



## THE 75th ANNIVERSARY OF NATO, THE WASHINGTON SUMMIT

Klára SIPOSNÉ KECSKEMÉTHY, Alexandra SIPOS

### ABSTRACT

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization celebrated its 75th anniversary in Washington. The Washington Summit addressed the following important issues: deterrence and defence, further strengthening the defence of the Eastern flank, the defence expenditures of the member states, cooperation with Asia-Pacific partners, the systemic challenge posed by China, the Russian Federation as the most significant and immediate threat to NATO. The most important issue was the continued and predictable political, military, financial, economic and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. The Defence Investment Pledge was reaffirmed, more than two-thirds of member countries have met the commitment to spend annually at least 2% of GDP on defense. The Russian Federation is the most significant and immediate threat to the Alliance, while China poses a systemic challenge to Alliance interests, security and values. The Russian-Chinese strategic partnership and Chinese support for the Russian Federation through covert technology transfer are of concern. The Partnership for Peace and the Mediterranean Dialogue initiatives celebrated their 30th anniversaries, while the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative celebrated its 20th anniversary. A new era begins for the Alliance, with Mark Rutte, the new Secretary General at the forefront from 1st October.

**Keywords:** Washington Summit, Ukraine, Russian Federation, defence expenditure, Asia-Pacific Partners, China

### INTRODUCTION

The Summits are crucial in NATO's (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) life, taking place in emblematic locations, marking important historical milestones, helping to shape the organization's development, setting directions and providing guidance. They accelerate decision-making processes by bringing together NATO Heads of State and Government, which is important for reaching compromises and consensus. Looking back, this was particularly true for 2022, which was historic in many ways. When Russia invaded sovereign, independent Ukraine, for the first time in NATO's history, three summits were held in 2022. Heads of State and Government met in virtual space on 25th February, the day after the Russian attack, followed by the Brussels Summit on 24th March 2022 and the Madrid Summit on 28th–30th June. In Madrid the fourth strategic concept of the post-bipolar era was adopted, and the summit prepared the accession of Finland and Sweden (NATO. 2022a).

Previous summits were also held in the capitals of former socialist countries of the Soviet Union's sphere of interest and in one of the former Soviet republics: 2002: Prague, 2006: Riga, 2008: Bucharest, 2016: Warsaw. All were significant and highly symbolic venues. This was also the case for the Vilnius Summit in July 2023. On the one hand, a clear message was sent to the Russian Federation, and on the other hand, it signaled that NATO's top priority is to protect the member states on its eastern flank, to ensure the security of the region, and not to allow any room for Russian military aggression against Ukraine.

Washington was also an emblematic choice of location, in NATO's history. The Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium in Washington D.C. on 4 April 1949 was the emblematic venue for the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the signing of the Washington

Treaty. There was a summit held on 30–31 May 1978, where, among other things, the objectives were to maintain security, strengthening East–West détente and increasing defence spending by three per cent. The Washington Summit, held on 23–24 April 1999, was also of historic importance, commemorating the 50th anniversary of NATO. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland attended their first summit as full members and adopted the second strategic concept for the post-bipolar era in 1999. The Washington Summit in July 2024 was symbolic in many ways. The 75th anniversary of NATO’s founding was celebrated in the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium, the same place where the founding treaty was signed in 1949.

## **1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization security community is made up of 32 NATO member countries, eighteen Partnership for Peace countries, seven Mediterranean Dialogue countries, four Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries and nine Global Partners. Since its foundation, NATO has been constantly changing and adapting to the changing security environment. In its 75 years of existence, NATO has gone through four distinct eras, and its history reflects the transformation of the Euro-Atlantic community.

In the first era, the decades of the Cold War (1949–1989), collective defence and deterrence were the dominant core tasks, and the enlargements of the Alliance, the accession of Greece and Turkey (1952), Germany (1955) and Spain (1982) were primarily intended to achieve this objective. The second post-Cold War period was characterized by continuously broadening partnerships and post-bipolar expansion. Between 1989 and 1994, the Alliance developed and expanded cooperation and relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was created, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) were established. The unification of Germany was the first enlargement of the post-bipolar era, followed by the second round of enlargement in 1999, when the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became full NATO members. The start of the third era was marked by the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001, after which NATO launched crisis management operations outside its area of responsibility. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked another milestone for both the Alliance and the partnership initiatives. As Szenes wrote in his assessment of the 2014 Wales Summit, „NATO has made a half-turn towards a Cold War operational order”, (Szenes, 2014) with the so-called „NATO on standby” returning to its founding roots, the core mission of collective defence and deterrence. In the strategic concept 2022, adopted in Madrid, the focus shifted from collective defence to deterrence.

## **2 ASSESSMENT OF THE NATO WASHINGTON SUMMIT**

Prior to previous strategic summits, experts have assessed the likely themes of events, while the Washington Summit possible topics were mostly based on statements, press conferences and speeches issued in the run-up to the summit. Among others, it was Jens Stoltenberg’s pre-summit press conference on 5 July, (NATO. 2024h.) as well as the Atlantic Council’s paper on NATO’s relevance in 2024 and beyond, the priority support given to Ukraine and global partnership issues (Jeglinskas-Sergejeva, 2024).

The “Memo to the President” study also argued for all-round support for Ukraine, promoting its integration into NATO, defining a clear path to membership and inviting it to start joining the Alliance (Memo to the President, 2024). At the same time, the paper recalled that, although Ukraine did not receive a formal invitation in Vilnius, the requirements of the Membership Action Plan have been made easier and the strategic partnership with Ukraine has been upgraded, with the establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Council. (NUC). The NUC

provides for broader and deeper cooperation and a privileged partnership status Ukraine (Jeglinskias-Sergejeva, 2024).

Several experts have previously argued that the issue of Ukraine's invitation to join NATO will be unavoidable at the 2024 summit in Washington. According to Wilson Center's paper the key question will be whether Ukraine will be invited to join NATO at the Washington Summit. They argued that inviting Ukraine to join did not mean that the country would become a NATO member tomorrow, because the process can take years from invitation to depositing a country's instrument of accession (Quinville-Moyer-Ocvirk, 2024).

Csiki Varga, an expert at the John Lukacs Institute, underlined the demonstration of political unity, the new secretary general, burden sharing and burden bearing, and the political, military, financial and economic assistance to Ukraine, noting that NATO would not invite Ukraine to join the Alliance at the Washington Summit (Csiki Varga, 2024).

The Washington Summit addressed a number of important issues: 1. NATO deterrence and defence, 2. the Russian Federation as the most significant and immediate threat, 3. further strengthening the defence of the Alliance's eastern flank providing credible deterrence to Russian aggression, 4. member countries' defence budgets issues – as recommended in the 2014 Wales Defence Investment Pledge, 5. cooperation with partners in Asia-Pacific countries, and 6. the systemic challenge posed by the rising China. The main item on the agenda was the continued, stable, predictable political, financial and military support to Ukraine (Csiki Varga, 2024).

Although there have been internal disputes and disagreements in the Alliance over the past decades, the Russian attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and the new Madrid strategic concept make it very important to demonstrate political solidarity, consensus and the unity of the Alliance at all summits (Brussels 24 March 2022, Madrid 29-30 June 2022, Vilnius 11-12 July 2023). As in the previous summits, NATO expressed the strong political unity of its member states in Washington. As in Madrid and Vilnius, the Washington Summit was dominated by adequate alliance responses to Russian aggression. Indeed, the Russian Federation's actions in violation of international law (the Russian-Georgian war of 7–12 August 2008, the annexation of Crimea on 12 March 2014, the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022) have radically changed the strategic and security environment.

On 26th June 2024, the North Atlantic Council formally adopted the nomination of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte to succeed Jens Stoltenberg – the second longest serving Secretary General of the Alliance (NATO 2024j.) – on 1st October. He is taking over a difficult task at a difficult time. He has to promote consensus-based decision-making and must credibly represent the political and military opinions of 32 member countries as NATO's number one leader. Jens Stoltenberg has served as NATO secretary general for a decade, since October 2014 (NATO 2024e.).

In the final point of the Washington Summit Declaration, they thanked Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg for his work over the decade and assured his successor, Mark Rutte, of full support.

There can be no doubt that a new and different era is dawning in the life of NATO, and we will have a realistic time perspective to assess how successful and effective the alliance will be with the new Secretary-General at its forefront.

### **3 NATO SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE**

Since the Russia-Ukraine war, long-term, stable, predictable and uninterrupted support for Ukraine to resist and deter further Russian aggression, while maintaining the European

security architecture, has been a high priority for the Washington Summit. It was important to establish an institutionalized, alliance-based framework.

Paragraphs 15-16 of the Washington Summit Declaration (NATO. 2024o.) address in detail the issue of NATO assistance and support to Ukraine, as does the Pledge of Long-Term Security Assistance for Ukraine, which is annexed to the Summit Declaration (NATO. 2024i.). Ukraine's fight for its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders contributes directly to Euro-Atlantic security. A strong, independent and democratic Ukraine is therefore vital for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area.

According to the NATO-Ukraine Council statement, NATO will support the development and implementation of an integrated Ukrainian air and missile defence system that will allow the most effective use of Ukraine's air and missile defence capabilities and promote full interoperability with NATO (NATO. 2024n.). Support to Ukraine's security, the coordination of training and military equipment supplies and their integration into the NATO institutional framework were high on the agenda of the Summit.

NATO is forming a new command to plan, coordinate, and arrange delivery of security assistance to Ukraine in order to provide enhanced, predictable and coherent security support in the long term. The NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) program has three main focus areas: overseeing training of Ukrainian armed forces at training facilities in Allied countries; providing tangible support to the long-term development of Ukraine's Armed Forces; supporting Ukraine through planning, coordination of donations with Allies and partners, transferring of security assistance material, and repair of equipment. A new NATO headquarters will be established in Wiesbaden, Germany, where approximately 700 personnel from NATO Allied nations and partners will coordinate the military assistance provided by member states to Ukraine. The commander of the NSATU, a three-star US general will be subordinated to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

NATO will grant Ukraine €40 billion in financial assistance and sustainable security support over the next year, in order to build a military force capable of stopping and deterring future Russian aggression and capable of winning. At the press conference on 10 July, the Secretary General stressed that support for Ukraine would not make NATO a party to the conflict, but is essential to strengthen and maintain the right to self-defence (NATO. 2024k.).

To strengthen the Alliance's NATO Representation in Ukraine (NRU), the Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg appointed on 17th July a senior NATO representative (Patrick Turner) to lead the NRU, and act as a focal point for cooperation between NATO and the Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv in September 2024 (NATO. 2024m).

Significant progress has been made in cooperation, including through the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine – already a key issue at the Vilnius Summit – which aims to strengthen and rebuild Ukraine's security and defence sector, support Ukraine's long-term deterrence and defence capabilities, and achieve full interoperability with NATO. To this end, the NATO Interoperability Requirements (NATO IR) have been developed, using NATO's Defence Planning and Review Process (PARP) processes and tools, to support Ukraine's security and defence sector reforms and enable the achievement of long-term interoperability.

Ukraine's defence procurement is harmonized with Euro-Atlantic best practice through the Strategic Defence Procurement Review (SDPR). Once reaching full operational capability, the Joint Analysis, Training, and Education Centre (JATEC) in Bydgoszcz (Poland), will be an

important pillar of practical cooperation, increasing Ukraine's interoperability with NATO, and will analyse the lessons learned of Russia's war against Ukraine, including resilience.

In 2024, the Alliance decided to use the resources of the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC), based in Monsanto (Portugal), to Ukraine by establishing the JALLC-UKR Initiative (The JALLC-UKR Initiative 2024). This initiative created the JALLC-UKR Initiative Information Centre, which is located on the NATO Lessons Learned Portal. The Information Centre allows NATO and national personnel to register and access the portal, which acts as a searchable repository, allowing them to search, upload and download relevant (reports, studies, documents) information (The JALLC-UKR Initiative Information Centre, 2024).

A NATO-Ukraine Innovation Cooperation Roadmap is launched to support Ukraine's self-defence. Since its establishment at the Vilnius Summit, the NUC has proven to be an effective crisis management consultation forum in a number of areas, such as interoperability, energy security and infrastructure, innovation, cyber defence, defence industry, countering disinformation and enhancing resilience.

The previous summits, the Washington Summit and the NATO-Ukraine Council decisions to support Ukraine bring the country closer to NATO, forming a bridge to NATO membership. The question of membership will be revisited in the post-Russian-Ukrainian war period. The support of all member states is required to invite Ukraine to join –one of NATO's fundamental principles, consensus decision-making, has not been questioned – and Ukraine must meet the requirements for accession.

Among other things, Gyarmati was critical of the Washington Summit's decisions on Ukraine, writing that NATO has been unable to move beyond its shadow, „half-hearted measures cannot convince” the Russian Federation.” (Gyarmati, 2024).

#### **4 DEFENCE EXPENDITURE**

Military capabilities, transatlantic burden sharing between the two continents have been the subject of numerous discussions within the Alliance. On 10th June 2011, US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates was very critical analysing the experience of NATO's Air Campaign in Libya (Gates, 2011; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2017). According to its evidence-based assessment, European defence spending has fallen by around 15% in the decade since 11th September 2001. Only five (US, UK, France, Greece and Albania) of the then 28-member alliance countries had defence budgets above 2% of GDP in 2011 according to Military Balance. As part of the historical overview, defence budgets in NATO member countries, including the United States (5.87% in 1989, 3.55% in 1996), gradually declined in the post-Cold War years between 1989 and 1996. This trend continued after 2009, with defence spending falling in both European and overseas NATO member countries (US 2009 – 4.88%, 2015 – 3.46%) (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 1988-2023).

At the 2014 Wales Summit, it was recommended that within ten years, member states should spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defence, 20 percent of the military budget on procurement, including research and development (Wales Summit Declaration, 2014). After the Wales Summit, the Alliance monitored the increase in the defence budget on an annual basis at the Defence Ministers' meeting and at subsequent summits. In 2014, only three countries had defence budgets above 2%, Greece, the UK and the US (2.22%; 2.2%; 3.51%). Following the Wales Summit recommendation on defence spending increased in around half of the member states, and not surprisingly in the Eastern flank countries, the Baltic states, Poland, Romania

and Bulgaria. Estonia (2.07%) and Poland have (2.23%) already exceeded the recommended two percent in 2015 (NATO. 2024a.; NATO. 2024b.).

The development of Member States' defence budgets was also reviewed ahead of the Washington Summit. The Russian-Ukrainian war and fears of Russian military aggression have given a new impetus to increasing defence spending. In 2023, ten countries spent more than 2% on defence: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, the United States and the United Kingdom. Among those spending significantly less than the threshold are Belgium (1.21%), Canada (1.33%), Luxembourg (1.01%), Italy (1.47%), Portugal (1.48%), Spain (1.24%) and Slovenia (1.33%). The modernization target of 20% (military technological improvements, equipment, tools, etc.) is met by all countries except Canada (14.37%) and Denmark (13.35%) (Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2014–2023)). In all his statements the NATO Secretary General has already communicated that 23 of the 32 member countries spend at least 2%, some significantly more than 2% of GDP on defence (NATO. 2024d.).

Summit declaration (point 6) also confirmed that more than two-thirds of the member countries have fulfilled their commitment to annual defence spending of at least 2% of GDP. They paid tribute to those who exceeded this, Poland is the member country that spends the most on defence with 3.92%, followed by the USA with 3.24%, but the performance of the Baltic states in 2023 is also outstanding (Estonia – 2.89%, Latvia – 2.37% and Lithuania – 2.75%). They confirmed the implementation of the Defense Investment Pledge adopted in Vilnius, but also predicted that expenditures exceeding 2% of GDP will be needed in the coming years if NATO wants to remain an alliance with a credible deterrent and robust defence capability. Several countries have proposed that the defence budget should reach 2.5% of GDP.

## **5 NATO PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS**

The four Asia-Pacific Partners (AP4, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea) were invited for the first time to the Madrid Summit in 2022. In 2023, the AP4 countries also attended the Vilnius Summit and were invited to Washington. At the meeting of the North Atlantic Council on 11th July 2024, the Heads of State and Government of the member countries joined by representatives of the European Union and leaders from the Asia-Pacific region. NATO is a regional political and military organization with global responsibility and outreach, with partnerships from the Mediterranean and the Middle East to the Pacific and South America. Since the beginning of the post-bipolar era, NATO has steadily expanded and built relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in line with its partnership strategy. Then moved on to the Mediterranean and Middle East, the Asian continent and the Pacific. In recent years, Colombia, a partner country on the South American continent, has also been working with the Alliance. Over the past decades, NATO has established structured partnership frameworks: the Partnership for Peace, the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the Global Partners. Partner countries cover almost half of the total area of the continents, and are home to one fifth of the world's population.

The Alliance's relations with the Asia-Pacific countries are the result of a long process. While their existing relationship with NATO is of paramount importance, these countries do not have a permanent organization that enables the structured dialogue between the parties. The strategic significance of the Asia-Pacific region is important for a number of reasons (military developments in the emerging China, the Taiwan issue, nuclear powers in the region, natural gas and oil reserves in the South China Sea, territorial claims, island disputes, etc.).

The Summit Declaration (paragraph 29) assessed the strategic partnership with the European Union, which remains a unique and indispensable partner for NATO. The wide-

ranging NATO-EU practical cooperation has been expanded to include other areas such as space exploration, cybernetics, climate and defence, and emerging and disruptive technologies (NATO. 2024o). It also stated that partnerships are key to the global security environment and upholding international law, as well as supporting NATO's three core tasks (deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, cooperative security) and its 360-degree approach to security.

At this anniversary summit celebrated thirty years of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), and twenty years of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), but there was little emphasis on the partnerships with NATO's southern wing. Through partnerships the Alliance aims to foster greater security and stability, to contribute to peace and prosperity in the Middle East and Africa is declared and articulated at every summit, but since 2022 the focus has shifted back to Central and Eastern Europe.

NATO is monitoring the challenges in the South, and after Vilnius, the Secretary General mandated a group of independent experts in October 2023 (NATO. 2024l.) to analyse the threats and challenges in the South (Middle East, North Africa, Sahel) and to make recommendations, the report was published on 7th May 2024 (NATO. 2024c.). The experts, led by Portuguese Professor Ana Santos Pinto, made recommendations, suggesting the appointment of a Special Envoy for the Southern Neighbourhood, better integration of the Alliance's Strategic Direction-South Hub in Naples within the NATO structure, and strengthening its links with the political leadership. They proposed among others: 1. to periodically assess NATO's relationship with the southern neighbourhoods; 2. to strengthen the dialogue with the Southern Neighbourhood; 3. to enhance cooperation with relevant regional and international organizations; 4. to convene a special summit meeting of all NATO's southern partners to discuss proposals for further deepening regional cooperation – the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries – 5. and to establish a High-Level Security and Stability Dialogue.

To improve NATO's image in the region, the creation of a regional information centre was proposed. The report identified areas where NATO should increase its capacity to act, including: a regional training and capability building centre, cooperation in resilience, disaster response and maritime security. The experts suggested to explore the possibility of setting up a centre for climate and security in North Africa, and to consider setting up a Counter- Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) Centre of Excellence (Four steps that NATO' southern flank strategy, 2024).

An action plan for a more effective, strategic and results-oriented approach to the Southern Neighbourhood was adopted in Washington and will be reviewed at regular intervals. The Secretary General has appointed a Special Representative for the Southern Neighbourhood, Javier Colomina, to act as a liaison officer and coordinate NATO's efforts (NATO. 2024g.). The Alliance also plans to strengthen its existing institutions for dialogue, networking and cooperation, the Defence Capacity Building Initiative, Hub for the South, NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait. Agreement has also been reached on the opening of a NATO Liaison Office in Amman, Jordan (NATO. 2024f.). At the request of the Iraqi authorities, the Alliance is extending its support to Iraqi security institutions within the framework of NATO Mission Iraq.

## CONCLUSION

The American capital and the location were of symbolic importance, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alliance was celebrated in the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium, the same place where the founding treaty was signed in 1949.

The most important topics of the Washington Summit were NATO deterrence and defence, the Russian Federation as the most significant and immediate threat, further strengthening the defence of the Alliance's eastern flank providing credible deterrence to Russian aggression, the issues of the defence budgets of the member countries, cooperation with the Asian-Pacific partners, emerging, systemic challenge posed by China building and its strategic partnership with Russia.

However, the main agenda was the continuous, stable, predictable political, financial and military support to Ukraine. An independent and democratic Ukraine is vital to the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region. The Washington Summit declaration and the "Pledge of Long-Term Security Assistance for Ukraine" deal in detail with allied support to Ukraine.

NATO's relationship with Russia remains unchanged and as it represents the most significant and immediate threat to the Alliance. The designation of China as a systemic challenge was already included in previous documents. China was mentioned for the first time in the NATO 2030 report, which stated that China is both an opportunity and a challenge, however, the experts in the report emphatically dealt only with the latter. It was already mentioned in the 2022 strategic concept that China poses a systemic challenge (malicious hybrid and cyber operations, confrontational rhetoric, disinformation operations, control of key technological and industrial sectors, vital infrastructures and strategic raw materials and supply chains, undermining the international legal order in outer space, on seas and in cyberspace, etc.) to the interests, security and values of the Alliance. The deepening strategic partnership between China and the Russian Federation was considered worrying (NATO. 2022b.). The Sino-Russian strategic partnership and their effort to undermine and transform and the rules-based international order also appears in the Washington Summit declaration. China's support of the Russian Federation through covert technology transfer appeared as a new element, which the document deemed dangerous.

The demonstration of political unity and solidarity was just as important as at previous summits (Brussels, Madrid, Vilnius). A new era will begin on 1st October 2024, Mark Rutte will be the number one leader of NATO, preparing for the 2025 summit in The Hague, we will be able to assess how successful and effective the alliance remains/will be with the new Secretary General at the helm.

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Prof. Klára SIPOSNÉ KECSKEMÉTHY, CSc  
Retd. Colonel, Professor, CSc, Ludovika University of Public Service, Military Science and Officer Training Faculty, Department of Operation and Support  
E-mail: [siposne.kecskemethy.klara@uni-nke.hu](mailto:siposne.kecskemethy.klara@uni-nke.hu)  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4150-7823

Alexandra SIPOS, PhD  
Research Fellow  
HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Sociology, Budapest  
E-mail: [alexandra.sipos@tk.hun-ren.hu](mailto:alexandra.sipos@tk.hun-ren.hu)  
ORCID: 0000-0003-3855-4300