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The Ankara Summit and the renegotiation of the transatlantic strategic contract

strategic contract

Abstract:

The document argues that the NATO Summit in Ankara (July 2026) marks a turning point in the transatlantic relationship, as it initiates a renegotiation of the division of responsibilities between the United States and Europe. The central thesis is that the Alliance's future does not depend on greater European strategic autonomy, but rather on achieving a level of strategic maturity that enables Europe to assume greater military, industrial and political capabilities, whilst maintaining US leadership. It also warns that the main risks to NATO are diverging priorities between the two sides of the Atlantic, Europe's structural limitations, and the potential erosion of the Alliance's political cohesion.

Keywords: Ankara Summit, Transatlantic Relations, United States, Europe, Strategic Maturity, Defence Industry, Great Power Competition, Political Cohesion, US Leadership, International Order.

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Introduction

The strategic paradox: why is the Ankara Summit different?

Rarely has a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) summit generated such anticipation without there being a new threat or a specific event requiring immediate decisions.

The Ankara meeting on 7 and 8 July 2026 was not convened in the wake of an unexpected act of aggression, as was the case following Russia's invasion of Ukraine; nor did it respond to a historic enlargement of the Alliance, nor is it intended to adopt a new Strategic Concept. Just four years ago, in Madrid, the Strategic Concept currently in force was adopted¹. However, few summits since the end of the Cold War have had a comparable capacity to redefine the organisation's future.

The uniqueness of the Ankara summit lies not so much in the issues officially included on the agenda – continued support for Ukraine, the strengthening of the defence industrial base or the enhancement of allied military capabilities – as in the strategic question underlying them all.

A question that is scarcely articulated explicitly in official communiqués, but which silently shapes all discussions amongst the allies: can NATO continue to rely on the same model of US leadership that has guaranteed European security for the past seventy-five years?

For decades, the answer seemed obvious. Since its creation in 1949, the Atlantic Alliance has been the most successful example of an asymmetric military alliance.

The United States provided the vast majority of strategic capabilities — nuclear deterrence, intelligence, strategic transport, command and control, technological superiority and global projection capability — whilst the European allies contributed conventional forces, political legitimacy and regional stability.

This division of responsibilities not only helped to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but also made possible NATO's enlargement, crisis management operations

¹ <https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/publications-and-reports/strategic-concepts/2022/290622-strategic-concept.pdf>

Note: All hyperlinks in this article are active as of 9 July 2026.

in the Balkans, the campaigns in Afghanistan and the consolidation of a Euro-Atlantic area characterised by unprecedented levels of security.

However, the assumptions that made this model possible are undergoing a profound transformation. The war in Ukraine has brought conventional warfare back to the European continent; China's rise has progressively shifted the US strategic centre of gravity towards the Indo-Pacific; technological and industrial competition between major powers has taken on an importance comparable to the strictly military dimension; and growing political polarisation in the United States has introduced an element of uncertainty regarding the extent of Washington's future commitment to European security.

This is not a matter of questioning the validity of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, but rather of recognising that the strategic context in which that commitment must be realised is substantially different from that of just a decade ago.

In this scenario, Ankara symbolises a transition that runs deeper than NATO's mere adaptation to a more complex international environment. It represents the shift from an alliance designed to manage common threats under virtually unchallenged US leadership towards one in which European allies will have to assume increasing responsibilities to preserve, precisely, that leadership.

The paradox is clear: Europe needs to become more autonomous not to distance itself from the United States, but to keep it committed to the defence of the continent.

This idea lies at the heart of this paper. Public debate is often framed in dichotomous terms: should Europe prepare for a NATO without the United States?

However, this framing is misleading. There is, at least within the foreseeable strategic horizon, no realistic alternative to the military, technological and nuclear capabilities that the United States brings to the Alliance.

The relevant question is not whether Europe can replace the United States, but whether the United States will be able — and willing — to continue indefinitely in the role of almost exclusive guarantor of European security whilst simultaneously facing strategic competition with China, instability in the Middle East, global technological challenges and growing domestic political and budgetary constraints.

From this perspective, the Ankara Summit should be seen less as a meeting devoted to resolving immediate problems and more as a turning point in NATO's historical evolution. Decisions on defence spending, industrial production, support for Ukraine or the sharing of capabilities are, in reality, concrete manifestations of a much deeper transformation: the redefinition of the transatlantic strategic contract upon which Western security has rested since 1949².

The hypothesis underpinning this article is that the real issue for Ankara is not how much more Europe is prepared to invest in defence, but how long the United States can continue to be the almost exclusive guarantor of European security.

All other issues — support for Ukraine, the strengthening of the defence industry, increased military spending or the modernisation of allied capabilities — ultimately stem from that fundamental question.

Understanding this paradigm shift is essential for interpreting not only the significance of the Ankara summit, but also the future evolution of the transatlantic relationship and of the international order as a whole.

NATO enters a third historical phase

To understand the true significance of the Ankara Summit, it is necessary to place it in a historical perspective.

NATO's evolution since 1949 can be interpreted as a succession of three major phases, each defined by a different strategic context and a distinct division of responsibilities between the United States and its European allies.

The first phase, NATO during the Cold War (1949–1991), was marked by the containment of the Soviet Union. The Alliance was founded as an instrument of collective defence against a clearly identified existential threat.

During this period, US leadership was unquestionable and formed the cornerstone of European security, underpinned by nuclear deterrence, military superiority and a permanent presence of US forces on the continent.

² <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2026/07/08/the-ankara-summit-declaration>

The second phase, which began following the collapse of the Soviet Union, profoundly transformed the nature of the organisation. Post-Cold War NATO (1991–2022) shifted its focus away from territorial defence to take on new missions in crisis management, stabilisation and the fight against terrorism. Operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Libya reflected an Alliance geared towards projecting stability rather than defending allied territory. At the same time, successive enlargements consolidated an increasingly broad and politically integrated Euro-Atlantic area.

However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and China's growing strategic prominence have ushered in a third phase. NATO is once again placing collective defence at the heart of its strategy, but within a context far more complex than that of the Cold War. Great-power competition, the technological revolution, supply chain security, industrial resilience and pressure on strategic resources are forcing a redefinition of how the Alliance operates.

The Ankara Summit symbolises, precisely, the consolidation of this third phase. It does not represent a break with the past, but rather NATO's adaptation to an environment in which the United States can no longer focus its attention exclusively on Europe and in which European allies must assume a much greater responsibility for capability development, industrial production and the maintenance of common security.

From this perspective, Ankara does not mark the beginning of a new NATO, but rather a new way of understanding the transatlantic bond: an Alliance in which US leadership will remain indispensable, but whose success will depend, more than ever, on Europe's ability to become a stronger, more resilient and more autonomous strategic partner.

The US's strategic shift: from sole guarantor to champion of burden-sharing

If the Ankara Summit represents a turning point for NATO, this is largely due to the evolution of US strategic policy. Since the end of the Second World War, Washington has regarded political and military leadership of the Atlantic Alliance as an essential element of its global strategy. However, the circumstances that justified that model have changed profoundly.

The main factor driving this transformation is the shift in the centre of gravity of US foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific. Over the last two decades, and particularly since China's

emergence as a strategic competitor, US defence planning has ceased to regard Europe as the main theatre of geopolitical competition. Today, Washington's strategic priority is to preserve the balance of power in Asia, guarantee freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific and respond to Beijing's growing military and technological development.

This shift does not imply an abandonment of Europe or a loss of interest in Euro-Atlantic security. Rather, it means that the United States must simultaneously manage several strategic theatres with necessarily limited resources. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the same level of presence, investment and leadership that characterised the decades following the Cold War.

Added to this structural transformation is a second factor: the evolution of the domestic political debate in the United States. Regardless of differences between administrations, there is an increasingly broad consensus on the need for European allies to shoulder a greater share of the burden of their own defence.

What was once a recurring demand from certain administrations has now become a position shared by a large part of *the* US political and strategic *establishment*³.

In this context, the traditional debate on the percentage of GDP allocated to defence is insufficient. For Washington, the problem lies not only in how much the European allies invest, but in what capabilities they generate with those resources. And the Alliance already has its own capability generation system (NDPP), which is currently under discussion and review⁴.

The fragmentation of the European defence industry, the duplication of programmes, the slowness of procurement processes and the poor integration of certain capabilities continue to limit the effectiveness of investment efforts.

From this perspective, the US message to Europe has evolved. It is no longer simply a matter of calling for greater spending, but of promoting a structural transformation that will enable European allies to assume greater operational and industrial responsibilities within the Alliance.

³ GIOE, D. 'The Transatlantic Crucible: Why the Crisis Between Washington and Europe May Be a Blessing in Disguise'. 2026.

⁴ <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/nato-defence-planning-process>

The aim is not to replace US leadership, but to make it more sustainable in a context of global strategic competition.

The paradox is clear. The United States remains an indispensable player for European security, but, precisely for that reason, it needs to cease being the sole pillar upon which the continent's defence rests.

In other words, Washington is not seeking a less dependent Europe in order to distance itself from NATO, but rather a more capable Europe that will enable it to maintain its commitment to the Alliance without compromising its ability to act in other strategic theatres.

It is precisely on this point that the Ankara Summit takes on a historic dimension. Beyond specific decisions on Ukraine or the defence industry, the meeting symbolises the beginning of a new transatlantic relationship based on the principle of shared responsibility.

NATO's future strength will depend less on the United States' willingness to continue leading alone and more on Europe's ability to become a strategically more robust ally.

Europe at a strategic crossroads: from a protected partner to a co-responsible partner in transatlantic security

Whilst the US strategic shift is the main external factor explaining NATO's evolution, Europe's response will determine the success or failure of that transformation. For the first time since the end of the Second World War, Europe faces the need to take on a much more active role in its own security – not as an alternative to the transatlantic bond, but as an indispensable condition for preserving it.

For decades, European security rested on a model that allowed many allies to prioritise other political, economic and social objectives whilst the United States provided the bulk of the strategic capabilities necessary to guarantee collective defence. This division of responsibilities worked well during the Cold War and continued, with some variations, in the decades that followed. However, the new strategic context demands a thorough review of that balance.

The war in Ukraine has highlighted both Europe's strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, European states have significantly increased their defence budgets and demonstrated an unprecedented capacity for political response through economic, military and humanitarian support for Kyiv.

On the other hand, the conflict has highlighted structural limitations that go beyond the level of spending: insufficient ammunition production capacity, dependence on external suppliers, industrial fragmentation, duplication of armaments programmes and difficulties in sustaining high-intensity operations over prolonged periods.

In this regard, the real challenge for Europe lies not merely in investing more, but in investing better. Increased defence spending will only have a strategic impact if it is accompanied by greater industrial integration, coordinated capability planning and a reduction in the inefficiencies that still characterise the European defence market⁵.

Strategic autonomy should not be understood as a project to disengage from the United States, but rather as Europe's ability to contribute more effectively to the Alliance's common objectives.

The defence industry therefore occupies a central place on Ankara's agenda⁶. Security no longer depends exclusively on troop numbers or the technological sophistication of weapons systems, but also on the ability to produce, replenish and sustain those systems in scenarios of protracted conflict. Industrial resilience has become an essential component of deterrence.

Europe has the economic, technological and industrial capacity required to fulfil this role. What it still needs to consolidate is the political will to translate these resources into common and sustainable capabilities.

Europe can take on greater responsibilities, but... is it prepared to do so with the speed demanded by the current strategic environment?

Consequently, the future of the Alliance will depend, to a large extent, on Europe's response to a question that can no longer be postponed: is Europe prepared to move

⁵ [Strategy for Industry-NATO Cooperation](#) endorsed by Allied leaders at the NATO Summit in Ankara.

⁶ <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/event-programmes/2026/07/2026-ankara-nsdif>

from being a protected partner to becoming a true co-responsible partner in transatlantic security?

That is probably the most significant strategic decision underlying the Ankara summit.

Ukraine as a catalyst for NATO's military transformation

The war in Ukraine is no longer merely a conflict between an aggressor state and a state under attack; it has become the main catalyst for NATO's military transformation. Beyond the political and military support provided to Kyiv, the conflict has forced the Alliance to review some of the principles upon which it had built its defence planning over recent decades.

The Ukrainian experience has shown that contemporary conflicts combine conventional capabilities with emerging technologies, real-time intelligence, unmanned systems, electronic warfare, operations in cyberspace and the intensive use of data and artificial intelligence. At the same time, it has highlighted that technological superiority, on its own, is insufficient unless accompanied by a robust industrial base capable of sustaining the war effort over long periods.

The war has also highlighted the importance of national resilience as a strategic factor. The ability to protect critical infrastructure, ensure the functioning of supply chains, maintain public support and guarantee a steady flow of industrial production has become just as decisive a factor as operations on the ground.

For NATO, Ukraine thus presents a twofold challenge. On the one hand, maintaining the necessary support to ensure its resilience in the face of Russian aggression. On the other, incorporating the lessons learnt into the Alliance's own process of doctrinal, technological and industrial adaptation.

In this regard, Ukraine is not only receiving support from NATO; it is also helping to transform the way NATO conceives of 21st-century warfare.

The Ankara Summit offers an opportunity to consolidate this transformation. The debate centres not only on the scale of aid to Ukraine, but also on how to translate the lessons of the conflict into permanent capabilities that strengthen the Alliance's preparedness, deterrence and response capacity in the face of future high-intensity scenarios.

Ankara and the birth of a new NATO

The Ankara Summit could become a turning point in NATO's evolution, not because it alters its founding principles, but because it consolidates a new way of understanding the sharing of responsibilities within the Alliance. Collective defence, the commitment to Article 5 and US political leadership remain unchanged. What is changing is the strategic context in which these principles must be put into practice.

As I have already noted, for decades NATO's functioning rested on a relatively stable premise: the United States provided the bulk of the strategic capabilities, whilst Europe ensured the continent's stability. The geopolitical developments of the past decade have made it necessary to move towards a more balanced model.

In this sense, Ankara may symbolise the birth of a NATO based on shared responsibilities. This is not an Alliance without the United States, nor is it a Europe that is strategically independent of Washington. It is a NATO in which European allies take on a greater role in capability development, industrial production, logistical sustainment and conventional deterrence, enabling the United States to maintain its global leadership without bearing the burden of European security almost single-handedly.

This transformation also entails a shift in mindset. The Alliance's strength can no longer be measured solely by the number of troops deployed or by the percentage of GDP allocated to defence. It will be necessary to assess the ability to produce armaments rapidly, protect critical infrastructure, guarantee the supply of strategic resources, integrate new technologies and respond in a coordinated manner to hybrid and multi-domain threats.

Consequently, the true significance of Ankara lies not only in the decisions that may be taken during the summit, but in the strategic message it sends for the future. NATO is entering a new phase in which the credibility of deterrence will depend both on the United States' continued commitment and on Europe's ability to become a much stronger military, industrial and technological partner.

If the Cold War gave rise to a NATO designed to contain the Soviet Union and the post-Cold War era to an Alliance focused on managing international crises, Ankara may mark

the beginning of a third phase: a NATO adapted to great-power competition, based on renewed US leadership and a stronger, more capable Europe that shares greater responsibility for the security of the Euro-Atlantic area.

This may ultimately be the summit's main strategic legacy.

The risks of the transition: why the new NATO is not a foregone conclusion

The risk of a strategic divergence between the United States and Europe

Since its creation in 1949, NATO's strength has rested on a premise that was scarcely questioned for more than seven decades: the United States' commitment to European security was regarded as a permanent feature of the international architecture. Although successive US administrations adopted different approaches to foreign policy, Washington's leadership within the Alliance was never seriously called into question. The defence of Europe was not merely an obligation arising from Article 5 of the Washington Treaty; it constituted a fundamental strategic interest for the United States.

Today, that perception is changing.

Washington is re-evaluating its strategic priorities. This shift stems from a structural rather than a circumstantial logic. Regardless of which administration occupies the White House, there is a growing consensus among US policymakers, military leaders and think tanks on a fundamental idea: Europe must assume greater responsibility for ensuring its own security.

The issue is no longer confined to the traditional debate over the percentage of GDP allocated to defence. What is being called into question is a model of responsibility-sharing that many consider difficult to sustain in a scenario of simultaneous competition with several major powers.

This development introduces an element of uncertainty that had been virtually absent from the European strategic debate for decades. The US security guarantee is no longer perceived as an immutable factor, but has become a variable conditioned by developments in the international environment and by Washington's political priorities. This does not mean that the US commitment will disappear, but it does mean that it is no longer automatic or unlimited.

The fundamental question is to determine under what conditions US leadership can be maintained over the coming decades and what role Europe must play to make this possible.

The paradox is clear. Europe needs the United States to remain the primary guarantor of Euro-Atlantic security, whilst the United States needs a much more capable Europe in order to maintain that leadership without compromising its global interests. Both needs are complementary, but they do not necessarily coincide in terms of timing or perceived urgency.

Whilst Washington views European strengthening as an essential prerequisite for focusing part of its efforts on the Indo-Pacific, many European allies continue to adapt slowly to this new strategic reality.

This time lag constitutes one of the main risks to the Alliance's future cohesion. History shows that alliances tend not only to weaken due to the emergence of external threats, but also when the strategic interests of their members evolve at different rates. If the United States accelerates its reorientation towards Asia more rapidly than Europe develops its own capabilities, a period of uncertainty that is particularly delicate for the continent's security may ensue.

Consequently, the main challenge for NATO is not merely to manage the Russian threat or contain China's growing influence. The real challenge will be to preserve strategic convergence between the two sides of the Atlantic in a context where national priorities are beginning to diverge.

The question is under what conditions the United States will be willing to continue leading European security, and to what extent Europe will be able to meet these new demands.

During the Cold War, Europe feared being abandoned by the United States. Today, the risk is not abandonment, but distraction.

This is a fundamental difference. We are not dealing with a power that wishes to abandon the Alliance, but with a power that must divide its attention, its resources and its leadership amongst several strategic theatres simultaneously.

Ankara is not just about Europe, but about the United States' ability to remain a global power whilst continuing to be the principal guarantor of Euro-Atlantic security.

Europe's structural limitations

Beyond increasing spending or developing new capabilities, the real challenge for Europe is to achieve what we might call strategic maturity. This concept goes beyond the often oversimplified and even ideologised debate on so-called 'strategic autonomy'. Whilst the latter is usually associated with the ability to act independently of the United States, strategic maturity refers to a different – and probably more attainable – reality: the ability to assume responsibilities, build sustainable capabilities, coordinate national policies and contribute credibly to the Alliance's strategic balance.

The difference is by no means minor. Strategic autonomy implies, in its most ambitious formulation, that Europe could guarantee its own security against high-intensity threats. However, this scenario continues to face structural obstacles of enormous magnitude. The fragmentation of the defence industry, the absence of a fully integrated foreign and security policy, differing perceptions of threats amongst Member States, dependence on critical US capabilities — such as nuclear deterrence, strategic intelligence, long-range air transport or command and control systems — and the lack of a single political authority make it difficult to imagine Europe achieving, at least in the foreseeable future, full strategic autonomy.

This does not mean that Europe should give up on strengthening its capabilities. On the contrary. But the strategic objective should not be to build a capacity to act independently of the United States, but rather to become a sufficiently strong ally to effectively share the responsibilities arising from collective defence.

In this regard, Europe will probably never be fully strategically autonomous, but it does need to be strategically mature. Such maturity is a necessary condition for maintaining the credibility of the transatlantic bond in an increasingly demanding international context.

The literature on European strategic autonomy has tended to focus on the European Union's capacity for independent action. However, various authors have pointed out that the fundamental problem is not independence, but rather the development of capabilities and political coherence.

From this perspective, the concept of strategic maturity proposed in this paper aims to shift the focus from autonomy towards shared responsibility, engaging with the debates initiated by Barry Posen on burden-sharing in alliances, by Elbridge Colby on the

reorientation of US strategy towards the Indo-Pacific, and by Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman on the strategic dimension of economic interdependence.

The notion of strategic maturity ties in with the debates raised by Barry Posen on burden-sharing within alliances⁷. Posen has highlighted how prolonged protection by a great power can encourage dependent behaviour amongst smaller allies; strategic maturity entails precisely the ability to overcome this logic through the sustained development of one's own capabilities and a more balanced assumption of responsibilities within NATO.

For his part, Elbridge Colby argues that growing competition with China is forcing the United States to progressively reorient its strategic priorities towards the Indo-Pacific. From this perspective, the strengthening of European capabilities is not solely driven by a desire for autonomy, but by the need to assume a greater share of the conventional defence of the Euro-Atlantic area, thereby enabling Washington to maintain a favourable balance of power in Asia⁸.

Strategic maturity requires accepting that power is not measured solely by the level of military spending. It demands political continuity, long-term planning, a resilient industrial base, the capacity for technological innovation, effective decision-making mechanisms and, above all, the political will to adopt common positions even when national interests do not fully align.

In all these areas, Europe has made significant progress since the start of the war in Ukraine, but it continues to display major structural limitations that raise doubts about its ability to fully achieve that level of strategic maturity.

From this perspective, the greatest risk to NATO's transformation lies not only in the evolution of US commitment, but also in the possibility that Europe may overestimate its progress and underestimate its own shortcomings. There is a danger of confusing increased defence budgets with the genuine generation of strategic power, or of interpreting strategic autonomy as a political objective in itself, when the real challenge lies in achieving a sufficient level of strategic maturity to preserve the Alliance's cohesion and effectiveness.

⁷ POSEN, Barry R. **Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy**. 2014.

⁸ COLBY, Elbridge A. *The Strategy of Denial: American Defence in an Age of Great Power Conflict*. 2021.

Consequently, the Ankara Summit should serve less to fuel the debate on the possibility of a strategically autonomous Europe and more to move towards a strategically mature Europe. Autonomy may remain a political aspiration, perhaps an illusion; strategic maturity, however, is an immediate necessity.

Ultimately, the European debate should move away from a question that is unlikely ever to have a fully satisfactory answer — whether Europe will be able to defend itself entirely on its own — and address another that is far more relevant from a strategic point of view: will it be able to contribute sufficiently to common security for the United States to consider that it is still worth taking the lead on European defence?

That is, in all likelihood, the real issue underlying NATO's transformation and one of the fundamental questions left open by the Ankara Summit.

The least visible threat: the erosion of the Alliance's political cohesion

In my view, the greatest danger facing NATO is not military; it is political.

NATO has never been merely a military alliance. It has been a strategic community of democracies sharing a relatively homogeneous perception of threats. That consensus no longer exists with the same intensity and, in my view, that is the real problem for the coming decade.

Whilst uncertainty over the United States' future commitment constitutes NATO's main external challenge and Europe's structural limitations represent its greatest internal challenge, there is a third, far less visible but potentially more profound threat: the gradual erosion of political cohesion amongst the allies themselves.

History shows that alliances rarely dissolve as a result of military defeat. More often, they weaken when their members cease to share a common vision of threats, strategic priorities or the division of responsibilities. NATO's strength has never depended solely on the sum of its military capabilities, but on the existence of a shared political will to use them in defence of common interests.

During the Cold War, such a consensus was relatively straightforward to build. The Soviet Union constituted a clearly identifiable threat, and the defence of the Euro-Atlantic area provided a widely shared strategic objective. Following the end of the Cold War, the

Alliance's enlargement and crisis management operations maintained a high degree of political cohesion, although differences began to emerge over the scope of certain interventions.

Today, however, the picture is considerably more complex. NATO must respond simultaneously to challenges of very different natures: the Russian military threat, growing strategic competition with China, instability in the Mediterranean and the Sahel, terrorism, hybrid threats, cyber security, the protection of critical infrastructure, and security in space and emerging technological domains. Not all Allies perceive these threats with the same intensity, nor do they set the same priorities.

Geographical differences continue to play a decisive role. The states on the eastern flank regard deterrence against Russia as the Alliance's top priority. The southern allies are calling for greater attention to be paid to instability stemming from North Africa, the Middle East and the Sahel. Other members emphasise the need to prepare NATO for a scenario of technological and economic competition with China. All these concerns are legitimate, but integrating them into a common strategy is becoming increasingly complex.

Added to this is a further factor: the growing political fragmentation of Western societies. Electoral cycles, the rise of political forces with divergent approaches to foreign policy, public pressure regarding increased defence spending, and the proliferation of disinformation campaigns all make it difficult for governments to honour the commitments they have made.

Collective security requires policies sustained over decades; democracies, however, operate under increasingly short electoral cycles and in increasingly polarised political environments.

This tension introduces an element of vulnerability that extends beyond the strictly military sphere. The credibility of deterrence depends as much on available capabilities as on a potential adversary's conviction that the allies will act in unison when necessary. If that perception of unity begins to erode, the Alliance's deterrent effect may also be undermined.

In this sense, political cohesion is now a strategic capability in its own right. Maintaining mutual trust amongst allies, preserving a shared understanding of threats and sustaining the political consensus needed to tackle an increasingly demanding international

environment will likely be just as important as increasing defence budgets or developing new military capabilities.

Consequently, the success of the transformation initiated in Ankara will depend less on the decisions taken during the summit than on the allies' ability to maintain a common political will over the coming decade. That will probably be the true indicator of NATO's future strength.

Perhaps, consequently, the greatest risk to the Alliance does not stem from a more aggressive Russia or a more powerful China. The real risk is that the allies may share the same assessment of the threats, but not the same sense of urgency in addressing them.

The threats are shared; the political agendas remain national. And that difference may become NATO's main strategic vulnerability in the coming years.

Political cohesion is also a military capability. Without shared political will, material capabilities lose much of their deterrent effect.

Conclusions

The Ankara Summit will probably not be remembered for any specific decision or for an agreement of a historic nature comparable to the major milestones that marked NATO's evolution during the Cold War or following the end of the bipolar confrontation. Its significance lies in something less visible, but far more profound: it represents the recognition that the strategic contract on which Euro-Atlantic security has been based for more than seven decades has entered a phase of redefinition.

The debate surrounding this summit has focused, to a large extent, on increased defence spending, support for Ukraine and the strengthening of the defence industry. All of these are essential issues. However, they are merely the visible manifestation of a deeper transformation. The real question is not how much more Europe is prepared to invest in defence, but whether it will be able to assume a strategic role commensurate with an international context in which the United States must divide its attention and resources amongst various theatres of global competition.

From this perspective, the main conclusion of this paper is that NATO's future does not depend solely on the United States' willingness to continue leading the Alliance. It will

depend, above all, on Europe's ability to evolve from a position of strategic dependence towards genuine strategic maturity.

This is not a question of replacing US leadership or building an alternative security architecture. Nor does it seem realistic to think that Europe could achieve full strategic autonomy within the foreseeable future. Nuclear capabilities, strategic intelligence, command and control, and global projection continue to place the United States in an irreplaceable position within the Alliance.

The challenge, therefore, lies in a very different objective – one that is far more realistic and, at the same time, far more demanding: to build a Europe capable of sharing responsibilities, developing sustainable capabilities and making a strategic contribution commensurate with its economic, technological and political weight. Strategic autonomy may remain a subject for debate. Strategic maturity, on the other hand, is an immediate necessity.

However, the success of this transition is by no means guaranteed. The evolution of US strategic priorities, the structural limitations of European defence and the growing difficulty in maintaining political cohesion amongst thirty-two allies paint a much more complex picture than is usually reflected in official statements. History shows that alliances do not usually fail due to a lack of capabilities, but rather when their members cease to share a common vision of threats, priorities and the distribution of responsibilities.

In this regard, NATO's greatest vulnerability over the coming decade may not lie in Moscow or Beijing, but in the difficulty of maintaining strategic convergence between the two sides of the Atlantic. The risk lies not so much in the United States eventually abandoning Europe as in a gradual divergence of strategic priorities amongst allies who continue to share values but face different challenges from distinct geographical, political and economic positions.

NATO's transformation will therefore require more than just new budgets, new defence plans or new military capabilities. It will require political leadership, strategic vision and a sustained willingness to adapt. Threats evolve rapidly; alliances, by their very nature, do so much more slowly. The challenge lies in preventing this difference in pace from ultimately eroding the credibility of collective defence.

That is the main lesson to be learnt from Ankara. The question is not whether the United States will remain NATO's leader, but under what conditions it will be prepared to continue exercising that leadership, and to what extent Europe will be able to become the strategic partner that this new context demands.

Ultimately, the Alliance's future will depend not solely on the decisions taken at a summit, but on its members' ability to answer a far more uncomfortable question: are they truly prepared to assume the responsibilities that, for decades, they implicitly delegated to the United States? Is this possible?

The answer to that question, however difficult it may be, will determine not only the future of NATO, but also the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area in an increasingly competitive and uncertain international order.

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