

# MONITOR

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# NATO Anniversary 2024 – 75 Years of Defence Alliance

Whatis required of member states before the Alliance anniversary summit from July 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> in Wahsington D.C.

Christina Bellmann

- On the verge of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, NATO finds itself in troubled waters. On the one hand, it is not 'brain dead', but offers protection to new members – on the other hand, the challenges in light of the Ukraine war are enormous.
- In the third year of the war, the military situation for Ukraine is serious. The military is under increasing pressure and European partners are delivering too little, too late.
- Western support must be ramped up in order to influence the outcome of the war – Russia's future behaviour towards its neighbourhood also depends on this.

- In 2024, elections will take place on both sides of the Atlantic – the U.S. presidential election in November in particular will set the tone for NATO.
- > Two-thirds of NATO member states are well on their way to meeting the 2 percent target for national defence spending – Germany in particular must ensure that this is met in the long term.
- Now it is up to the leadership of larger states such as Germany, France and Poland to develop traction in European defence, to provide a future U.S. president with a robust burdensharing record and to ensure that neither Ukraine – or the European Union security order – are abandoned.



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#### **Return to the Core Mandate**

In the 75<sup>th</sup> year of its existence, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has returned to its core mission: deterrence and defence against a territorial aggressor. In the run-up to the NATO Summit in Washington D.C. from 9 to 11 July 2024, NATO's defence planning will be reviewed for its resilience. What challenges does the Alliance face in its anniversary year and what needs to happen between now and the NATO summit in order for it to be a success?

## **Constitution of the Alliance Before the Summit**

On the eve of its 75th birthday, NATO is in troubled waters. On the one hand, since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression, it has proven that it is capable of decisive actions and not at all 'brain dead'. The two new member states, Finland and Sweden, have abandoned their decadeslong policy of neutrality and non-alignment. Their populations are convinced that they are better protected from Russian aggression as members of a strong alliance despite being able to rely on excellent national militaries. On the other hand, the admission process has taken much longer than could have been expected given the high level of interoperability between the two countries and NATO due to years of joint exercises. It took about twenty months since the application to join the alliance was submitted for both flags to be mounted on the flagpoles in front of the NATO headquarters in Brussels - the internal blockade by Turkey and Hungary is an expression of the Alliance's challenge to maintain a united front against the Russian threat.

The Vilnius Decision of 2023 – to adhere to the previous 2 percent target for annual defence spending as a percentage of national gross domestic product (GDP) and for 2 percent to be a minimum – is an enormous effort for the members of the Alliance. It is also the biggest point of criticism from sceptics of the alliance. The implementation of this objective goes hand in hand with the further development of the defence posture, which was also decided in Vilnius. These include new regional defence plans that provide for more combat-capable troops with shorter lead time for operational readiness.

The Washington Summit will show how far the Alliance has come in this regard in a year's time – consequently, gaps between targets and actual capabilities would have to be covered by investments beyond the 2 percent GDP contributions. In addition, there are a number of other important events and factors that will influence the outcome of the summit.

#### **Military Situation in Ukraine**

In the third year of the war, the military situation for Ukraine is serious. The fighting has largely turned into trench warfare with heavy casualties on both sides. The sluggish delivery of support from the West means that the Ukrainians have to make do with significantly less than meets their defence needs. The European Union has failed to meet its pledge to deliver one million 155-millimeter shells within a year (by March 2024), while the Russian war economy is producing supplies in a multi-shift system. This imbalance is painfully noticeable in the Ukrainian defence. Far from enough Russian positions can be eliminated and Russian attacks repelled due to the material shortage. Consequentially, the Ukrainian personnel on the front line are emaciated. President Volodymyr Zelensky is coming under increasing pressure to mobilize fresh forces for the front lines. As a result, the Ukrainian military must give up some of its terrain to conserve material and personnel and take up as sustainable a defence position as possible for the coming weeks until relief – hopefully – arrives.<sup>1</sup>

The Czech initiative to procure half a million rounds in 155-millimeter calibre and 300,000 rounds in 122-millimeter calibre on the world market for Ukraine by June 2024 is urgently needed – but it does not change the fact that Europe and the West are delivering too little and too late, despite the efforts that have been made so far and that must continue to be made.<sup>2</sup> Even if the U.S. and Europe were to produce at full capacity and speed, it would only be half of what Russia produces itself and receives from its allies. Western support therefore urgently needs to be ramped up, as it is crucial for the outcome of the war – and for Russia's further behaviour in its neighbourhood.

#### **Upcoming Elections**

In close proximity to the summit, a series of landmark elections are taking place on both sides of the Atlantic. The U.S. presidential elections in November 2024 will be of paramount importance for NATO's further direction. The U.S. has so far been Ukraine's largest single supporter in the military sphere; In addition, the United States has decisive weight in the coordination of concrete support from NATO countries – German Chancellor Olaf Scholz repeatedly looked towards U.S. arms deliveries before deciding about German support or even made them a condition for his own commitments.<sup>3</sup>

While Democrats in the U.S. Congress continue to support aid packages to Ukraine, the Republican Party is dominated by voices around presidential candidate Donald Trump to leave this "European war" to the Europeans and instead turn to domestic challenges. This resulted in a monthslong blockade of further aid to the tune of 60 billion U.S. dollars in the Republican-led U.S. House of Representatives, only led by a razor-thin majority. Ukraine is in dire need of these supplies to avert shortages of ammunition and air defence. At the time of publishing this monitor, there is no release of the funds in sight. In terms of foreign policy, there is a bipartisan consensus that the

real danger for the U.S. lies in a systemic confrontation with China. Among republican supporters, impatience with the continuation of the war is growing, while approval for further support for Ukraine is waning.

The mood among the general population is similar: between April 2022 and September 2023, the view that the U.S. is doing "too much" for Ukraine increased (from 14% to 41%).<sup>5</sup>

Looking at Europe, the most important milestone for further support for Ukraine is the election of the new European Parliament from 6 to 9 June 2024. Since the outbreak of the war, support ratings in the EU for support for Ukraine have been remarkably stable. Even in view of a sometimes difficult economic environment in the 20 countries of the euro area, approval ratings for the continuation of aid to Ukraine have fallen only slightly in a few EU countries - starting from a high level.

While the broad centre of the EP groups (EPP, S&D and Renew) is united in their support for Ukraine and the transatlantic alliance, the foreign and security policy positioning of the far-right parties of the ECR, ID and non-attached Groups is not always clear. While the ECR Group plays "a largely constructive and compatible role" in foreign and security policy, including NATO and Ukraine according to Nicolai von Ondarza and Max Becker of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), parts of the ID-Fraction, such as the French Rassemblement National (RN) or the German AfD, either voted against anti-Russian resolutions in parliament or abstained.<sup>7</sup> According to Olaf Wientzek of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, both ECR and ID can expect significant increases in seats in the upcoming EP elections.8 In terms of numbers, the ID and ECR groups, together with Renew, are competing for the third strongest force behind the EPP and S&D - all of which, according to current estimates, are between 80 and 90 seats. A connection of the currently non-attached Hungarian Fidesz (currently 13 MEPs) would be conceivable both for ECR and ID. In view of Parliament's increasing co-decision role – including for further Ukraine support packages – it is important for the EU how these parties and party alliances position themselves in foreign and security policy.9 In fact, within Europe, parties of the ID faction represent Russian propaganda in order to promote disinformation, subversion and mobilization and thus undermine the social consensus on Ukraine and NATO.<sup>10</sup> This could become apparent in individual elections, such as in the eastern German states in September 2024.

#### **Economic Pressure - Prioritizing Defence?**

Global inflation averaged 6.2% in 2023. Current forecasts predict falling inflation rates in the Euro-Atlantic area over the course of 2024 to 2026.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, however, global economic growth of 3.1% (2024) and 3.2% (2025) respectively is expected to be well below previous projections for the post-pandemic recovery.<sup>12</sup> The combination of higher consumer prices and a slower economic recovery continues to pose a risk of declining support among the populations for European states to strongly support Ukraine. Protests in the face of cost-cutting announcements in various policy areas have demonstrated this in Germany and other countries across Europe over the past year. This does not make it easy to prioritise defence spending from national perspectives for the coming years. In the case of Germany, the defence budget competes in the budget negotiations of the upcoming year with all other ministries, which are calling for the expansion of social spending and investment in view of the current burdens on the population.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, inflation does not stop at military procurement. As early as 2022, Germany had to cancel a number of planned procurement projects due to increased costs. <sup>14</sup> The increase in costs also relates to the maintenance of existing equipment and personnel. Even if Germany

nominally achieves the 2 percent target for 2024, the inflation-adjusted increases in national defence spending within the alliance are in fact smaller.

#### **Systemic Danger China**

The increasing systemic confrontation with China is not only identified as threat in the U.S. National Security Strategy; for the first time, China was declared a concrete threat by NATO in its 2022 Strategic Concept. China is threatening to annex the democratically governed island of Taiwan, possibly by military means. <sup>15</sup> This would have enormous potential for global escalation and far-reaching effects on important international sea routes. Concerns about free trade routes are aligning this threat perception on both sides of the Atlantic. As a result, many European partners are rethinking their relations with China – as is Germany in its China strategy.

China's global aspiration to restructure the existing multilateral order according to its ideas does not only concern Taiwan's independence. China's dominance in key technological and industrial areas, as well as in the area of critical infrastructure, rare raw materials and supply chains would lead to a deepening of existing dependencies. Because the U.S. identifies China as a systemic threat to international order, freedom, and prosperity, it has been pivoting to the Indo Pacific since President Obama. European NATO members are therefore expected to invest more in Europe's security themselves. Only greater burden-sharing by Europeans would allow the U.S. to focus its attention more on the Indo Pacific.

# **Challenges in New Dimensions**

In 2019, NATO declared space as a new battlefield in addition to the previous fields - land, air, sea and cyberspace - due to its increased importance. <sup>16</sup> In recent decades, China's presence in space, both civilian and military, is rapidly expanding. <sup>17</sup> The war in Ukraine has once again underlined the importance of satellite-based intelligence, as well as the importance of combined arms in combat.

In addition, the effects of man-made climate change, which also have an impact on security on the Alliance's Euro-Atlantic territory, have become increasingly evident. At the 2021 NATO Summit in Brussels, the Alliance set itself the goal of becoming an international leader in understanding and adapting to the impact of climate change on security. To that end, it adopted the Climate Change and Security Action Plan.

#### The Homework of NATO Countries

In the face of Russia's breach of international law and at a time of systemic competition, a successful NATO summit in the anniversary year 2024 would be an important sign of the unity and of capable defence posture of the Euro-Atlantic alliance. NATO member states are facing a complex threat ahead of the next summit in Washington, D.C. They give rise to various requirements:

#### **More NATO Members Must Reach the 2 Percent Target**

From a financial point of view, the Washington summit is likely to be considered a success if a substantial number of member states have reached the two percent target. In 2023, this was the case for eleven countries (Poland, USA, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Romania, Hungary, Latvia, United Kingdom, Slovakia). In February 2024, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced on the sidelines of a meeting of the Ukraine Contact Group in Brussels that 18 states would reach the goal by the summit. Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Denmark, Albania and North Macedonia are the countries that have only recently reached the target. With the newest member of NATO, Sweden, the number rises to 19.

Achieving the 2 percent target for defence spending is not an end in itself. The discussion within NATO as to whether one should deviate from the numerical contribution target and instead

assess the actual capabilities of the individual member states is not a new one. The share of GDP spent to measure collective defence remain the simplest way to approximate burden-sharing within NATO – and until all countries have achieved this, this will remain the key metric in the political debate.

From NATO's perspective, the gap between the desired capabilities listed in the defence plans and the troop contingents reported by the member states has widened recently. In order to equip the required personnel body – which, in an emergency would have to be subordinated to NATO's Supreme Commander (SACEUR) – adequately, there is no way around increased defence spending. From a military point of view, the demand is therefore increasingly being made that two percent should be the minimum target. To achieve all the skills needed, greater contributions are needed from all nations.

As result of the threat situation and of political pressure, it seems possible that 21 countries, i.e. two-thirds of the member states, will meet the 2 percent target by the NATO summit in Washington. In addition to the 19 countries mentioned above, these are France<sup>22</sup> and Montenegro.<sup>23</sup> Turkey aims to achieve the target by 2025,<sup>24</sup> but this commitment is uncertain given the country's poor economic situation. Italy wants to spend two percent within the next two years,<sup>25</sup> Norway wants to reach the target by 2026, according to Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere.<sup>26</sup> Slovenia has set a target of 2027 to meet its commitments, <sup>27</sup> Portugal, Spain, and Belgium as late as 2030, while Canada (1.38%), Croatia (1.79%) and Luxembourg (0.72%) did not indicate a target year.

# **Reduce Bureaucracy, Speed up Procurement**

In material terms, the main aim is to convert the increased defence spending into combat-ready material on the ground in a timely manner. To this end, planning and procurement processes in many European countries must be accelerated, de-bureaucratised and, at the same time, better coordinated. In this respect, common European defence policy will have to make massive improvements in the coming years. Some announcements have already been made in the context of the pre-election campaign for the European Parliament; here, too, the decisive factor is how the announcements are implemented after the election. Progress must also be made in the area of research and development in order to allocate scarce resources to state-of-the-art systems. The question of joint development versus off-the-shelf procurement of available equipment has to be decided in many cases. A rethinking of European procurement is essential for this. This is primarily the responsibility of the European nation states: long-term contracts with the arms industry must be concluded as a matter of urgency, cooperation must be initiated and loans for production must be granted.

#### Strengthening EU-NATO Cooperation and Partnership Policy

NATO's Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass have a strong convergence on the matter of threat perception. Especially for cross-thematic challenges such as tackling climate change, the threat of hybrid attacks and the protection of critical infrastructure, the EU has effective starting points and tools. The European Peace Facility and other instruments have created concrete institutional frameworks to strengthen the European pillar of NATO and contribute to fairer burden-sharing on both sides of the Atlantic. The EU and NATO should further intensify exchange on common challenges and draw on the strengths of their respective forums.

In addition to the partnership with the EU, Member States should further develop the Partnership Policy of NATO. 2024 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NATO's eastward expansion; NATO's "Partnership for Peace" programme has its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In view of a global confrontation with Russia and an increasingly aggressive China, it is worth looking at the instruments that were devised during the Cold War era with a view to "like-minded" partners outside the alliance. NATO's

Partnership Policy, adapted to the new circumstances, is an ideal instrument for forging close ties with democratic nations in the Indo-Pacific that share NATO's interests and values.<sup>28</sup>

# **Investing in Interoperability**

NATO must continue to act as a "guardian of standards" in favour of military interoperability. This year's large-scale exercises as part of "Steadfast Defender 2024" and "Quadriga 2024" will show, among other things, which weaknesses still exist in the different dimensions of interoperability when put to test. In addition, military innovations from pioneers within NATO need not technically outpace the alliance's other allies. That's not to say that technical progress is slowed down in a race to the bottom; Instead, member states with lower spending on research and development must be enabled to catch up more quickly – especially in areas such as space technology and the use of artificial intelligence in warfare, avoiding the technological gap between the members of the alliance is becoming increasingly important.

#### What Does This Mean for Germany?

The chancellor's announcement on 27 February 2022 that the establishment of the €100 billion special fund ("Sondervermögen") heralded a turning point in Germany's security and defence policy has been welcomed both within Germany as well as among allies as the right decision in view of Russia's aggression. Olaf Scholz emphasized in his speech that Germany does not seek to please it allies with this fund. The special fund serves national security. Although NATO's 2024 target will be met by Germany, the future of the German defence budget is anything but certain despite the persistent threats to European security. Investment in the Bundeswehr's defence capability is indispensable for a contribution to credible deterrence. The basis for securing sustainable defence spending in Germany's medium-term financial planning must be laid now, otherwise two per cent goal may be unattainable as early as 2026, when the regular federal budget is again used as a basis for calculating the NATO target. This depends on how fast the special fund is spent in its entirety. Since the budget for 2025 will not yet be decided at the NATO summit in July 2024, a credible commitment by the chancellor is required that Germany will not fall behind.

In order to meet the troop numbers reported for the new defence plans, the Bundeswehr will also have to stretch enormously. Currently, the Bundeswehr is stagnating at just under 182,000 soldiers. <sup>29</sup> In order to be able to provide the brigade in Lithuania in addition to the nationally required forces and to meet the divisional commitment for 2026, the Bundeswehr must come significantly closer to the target of 203,300 active soldiers by 2027. <sup>30</sup> The questions of how many of the 182,000 soldiers available on paper are willing to become part of the brigade in Lithuania and how many of the total number are actually operational in an emergency are not even asked at this point.

#### What's Important Now - Political Leadership

The security situation in Europe is serious and there is no shortage of challenges for the NATO in its 75<sup>th</sup> year of existence. It is in a good position to meet these challenges and has welcomed with Finland and Sweden two strong new members. However, it is now more important than ever not to let up in the efforts to meet the agreed upon targets. To stand united as NATO is central to this, as the current Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg tirelessly emphasizes. His successor will have to continue in this vein. Even more important, however, are actual, concrete, and substantial actions – to "put one's money where one's mouth is" must be the leitmotif of all European NATO nations in the run-up to the U.S. elections at the end of the year, regardless of the outcome of the election.

Ultimately, political leadership is important within the alliance in almost all of the areas mentioned above – immediately. Many smaller states in Europe are looking to the larger member states such as Germany, France or Poland in search of leadership. This applies both to the long-term adherence to the two percent target as well as to political agreement and cooperation in the armaments sector. Here, the larger states must lead by example, whereby they can initiate traction and exert pressure on the alliance as a whole. This political leadership will be more important than ever for European representatives in NATO in 2024. At this point in time, however, it seems questionable whether the current leadership vacuum can be filled in time for the NATO summit. Germany, France and Poland have not yet been able to develop a joint stance that could develop positive effects. Thus, it is also questionable whether the NATO summit will be able to send important signals beyond the minimum targets. The U.S. presidential election looms over everything like a sword of Damocles – the erratic leadership style of a second term for Donald Trump could be difficult to reconcile with the strategic goals of the alliance.

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### **Impressum**

# **The Author**

Christina Bellmann is Senior Advisor for Transatlantic Relations at the Department of Analysis and Consultancy of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Berlin

#### Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

#### **Christina Bellmann**

Transatlantic Relations Analysis and Consulting

T +49 30 / 26 996-3899 christina.bellmann@kas.de

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