](#) by the NATO Secretary-General ahead of the UK referendum. The [European Council](#) discussed EU-NATO cooperation ahead of the summit at its June 2016 meeting in the presence of the NATO Secretary-General and called for further enhancement of the relationship in light of the common aims and values and given unprecedented challenges from the South and East. According to the European Council [Conclusions](#), 'this new ambition should take the form of accelerated practical cooperation in selected areas. The new impetus in EU-NATO cooperation will take place in the spirit of full openness and in full respect of the decision-making autonomy and procedures of both organisations, be based on the principle of inclusiveness and be without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of any Member State. The President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission will issue a declaration together with the NATO Secretary-General in Warsaw in July.'

National priorities: the east/south divide

As has been suggested above, the great challenge in Warsaw will be to reconcile conflicting national priorities related to the three main questions of: 1) prioritising the challenges in the east (Russia) over the south (terrorism, refugees), or vice-versa; 2) budgetary and spending issues; and 3) the future of the Alliance. NATO appears

rather [divided](#) about how to respond to Russian aggression. Differences stem from a combination of differing histories, geographical locations and economic difficulties, according to expert Peter Wijninga from the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS).

Eastern states

For the [eastern European](#) member countries, the Warsaw Summit will be mainly about implementing the commitment to strengthen military capabilities they had assumed in 2014, in order to boost NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities vis-à-vis Russia. As [Poland](#) hosts the 2016 summit, its [government](#) intends to maintain an extensive focus on the geopolitical position of eastern Europe vis-à-vis Russia and NATO's role in the east. Based on information provided by NATO officials and member countries, the Alliance has already drawn up several plans for expanding its presence and role in the east. [Estonian](#) Prime Minister, Taavü Roivas, has called for NATO troops on constant watch in the Baltic States to show 'solidarity' and act as a 'deterrent' to Russia. Meanwhile, German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has [warned](#) of disunity over Russian sanctions. The heightened presence of NATO troops – up to 1 000 in each of the three Baltic countries – is due to be decided in Warsaw.

Southern member countries

NATO's [southern member](#) countries are concerned that the focus will be on eastern Europe and NATO's relations with Russia, despite the fact that their main priority has shifted to the constant influx of migrants and refugees. They demand, for example, that the new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) be suitable for the defence of southern Europe as well. This also raises the question of the extent to which the refugee crisis should be part of debates within NATO. Southern states perceive a lack of solidarity on the part of some eastern European member countries regarding the stream of refugees, whilst they demand solidarity with regard to a Russian threat. [Italy](#) is likely to seek the strengthening and deepening of the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), and outreach to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). According to the German Marshall Fund, [Turkey](#) is a particular case as it faces both the implications of the Syrian crisis (refugees, terrorism) but is also preoccupied with its relationship with Russia. Therefore it will support increased NATO presence in the eastern Mediterranean but also seek military and political support against potential Russian aggression. The place of Cyprus in future EU-NATO cooperation is also possibly part of the Turkish agenda.

It is likely that the three large European countries in NATO – Germany, France and the UK – and the USA will attempt to make allowances for both southern and eastern positions in order to [reduce tensions](#) between the 'south' and the 'east'.

The European Parliament position

In its [resolution](#) of 12 March 2015 on the Annual Report from the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament, Parliament welcomed the conclusions of the NATO Summit held in Wales in September 2014 and called for their implementation. It also stated that 'EU-NATO cooperation should be strengthened, and closer planning and coordination undertaken between NATO's smart defence and the EU's pooling and sharing, in order to avoid duplication and make best use of the scarce resources available', and reiterated 'the need to respect the security policies of those EU Member States which are not NATO members'. In its 14 January 2016 [resolution](#) on the implementation of Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, Parliament acknowledged that the 'EU needs to

strengthen its cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in order to make the security and defence policies established within both frameworks increasingly compatible, in particular when a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, which includes terrorist attacks', and that 'the EU-NATO strategic partnership should be strengthened'. Parliament also actively promotes the discussion on cooperation between the EU and NATO. The Subcommittee on Security and Defence ([SEDE](#)) holds regular exchanges of views with NATO representatives.

Main references

[National Priorities for the NATO Warsaw Summit](#), German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2016.

[The NATO Warsaw Summit: How to Strengthen Alliance Cohesion](#), Mattelaer, A., National Defence University, 2016.

Endnotes

¹ This was, for example, the case of the 2010 Lisbon Summit which included representatives from International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troop-contributing countries.

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eprs@ep.europa.eu

<http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet)

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