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Military assessment of the NATO Ankara Summit 2026

Abstract:

The Alliance is under pressure, not least from changes in United States policy, and we are living through a period in which the decisions of a few leaders, driven more by personal psychology than by cold strategy, are altering the course of history. From a military standpoint, this paper seeks to analyse how the world is changing, and will continue to change, through recessions, periods of prosperity and hardship, wars and situations that lie beyond our sphere of control. The most intelligent course of action is, and will be, to absorb the shocks and undertake the measures needed to dispel the fog that surrounds the fascinating multinational decision-making process.

Keywords:

NATO, Trump, Investment, drones, trust.

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Resumen:

Los líderes de la OTAN se han reunido en Ankara los días 7 y 8 de julio de 2026, en un momento crítico para la seguridad europea y euroatlántica. En el quinto año de la invasión ilegal de Ucrania, la Alianza desempeñará un papel clave en la definición del futuro de la seguridad europea, aunque su misión principal sigue sin cambios: salvaguardar la libertad y seguridad de todos los aliados. La Alianza se encuentra bajo presión incluidos los cambios en la política estadounidense y nos encontramos en una actualidad en la que las decisiones de unos pocos líderes, impulsadas más por la psicología personal que por la fría estrategia, están cambiando el curso de la historia. Tratamos de analizar desde un punto de vista militar cómo cambia y cambiará el mundo con recesiones, momentos de bonanza y momentos de penuria, con guerras y situaciones que estarán fuera de nuestra esfera de control, así que lo más inteligente es y será aguantar los golpes y acometer las acciones necesarias para disipar la niebla que existe en el apasionante proceso de toma de decisiones en el entorno multinacional.

Palabras clave:

OTAN, Trump, Inversión, drones, confianza

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Heads of state and government from NATO member countries met in Ankara on 7 and 8 July 2026. In the fifth year of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the Alliance will play a key role in shaping the future of European security, even though its core mission remains unchanged: to safeguard the freedom and security of all Allies.

As a former representative of Spain to the Military Committees of NATO and the European Union, I will seek to analyse, from the most strictly military standpoint possible, the conduct of the Summit and its potential consequences.

The first point to bear in mind is that this is a *Summit*: it crowns a long process of meetings of the Military Committee, the North Atlantic Council, defence and foreign affairs ministers, and of course bilateral and multilateral consultations between Allied partners.

Among the latter, particular mention should be made of the June 2026 meeting in Berlin between Europe's so-called "Big Five": Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Poland, in which NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte also participated virtually. These countries undertook to reinforce the European pillar of the Alliance and to prepare, in Ankara, a clear signal of strong support for Ukraine in the face of Russia. In this context, in their joint declaration, Merz, Macron, Meloni, Starmer and Tusk agreed to strengthen the Alliance's deterrence capacity and defensive posture so as to respond to, and deter, the most serious and direct threat emanating from Russia. As we can see, this joint declaration by the five leaders has exerted a considerable influence on the Ankara Summit

It should also be noted that Spain, although one of the European Union's "Big Four", was not invited to the Berlin meeting. Without entering into political analysis, I would nonetheless like to underline the need for Spain to remain where it belongs: as a strong country and a firm, loyal partner of NATO. To that end, the first priority is to continue, at every level, to sustain technical relations between military professionals that guarantee transparency, confidence and interoperability among our countries and our armed forces.

In this regard, I would recall what the United Kingdom's Chief of the Defence Staff said at his last meeting of the European Union Military Committee on the occasion of Brexit, when he remarked that the United Kingdom was leaving the European Union but not Europe, and that we must continue to maintain close *military-to-military* relationships. He added that, had such relationships existed in 1914, the First World War would not have

occurred and, consequently, neither would the Second, with an immeasurable “saving” of human lives and resources that could instead have been devoted to making Europe a genuine world power.

On the other hand, it is widely acknowledged that the Alliance is under pressure, not least from the continual shifts in United States policy, and we find ourselves in a present in which the decisions of a few leaders, driven more by personal psychology than by cold strategy, are changing the course of history. It is clear that today’s world is changing and will continue to change; there will be recessions, depressions, times of prosperity and times of hardship, wars and situations beyond our sphere of control, so the wisest course is, and will be, to withstand the blows and take the necessary steps to recover and to dispel the fog that hangs over the fascinating process of decision-making in the multinational environment. From a military point of view, I consider the Spanish Government’s conduct to have been very sound: it has avoided any form of confrontation with President Trump while presenting Spain’s capabilities and options, together with our permanent participation in NATO missions and activities, in other words, absorbing the shocks, recovering and turning the page towards the future – a diplomatically impeccable and judicious choice.

In this regard, already at the 2025 The Hague Summit, the President of the United States sought to compel Allies to commit to investing the equivalent of 5% of their respective GDP in defence. Here, credit must be given to Secretary General Rutte, who was able to break down the magic figure of five into 3.5 for direct investment and 1.5 for related actions that are not strictly defence. The Spanish Government’s decision is to remain at 2.1% of GDP. From a military standpoint, this may be a surprising position, because once the 2% of GDP defence-spending benchmark was secured in 2025, it would not have been unreasonable for Spain to indicate its intention to “move towards” 3.5% by 2035, nine years ahead, and to devote the additional 1.5% to all issues relating to “security”, including cybersecurity, digital security, the security of critical infrastructure, energy networks, power plants, ports, airports, railways, security measures against climate change and natural disasters, and so on. In my view, rejecting the overarching 5% goal for 2035 means missing a golden opportunity to consolidate our position in NATO while at the same time enhancing our security and resilience capabilities and our support to the population, through that 1.5% catch-all envelope, with such varied and essential items as those mentioned above.

Today, the debate on defence spending is much deeper. We are witnessing a reorganisation of the distribution of military responsibilities between the United States and Europe, in which Washington expects European Allies to assume progressively a far greater share of the conventional defence of their own continent, moving from *burden sharing* to *burden shifting*. The aim is to reduce Europe's dependence so that Washington can devote more resources to deterrence against China and in the Indo-Pacific.

At the same time, the war in Ukraine has shown that a high-intensity conflict demands vast quantities of ammunition, air defence, drones, electronic warfare, logistics, personnel, reserves and industrial capacity. In this respect, NATO's announcement of investments worth billions of dollars and euros in new defence contracts is very welcome, placing the Alliance in the early stages of a "defence industrial revolution" ¹ that will help grow our economies and support hundreds of thousands of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a closing remark, the key factor of the NATO Ankara Summit can be summed up in a single word: confidence. Confidence that the Allies have managed to preserve by conveying to President Trump the message that the European partners will remain committed to increasing defence spending, will shoulder a greater share of the Alliance's burden and, ultimately, that we all need one another, for Europe's security is also that of the United States. In short, giving life to the so-called NATO 3.0: "a stronger Europe in a stronger NATO", an Alliance less dependent on the United States, but in which the United States remains firmly rooted.

And of course, to secure the support of all Europeans, including Spaniards, for these measures, one critical maxim applies: It is necessary to convince the population, but without overstressing it. We may hope that the Ankara Summit has helped to advance that process of persuasion.

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¹ Rutte, M. (2026) *Keynote speech: Towards a transatlantic defence industrial revolution*, NATO Defence Industry Forum, Ankara, 7 July 2026. NATO, Ankara <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2026/07/07/keynote-speech-by-nato-secretary-general-mark-rutte-at-the-nato-summit-defence>