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Ankara 2026: NATO lives on

The final communiqué of the NATO summit held in Ankara, the Turkish capital, on 7 and 8 July 2026, adequately fulfils the role that such a document should always secure regarding the event to which it refers: to describe precisely the manner, the spirit and the purposes of its participants and, consequently, of the countries they represent. As far as NATO is concerned, and in this particular case, the picture is clear and the conclusion evident: the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation remains alive and well, with a visible willingness to adapt its approaches and requirements to what the present moment demands. These are, of course, no longer exactly the same challenges the Organisation had to face some decades ago, but they are not so different from the objectives its founding sought to address. This is where we should begin by placing this NATO within version 3.0, the previous two numerical versions having already been surpassed.

“We, the Heads of State and Government of the North Atlantic Alliance, have gathered in Ankara to reaffirm our ironclad commitment to our collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and to the transatlantic bond. An attack on one is an attack on all. Our unity, solidarity and collective strength remain the foundation of peace, security, and prosperity for the one billion citizens in our Alliance of free and democratic nations. We remain committed to our 360-degree approach to deterrence and defence.”

This first paragraph might seem somewhat redundant, even unnecessary, given its evident intention to underline once again the reasons and terms that gave rise to the Organisation's birth in 1949, but in known reality this is not so. It is recent times that have witnessed statements from the leading figures of American politics, and in particular from its current President, Donald Trump, casting certain doubts on NATO's future and even on what might happen regarding his country's participation in it. Back during his first presidential term he went so far as to describe NATO as an "obsolete" organisation, and over recent months, now in his second term at the White House, there has been no shortage of remarks that fuelled the same doubtful and disparaging views of the Organisation. And, naturally, of the uncertainties that might arise regarding the future of the American presence within it. This first paragraph of the communiqué clearly aims to dispel any hesitation on this score, both as regards the allies' willingness to participate and as regards the continuity of the fundamental purpose, so far fully achieved, of

detering any external element wishing to breach the political, social, territorial or economic integrity of the allies. And this first paragraph of the communiqué, like the rest that make up the document, was certainly met with the unanimous approval of all participants at the Ankara summit. Including the United States of America.

There is no doubt that this has come at a price, an evident one at that: the repeated American demands to secure a more equitable redistribution of its economic and technical participation in the defensive whole—predominant for decades within the framework the United States had helped to create in 1949—among the rest of the Alliance's members, predominantly European but Canadian as well. The second and third paragraphs of the communiqué underline the measures and amounts that European and Canadian allies have put into practice to meet defence spending, and they clearly fall within that perspective. With some significant additions that obviously reflect the details of the compromises and commitments reached.

The second, for instance, which focuses on describing the budgetary increases that Europeans and Canadians have recently been implementing in the field of defence, begins by explaining that all this stems from the need "to counter the long-term threat Russia poses to Euro-Atlantic security and stability, and the persistent threat of terrorism." The matter of Russia concerns Europeans more directly, particularly those located in the eastern part of the continental landmass. And the mention amounts to a direct nod to the temptations Trump might harbour to maintain a smooth relationship with Vladimir Putin. The matter of terrorism affects everyone, but it also carries a particular emphasis on the northern lands of the American continent, where there is no shortage of volunteers keen to do away with the lives of Tyrians and Trojans alike.

The communiqué specifies that in 2025 Europeans and Canadians increased their defence spending by more than 139 billion dollars, and that for 2026, as regards new acquisitions, the figure stands at 50 billion dollars. In more general terms, and although it does not appear in the text of the communiqué, it is worth recalling that over the course of the last decade, defence spending as a percentage of GDP has risen steadily in most NATO member countries. The average across the Alliance as a whole has risen from 2.56% in 2014 to 2.65% in 2024, and is estimated to reach 2.86% in 2026, reflecting a continued effort for all countries to reach at least 2% devoted purely to defence. In the general ranking, based on the figures published during the summit and estimated for

2026, Poland (4.68%), Lithuania (5.33%), Latvia (4.92%) and Estonia (5.10%) occupy the top places in the ranking, Denmark (3.49%) overtakes the US (3.17%), and Norway (3.17%) matches the Americans. Spain reached 2% in 2025 after no small number of difficulties and finds itself in a numerous group of countries that do not rise much beyond that figure. Recalling that at the last Atlantic summit targets were agreed for 2035, following Trump's proposals, the percentage will then have to reach 3.5% of GDP devoted to defence capabilities, plus a further 1.5% indirectly related. Even the US will have to make efforts to comply; Poland and the Baltic states already exceed that target.

The third paragraph again dwells on defence requirements, placing the emphasis on the development of new capabilities with the aim of maintaining "our combat edge." It opens by stating: "We are building the future: a stronger Europe in a stronger NATO – a modernised Alliance. European Allies and Canada, working with the United States, are assuming greater responsibility for the Alliance's defence." There is no need to twist the interpretation of the text to reach the obvious conclusion: with or without the United States, the modernised Alliance will build a European Alliance. A purpose that now lies at the heart of the possible reconstruction of the international order, with the emphasis placed on a Europe capable of securing its own strategic autonomy. All of this very much in keeping with the long-standing American reservations about NATO and the corresponding, deliberately sought accommodations to find paths that do not end in withdrawal but in some form of reconciliation.

The fourth paragraph, clearly reflecting European priorities, states that "Ukraine contributes to transatlantic security, and Allies stand united in our unwavering support for Ukraine in defending its freedom, sovereignty, and territorial integrity." And, so that there should be no doubt on the matter, it states that "the European allies and Canada" — and no one else, one might add — "now fund the vast majority of security assistance." The United States has vanished from the subject. But it has raised no objection to its presence in the text of the joint communiqué.

And the communiqué, perhaps in exchange, concludes with the gift that Europeans and Canadians grant the Americans by reiterating that "Iran must never have a nuclear weapon and call on Iran to fully respect freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz."

It is reported, and should be noted with satisfaction, that the summit sessions in which the negotiation and unanimous conclusion of the communiqué took place were peaceful

and constructive. Perhaps reflecting, though this has yet to be properly confirmed, the negotiating skill of the Alliance's Secretary General, the Dutchman Mark Rutte, who has managed, on the one hand, to handle with as much skill as patience the American top dog's constant outbursts, and, on the other, to remind everyone of the basic requirements that NATO's existence entails for Europeans and Canadians.

The rest, for now, is beside the point: Trump's insults, his fickleness of thought — assuming he has any — and conduct, his mistakes in calling Zelensky Putin and Iran the Islamic Republic of Japan, or the loaded revolvers that the Turk Erdogan handed out to the participants over the course of the proceedings. Perhaps imagining they would come in useful for defending themselves against NATO's enemies once back home.

What matters is NATO's survival. And the inevitable involvement of Europeans and Canadians — not excluding similar participants, and hoping the Americans do not decide to absent themselves — in the shared task of standing ready to defend citizens' freedom by force of arms if need be. So be it.

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