



**ANKARA**  
SUMMIT | SOMMET

7-8 VII 2026

**NATO**  
+  
**OTAN**



• *ANALYSIS*

## **NATO's Ankara Summit: Agenda and Expectations**

Rifat Öncel



# NATO'S ANKARA SUMMIT: AGENDA AND EXPECTATIONS

RIFAT ÖNCEL

Contributors:  
EZGİ SELİN KÜREKÇİ

COPYRIGHT © 2026 by SETA

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

The conclusions and recommendations of any SETA Foundation publication are solely those of its author(s), and do not reflect the views of the Institution, its management, or its other scholars.

SETA Yayınları

ISBN: 978-625-5703-53-8

Editorial Team: Ebrar Üzümcü, Sudib Sontoran  
Layout: Said Demirtaş

**SETA | SİYASET, EKONOMİ VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI**

Nenehatun Cd. No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Tel: +90 312 551 21 00 | Faks: +90 312 551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

**SETA | İstanbul**

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüpsultan İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Tel: +90 212 395 11 00 | Faks: +90 212 395 11 11

**SETA | Washington D.C.**

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106

Washington D.C., 20036 USA

Tel: 202-223-9885 | Faks: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

**SETA | Berlin**

Kronenstraße 1, 10117 Berlin GERMANY

berlin@setav.org

**SETA | Brussels**

Avenue des Arts 27, 1000 Brussels BELGIUM

Tel: +3226520486

# CONTENTS

## **SUMMARY | 7**

## **INTRODUCTION | 8**

## **SUMMIT AGENDA | 9**

Defense and Deterrence: Increasing Military Spending | 9

The Defense Industry as a Strategic Element | 12

Support for Ukraine | 15

## **TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND NATO 3.0 | 16**

Elements of Division and U.S. Policies | 17

NATO 3.0 and Return to Factory Settings | 19

## **CONCLUSION | 20**





This analysis examines the key agenda items and main expectations surrounding the 2026 Ankara NATO Summit, with a particular focus on defense, security, and transatlantic relations.

## **SUMMARY**

The NATO Summit, to be held in Ankara on July 7–8, is of historic importance in terms of the Alliance’s adaptation to the new security environment. Key objectives that have emerged in recent years, such as boosting defense and deterrence, accelerating defense industry cooperation, and supporting Ukraine, will remain priorities for the Ankara Summit. Likewise, in the face of the challenges that have intensified in transatlantic relations since the beginning of last year, strengthening political solidarity among allies and resolutely upholding the principle of collective defense will be among the critical priorities of the Ankara Summit.

## INTRODUCTION

The NATO Summit in Ankara, taking place on July 7–8, holds historic significance for both the Alliance and Türkiye. While peace remains unachievable in the war in Ukraine, now entering its fifth year, the Iran conflict and general instability in the Middle East have made the security environment even more fragile. The divide that has emerged between the U.S. administration and its European allies has created new challenges for the Alliance. In light of these issues, NATO, just as it has throughout its history, needs the adequate military capabilities to counter threats and the political solidarity necessary to fulfill the requirements of collective defense.

The dynamics of today’s conflict environment and the decline in transatlantic relations have undermined both of these elements in recent times. Since February 2022, when Russia began its invasion of Ukraine, the Alliance has made efforts to take strong steps in these areas. The Ankara Summit will play a critical role in assessing the effectiveness of these steps, adopting new and stronger measures, and strengthening political solidarity. Similarly, the summit aims to reduce tensions in transatlantic relations and establish long-term mechanisms to resolve them. It came as no surprise that U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio noted at the Ankara Summit that there are “issues that need to be clarified and resolved,” and that for this reason, the summit has the potential to be the most important in history.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Yasin Güngör, “Trump to attend ‘most important’ NATO summit in Türkiye: Rubio”, Anadolu Agency, June 3 2026.

From Türkiye's perspective, the Ankara Summit will serve to both advance the Alliance's priorities and develop solutions to address emerging challenges. Over the past decade, as Türkiye's standing within NATO has risen, so too has its importance to European security. This situation is rooted in factors that go beyond Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> While the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) maintains their position as the second-largest army in NATO, they have begun to increase their personnel, including by expanding their commando units. The production capacity of the Turkish defense industry is on the rise, and defense cooperation with NATO allies is increasing. Its geographical location and control of the Turkish straits make the timing of the Ankara Summit particularly significant in light of the challenges emerging on the southern flank.



From Türkiye's perspective, the Ankara Summit will serve as an opportunity both to advance the Alliance's priorities and to develop responses to emerging challenges.

## SUMMIT AGENDA

It can be expected that the Ankara Summit will feature specific agenda items that have received greater importance within the Alliance in recent years. These will include strengthening defense and deterrence through increased military expenditures, supporting Ukraine, and the state of transatlantic relations in general. The most comprehensive industry forum in history, to be held as part of the Ankara Summit, has elevated the defense industry factor to a level of strategic importance unprecedented in the NATO agenda.

## DEFENSE AND DETERRENCE: INCREASING MILITARY SPENDING

Defense and deterrence have been NATO's most important elements from the very beginning, and their significance has only grown as a result of developments in recent years. In this regard, the issue of increasing defense spending has become NATO's most talked-about and controversial agenda item. This debate has become particularly intense following the change in administration in the United States in January 2025. At the 2025 Hague Summit, the allies committed to spending 5 percent of their gross domestic product on defense. It was agreed that all allies would meet this target by 2035. In this regard, the Ankara Summit will serve to assess trends in defense spending and the progress made, as well as to take any necessary additional measures.

Defense spending by NATO allies has risen rapidly, particularly since February 2022. Comprehensive defense investments have been planned, major arms

<sup>2</sup> In Western discussions, this relationship is viewed narrowly through the prism of the NATO-Russia dichotomy. See "Why Turkey likes NATO again," *The Economist*, June 9, 2026.

purchases have been made, and reform measures aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the armed forces have been implemented. In this context, progress has been made toward fulfilling the commitments made. By 2025, all allies met the 2 percent target, while NATO members other than the United States have achieved a 20 percent increase in defense spending compared to the previous year. Similarly, the share of defense spending by Canada and the Alliance’s European members within NATO rose from 1.4 percent of GDP in 2014 to 2.3 percent in 2025.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it is clear that the United States’ share of defense spending is on a downward trend compared to that of other allies.

Despite the significant increase in defense spending, it is also clear that there are some structural challenges to achieving a truly equitable burden-sharing arrangement. The clearest indication of this is that the perceived level of threat from Russia varies significantly depending on geographic location. While Eastern European and Baltic countries bordering Russia have raised their defense spending to record levels, it can be observed that many Western and Southern European allies have managed to stay just above the 2 percent threshold. For example, Poland and Lithuania are spending 4 percent or more on defense, followed by Latvia and Estonia. In contrast, a total of 17 allies have managed to increase their defense spending to only between 2 percent and 2.09 percent. It is noteworthy that actors expected to lead European security, such as Germany and France, are included in this second group.

**TABLE 1: DEFENSE SPENDING BY NATO ALLIES (2025 ESTIMATE)<sup>4</sup>**

Spending Rate to GDP	Country
4% and above	Poland, Lithuania
3.50-3.99%	Latvia
3.00-.3.49%	Estonia, Norway, US, Denmark
2.50-2.99%	Greece, Finland, Sweden
2.20-2.49%	Netherlands, United Kingdom, Türkiye, Romania
2.10-2.19%	-
2.00-2.09%	Other Allies (17)

Source: NATO

On the other hand, simply increasing defense spending will not be enough to strengthen NATO’s defense and deterrence. This is because it is well known

<sup>3</sup>“Defence Expenditures and NATO’s 5% Commitment”, NATO, April 10 2026, access June 24 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment>.

<sup>4</sup> “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025)”, NATO, access June 24 2026, <https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/finance/def-exp-2025-en.pdf>.

that there are serious problems regarding military manpower across the Alliance, and particularly within European armies.<sup>5</sup> Although most European allies are carrying out various initiatives targeting civilians, and particularly the young population, as part of their efforts to boost military personnel, it seems difficult to say that meaningful progress has been made in this regard.

Country	Active-Duty Military Personnel (thousands)
USA	1.300
Türkiye	495
Poland	234
France	205
Germany	186
Italy	171
United Kingdom	138
Spain	118
Greece	112

*Source:* NATO. Includes only members that have more than 100,000 active military personnel.

To strengthen and speed up this process, an agreement could be reached at the Ankara Summit on a kind of troop commitment, similar to defense spending commitments. Factors such as countries' national cultures, differing perspectives on military careers, and the continent's aging population stand as significant obstacles to such an initiative.<sup>7</sup> Similar to the defense technology cooperation facilitated by NATO, which involves various incentive mechanisms, the establishment of certain mechanisms could be considered. Issues such as the reform of national military recruitment systems and common reserve force standards could be adopted. Since the Russian invasion began in February 2022, debates on mandatory military service have emerged in many European countries, while measures to encourage voluntary military service have been implemented in many others. It can be assessed that the Alliance has the potential to accelerate such initiatives. Such a commitment could be based on the number of armed forces personnel that allies would determine in proportion to their national populations, following a logic similar to that applied to defense spending.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Detsch, "NATO Doesn't Have Enough Troops", *Foreign Policy*, April 10 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/04/10/nato-troop-numbers-russia-ukraine-war/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries".

<sup>7</sup> Alex Wagner ve Kristen Taylor, "How to Fill NATO's Manpower Gap", *National Interest*, September 20 2025, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/natos-manpower-gap>.

## THE DEFENSE INDUSTRY AS A STRATEGIC ELEMENT

One of the most important topics at the Ankara Summit will be both increasing the scale of defense industry production and taking its efficiency to the next level. It is necessary to increase the scale of defense production, as the war in Ukraine has shown that stockpiles are being depleted very rapidly.<sup>8</sup> The developments since February 2022 have revealed that NATO allies' defense industry output is insufficient. In particular, it has become clear that the defense industry ecosystems of European allies, which have shrunk since the end of the Cold War, are far from meeting current needs.

Moreover, this situation has quickly become apparent in Iran, which has been the scene of a limited war (air-missile).<sup>9</sup> Unmanned systems and artillery systems are emerging as key offensive tools, particularly in combat environments where the mobility of infantry and mechanized units is restricted or their deployment is not preferred. In contrast, air and missile defense systems play a primary role in protecting troops and critical infrastructure. The extent to which the interceptor missiles used by these systems are depleted can be understood by analyzing these combat environments.

All of this indicates that the battlefield has evolved into an environment where systems that can be produced quickly, inexpensively, and in large numbers are used extensively.<sup>10</sup> Considering that, to date, the NATO or Western standard of warfare has been based on sophisticated, costly, and limited platforms, the need for a transformation in defense planning has become apparent. Therefore, it is understood that factors such as air superiority, an area where allies hold a clear advantage, power projection at sea, and ballistic missile defense alone are better suited to the security environment of the Cold War. In this sense, it is inevitable that NATO defense planning will not only seek superiority in sophisticated platforms and systems but also adopt a new approach capable of responding to the changing nature of warfare.

On the other hand, the war in Ukraine has provided critical lessons for NATO in terms of interoperability. It has been determined that, with the assistance provided, the Ukrainian military is using at least 15 different 155mm artillery systems and at least 50 different types of high-explosive 155mm am-

---

<sup>8</sup>Aidan Stretch, "Trump says Ukraine war depleted U.S. weapons stockpiles, but as Iran takes that mantle, Kyiv sees opportunities", CBS News, March 23 2026; Ivan Diakonov, "WP: European allies concerned about future of US weapons supplies to Ukraine", Pravda, May 12 2026.

<sup>9</sup>Noah Robertson ve Ellen Francis, "As Iran war hits U.S. weapons stocks, allies fear impact on Ukraine", The Washington Post, May 12 2026.

<sup>10</sup>Matthew Slusher, "Lessons from the Ukraine Conflict: Modern Warfare in the Age of Autonomy, Information, and Resilience", Center for Strategic & International Studies, May 2 2025, access June 23 2026 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/lessons-ukraine-conflict-modern-warfare-age-autonomy-information-and-resilience>. For a more comprehensive literature overview on this topic, see "Russian War Against Ukraine: Lessons Learned Curriculum Guide", NATO, December 2023, access June 23 2026 <https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/deep/231208-RusWar-Ukraine-Lessons-Curriculum-Guide-en.pdf>.

munition; however, due to issues<sup>11</sup> encountered during the initial firing of these artillery systems, it has been assessed that many of the artillery systems and ammunition, which actually belong to NATO allies, are not interoperable.<sup>12</sup> NATO, which had previously adopted binding decisions on small arms, has adopted a non-binding resolution on artillery shells but 14 allied countries have entered reservations regarding this resolution.<sup>13</sup> To address this issue, NATO has moved to impose stricter rules on standardization agreements (STANAG). The goal, for example, is for a 155mm artillery system manufactured in Turkey to be able to fire a 155mm artillery shell produced in Germany accurately and without any problems.

Recognizing the shortcomings in defense production, Alliance members agreed on the Defense Production Action Plan at the 2023 Vilnius Summit, and the Industrial Capacity Expansion Pledge was adopted at the 2024 Washington Summit.<sup>14</sup> Through these initiatives, NATO has aimed to achieve larger-scale, faster, and standardized procurement of critical weapons systems and ammunition across transatlantic.

Through these initiatives, NATO aims to achieve larger-scale, faster, and standardized procurement of critical weapons systems and ammunition along the transatlantic axis. NATO is making efforts to enhance interoperability among allies in a cost-effective manner while relying as little as possible on U.S. resources and capabilities. In this regard, cooperation on critical military capabilities and technologies is being carried out under the Multinational Capability Cooperation.<sup>15</sup> For example, as part of this effort, NATO Flight Training Europe (NFTE) was established at the 2021 Brussels Summit to address the costly issue of pilot training, and 14 different facilities were set up. As a result, many allies, including Türkiye, began conducting multinational training exercises without relying on U.S. facilities. NATO has described this initiative as an excellent example of transatlantic burden-sharing.<sup>16</sup>

This year, the Alliance plans to host the largest-scale industrial forum in its history as part of the Ankara Summit. This can be seen as yet another sign that the Alliance has begun to view defense production as a strategic priority. It is sig-



The largest industrial forum in the Alliance's history is scheduled to be held as part of the 2026 Ankara Summit.

This development can be regarded as another indication that the Alliance has begun to perceive defense production as a strategic priority.

11 For example, shots missing the target by 50-60 meters.

12 Eric Johnson, "Guns and Ammo: The Ukraine War and NATO's Ammunition Interoperability Problem", *Modern War Institute*, July 11 2025, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/guns-and-ammo-the-ukraine-war-and-natos-ammunition-interoperability-problem/>.

13 Sabine Siebold, "NATO summit to push for standardizing shells", *Reuters*, July 5 2024.

14 "Washington Summit Declaration", NATO, Article 11, July 10 2024, access June 23 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2024/07/10/washington-summit-declaration>.

15 "Multinational capability cooperation", NATO, February 25 2026, access June 23 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/multinational-capability-cooperation>.

16 "Ten Allies start new era in pilot training", NATO, June 9 2021, access June 24 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2021/06/09/ten-allies-start-new-era-in-pilot-training>.

nificant that Türkiye, a rising player in the international defense sector, will host this forum. Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has stated that at the Ankara Summit, they will highlight Türkiye’s best practices in converting defense spending into military capabilities.<sup>17</sup> This emphasis can also be interpreted as the understanding that increasing defense spending cannot be an ultimate goal in and of itself. But rather, it is valuable only to the extent that increased financial resources lead to a concrete increase in military capabilities. Similarly, Secretary-General Rutte’s statement that “money is important, but we must quickly convert that money into combat-ready capabilities” is in accordance with this line of thinking.<sup>18</sup>

**TABLE 3: TÜRKİYE-EUROPE DEFENSE INDUSTRY COOPERATION  
(SELECTED EVENTS, 2022–2026)**

Product/Company	Recipient/Partner Country	Date	Contract Value
Bayraktar TB2 (3) / Baykar	Albania	December 2022	-
Bayraktar TB2 (18) / Baykar	Romania	April 2023	\$321 million
Arma 6X6; Yoruk 4X4 (total 230) / Otokar, Nurol Makina	Estonia	October 2023	\$211 million
Bayraktar TB2 / Baykar	Kosovo	2023	-
Skydagger 7" 15" / Baykar	Kosovo	2024-2025	-
Cobra II (1059) / Otokar	Romania	November 2024	\$983 million
Bayraktar TB2 (6) / Baykar	Croatia	November 2024	\$95 million
At-Sea Replenishment and Logistics Support Ship (2) / Stm	Portugal	December 2024	-
Baykar	Italy (Leonardo) - Memorandum of Understanding, Unmanned Systems	March 2025	-
Roketsan	Italy (Leonardo) - Memorandum of Understanding	June 2025	-
Tusaş	United Kingdom (BAE Systems) – Memorandum of Understanding	November 2025	-
Electronic Warfare Systems / Aselsan	Poland	December 2025	\$410 million
Warship (corvette) / Asfat	Romania	December 2025	\$256 million
Ejder Yalçın 4X4 (800) / Nurol Makina	Hungary	March 2026	-
Aselsan	Çekya (Excalibur International) – Strategic Cooperation	February 2026	-

<sup>17</sup> “NATO summit in Ankara should reaffirm alliance’s unity, Turkey to tell allies”, Reuters, May 20 2026.

<sup>18</sup> “NATO Defence Ministers make good progress ahead of the Ankara Summit”, NATO, June 18 2026, access June 24 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/06/18/nato-defence-ministers-make-good-progress-ahead-of-the-ankara-summit>.

Autonomy Software / Havelsan	Italy (Partnership for the Production of Unmanned and Hybrid Marine Vehicles)	April 2026	-
Hürjet jet trainer aircraft (30) / Tusaş	Spain	April 2026	\$3.06 billion
Baykar	Fransa (Safran) – Strategic Cooperation	May 2026	-
Roketsan	Spain (EM&E Group) - Memorandum of Understanding	June 2026	-

*Source: Compiled by the author from open-source materials.*

The Turkish defense industry, meanwhile, has recently emerged as a rising force in the European defense market. This trend is evident in the increasing number of agreements Turkish defense companies have signed with European allies. While the ammunition production and unmanned systems sectors stand out in particular, the scope of this cooperation extends to a wide range of areas, including submarines, corvettes, jet trainer aircraft, and armored personnel carriers.

Consequently, at a time when defense industry production has taken on critical importance for the Alliance, the increasing cooperation between Turkish companies and their counterparts in allied countries plays a positive role in terms of NATO's objectives. The Defense Industry Forum to be held as part of the Ankara Summit is expected to pave the way for even deeper and broader defense cooperation in this regard. Key objectives include promoting specialization in production, strengthening standardization criteria, and focusing more on joint projects.

## SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

From February 2022 to the present, the first of NATO's top priorities has been strengthening defense and deterrence, while the second has been preserving and enhancing Ukraine's defensive capabilities against Russia. 99 percent of the military aid provided to Ukraine has come from NATO allies.<sup>19</sup> Since the start of the war, the allies have provided Ukraine with approximately \$45 billion in aid annually. In fact, the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine (CAP), established in 2016 to support reforms in Ukraine's defense and security sectors but whose activities have intensified since February 2022, has served as the framework for NATO's non-military assistance to Ukraine. As of July 2025, the allies have provided approximately \$1.26 billion in non-military assistance under the CAP.<sup>20</sup> In addition, NATO provides extensive support to Ukraine under its Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) program.

<sup>19</sup> "NATO Allies Denmark, Norway and Sweden announce \$500m package of support for Ukraine", NATO, August 5 2025, access June 24 2026 <http://nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2025/08/05/nato-allies-denmark-norway-and-sweden-announce-500m-package-of-support-for-ukraine>.

<sup>20</sup> "Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine", NATO, June 20 2025, access June 24 2025, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/comprehensive-assistance-package-cap-for-ukraine>; "Relations with Ukraine", NATO, June 26 2025, access June 24 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/relations-with-ukraine>.



Although not to the same extent as the decisions adopted during the Biden administration, the Ankara Summit is expected to reaffirm commitments to providing Ukraine with the maximum possible support.

With Donald J. Trump taking office as President in January 2025, a shift in the U.S. stance toward the war, and toward Ukraine, had put the future of aid at risk. Faced with the threat of a cutoff in U.S. aid, NATO played a proactive role. On July 14, 2025, NATO and the U.S. launched the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) initiative to ensure and strengthen the continuation of aid.<sup>21</sup> As part of this initiative, the goal was to facilitate the rapid procurement of U.S. weapons by European countries and Canada. In this context, between August 2025 and December 2025, NATO allies procured \$4 billion

worth of weapons and ammunition from the U.S. for Ukraine. At the NATO Ministerial Meeting in December 2025, three PURL packages totaling \$1.5 billion were announced.<sup>22</sup> While actors such as Japan, which are not members of NATO but are Alliance partners, contributed to this package, Australia and New Zealand have also expressed their support for future PURL packages.<sup>23</sup>

Although the future of aid to Ukraine has at times been shrouded in uncertainty, the Alliance is expected to reaffirm its support for Ukraine once again at the Ankara Summit. There are several concrete reasons for this. First, the U.S. has not interrupted its supply of weapons systems to Ukraine. The continued supply of American weapons to Ukraine demonstrates this, despite stockpile issues arising in conflicts with Iran. Second, European allies view strong support for Ukraine as their top policy priority and are unwilling to make concessions on this matter. Third, the lack of momentum in the war in Ukraine, and the fact that Russia's advances, even if they are occurring at all, remain very slow, could prompt the U.S. administration to rethink its initial approach. Given these factors, it is expected that the Summit declaration will include commitments to provide Ukraine with as much support as possible, even if not to the same extent as the decisions made during the Biden administration.

## TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND NATO 3.0

With Donald Trump's second presidential term beginning in January 2025, a transatlantic divergence has emerged that has been gradually intensifying. The hardline stance and policy of intimidation adopted by President Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance toward NATO's European allies have reignited debates

<sup>21</sup> As part of the program, Ukraine submits a list of the weapons and ammunition it needs, and that list is approved by SACEUR.

<sup>22</sup> It has been stated that the first package will be funded by Germany, Norway, and Poland; the second by Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway; and the third by Belgium, Canada, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain.

<sup>23</sup> "NATO Allies and partners fund over 4 billion in PURL packages for Ukraine", NATO, December 10 2025, access June 23 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2025/12/10/nato-allies-and-partners-fund-over-4-billion-in-purl-packages-for-ukraine>.

about the Alliance's future. The Trump administration believes that Europe is "free-riding" under U.S. security guarantees by failing to fulfill its obligations. Furthermore, the Trump administration has openly expressed its discomfort with the current values and social policies adopted by Europe, particularly in the context of the MAGA movement, which forms an important part of its sociological base. In NATO, which is not only a military organization but also an institution of values, the transatlantic rift between the U.S. and Europe is manifesting on both levels.

## ELEMENTS OF DIVISION AND U.S. POLICIES

Since January 2025, the U.S. administration has reduced the number of troops stationed in Europe in light of these considerations, scaled back the number of personnel and platforms participating in joint exercises, and emphasized that these activities will continue. In addition, a series of issues, including the U.S. adoption of a hardline policy toward Ukraine and President Zelensky, the imposition of tariffs on European countries, and territorial claims regarding Greenland, have further intensified the split between the two sides.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has handed over leadership of the Allied Joint Force Commands in Naples, Norfolk, and Brunssum to Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany and Poland, respectively. Similarly, the issue of relinquishing the position of Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), NATO's highest-ranking military post, which has been held by an American general since the Alliance's founding, has been opened for debate. Congress prohibited this by adding a provision to the National Defense Authorization Act in December 2025.<sup>24</sup> Trump, who did not find Europe's stance on the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran sufficiently supportive, has labeled the continent "cowards." During the same period, Trump likened NATO to a paper tiger and claimed that he could withdraw from the Alliance and that the U.S. Congress would be unable to stop him.

After German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stated that Iran had humiliated the U.S. during the Hormuz Crisis, the U.S. announced that it would withdraw 5,000 personnel from Germany. However, the U.S. desire to reduce the number of military personnel stationed in Europe is not solely due to bilateral relations or tensions at the leadership level. Poland, which maintains very good relations with the U.S., has also been affected by these troop reductions. The U.S. has canceled the deployment of 4,000 personnel originally planned for Poland.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Congress has prohibited the number of U.S. troops stationed in Europe from falling below 76,000.

<sup>25</sup> Phil Stewart, "US scraps deployment of 4,000 troops to Poland", Reuters, May 15 2026.

**TABLE 4: U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL STATIONED IN EUROPE (EXCLUDING ROTATIONAL DEPLOYMENTS, DECEMBER 2025)<sup>26</sup>**

Country	Military Personnel
Germany	36.436
Italy	12.662
United Kingdom	10.156
Spain	3.814
Türkiye	1.661
Belgium	1.118
Greece	432
Netherlands	414
Poland	369
Portugal	237
Romania	153
Denmark	151

Source: U.S. Department of War, Open Sources

To date, European allies have largely pursued a conciliatory policy toward the U.S. administration; in this context, they have refrained from responding to Trump's harsh rhetoric while yielding to U.S. demands within the framework of NATO. The decision to increase defense spending to 5 percent of GDP is one of the steps taken in this regard. The acceptance of this target, which, outside of Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, is viewed not only as overly ambitious but also as "unnecessary", has in fact been one of the clearest indicators of the allies' policy of appeasing Trump.<sup>27</sup>

Although transatlantic divide have reached this level, the likelihood of a full-scale rupture can still be considered slim. The main reason for this lies in the significant strategic benefits that NATO membership provides to the U.S., even if they do not match Europe's need for the U.S. Thanks to bilateral agreements made within the framework of NATO membership, the United States possesses a vast network of military bases. These facilities are of vital importance for the United States in terms of power projection, intelligence gathering, and offensive

<sup>26</sup> There are thousands of U.S. troops deployed on a rotating basis for six-month periods in Poland and Romania as part of NATO.

<sup>27</sup> Spain, a country on the alliance's southern flank that perceives little threat from Russia, has declared that it will not comply with the decision by registering a reservation, and as a result, its bilateral relations with the U.S. administration have begun to deteriorate. In a letter sent to Secretary-General Rutte, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanches stated that "For Spain, adhering to a 5 percent target would not only be illogical, but it would also have the opposite effect, as it would divert Spain from optimal spending and hinder the EU's ongoing efforts to strengthen its security and defense ecosystem." Gavin Blackburn, "İspanya, NATO'nun yüzde 5'lik harcama planını reddetti", Euronews Turkish, June 19 2025.

operations.<sup>28</sup> A transatlantic rift would mean that the U.S. would lose access to radar stations, air bases, ports, and a wide variety of other facilities scattered throughout Europe. Therefore, continuing and accelerating NATO's transformation is the fundamental approach currently being adopted. This process has been reflected in the discussions surrounding "NATO 3.0."

## NATO 3.0 AND RETURN TO FACTORY SETTINGS

Under the Trump administration, the U.S. seeks to reshape NATO into an organization centered more strongly on collective defense. According to Trump and his team, the Alliance has strayed from its primary and founding mission of collective defense and has taken on unnecessary missions such as crisis management and cooperative security. In other words, the Alliance has lost its military character based on hard power and has increasingly transformed into an international organization focused on values and global partnerships. It appears that correcting this situation, which troubles the Trump team and the MAGA base, is being described within U.S. administrative circles as a "return to factory settings".<sup>29</sup>

NATO 3.0, on the other hand, refers to a return to the Alliance's founding philosophy, that is, the adaptation of NATO 1.0 to the current security environment. According to this view, in the post-Cold War era, NATO undertook unnecessary missions and partnerships, thereby diluting its character as a military organization. This period in the Alliance's history is regarded as NATO 2.0. Elbridge Colby, the current Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, who has long been known for his realist views, also emphasizes the need for NATO 3.0, which would operate within a more limited framework of missions and capabilities.<sup>30</sup> According to Colby, the "Unipolar Moment", which emerged immediately after the end of the Cold War, is no longer valid. Colby has stated that this has led to a false sense of security among European allies and that, as a result, European allies must assume much greater responsibility within the new NATO.<sup>31</sup> In his speech on June 18, Secretary General Mark Rutte described NATO 3.0 as an Alliance rebooted for the modern era; he emphasized that all allies have embarked on accelerated defense investments to achieve this goal.<sup>32</sup>

The NATO 3.0 Ankara Summit will be a test, as Türkiye has traditionally placed importance on partnerships in NATO policies. It has also demonstrated

28 For information on the U.S. use of these bases during war with Iran, see Rifat Öncel, "Trump'ın NATO çıkışı ve ABD/İsrail-İran Savaşı'nın lojistik ironisi" Anadolu Agency, April 2, 2026, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/trumpin-nato-cikisi-ve-abd-israil-iran-savasinin-lojistik-ironisi/3889136>.

29 Victor Jack, "US presses NATO for major reset, ending mission in Iraq", Politico, February 19 2026.

30 Jack, "US presses NATO".

31 "Remarks by Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby at the NATO Defense Ministerial (As Prepared)", U.S. Department of War, February 12 2026, access June 24 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4404801/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-war-for-policy-elbridge-colby-at-the-nato-defense/>.

32 "NATO Defence Ministers make good progress"

the importance it attaches to the participation of Gulf countries and NATO's official partners in Asia in this year's summit as part of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. However, under NATO 3.0, the U.S. will likely seek to reduce the impact of NATO missions that could be considered "irrelevant or unnecessary," such as partnership policies and training activities. For example, in recent months, the NATO training mission in Iraq was terminated, allied troops were withdrawn from the country, and the mission headquarters was relocated to Italy. Meanwhile, there have been some media reports recently suggesting that Donald Trump has opposed the participation of NATO partners in the Ankara Summit.

Therefore, while there is synergy between Turkey and NATO 3.0 regarding burden-sharing and the enhancement of NATO's hard power capabilities, sudden changes in the Alliance's crisis management and collaborative approach to security could give rise to new challenges.

## CONCLUSION

The Ankara Summit is of critical importance because it is taking place at a time when both the Alliance's military capabilities and political solidarity are being put to the test. It can be assessed that the following topics will have a direct impact on both the core agenda and the decisions that may be made.

- An assessment of the increase in allies' defense investments and progress toward achieving a more equitable transatlantic burden-sharing arrangement in this regard. In this context, the progress made by European allies, particularly regarding strategic systems and platforms for which they are highly dependent on the United States, is of great importance.
- Ensuring the continuation of measures and assistance aimed at preserving Ukraine's ability to sustain the war. Assessing the effectiveness of initiatives such as PURL, which NATO launched last year, as well as identifying allies to fund new aid packages.
- Removing barriers to transatlantic defense industry cooperation, deepening existing partnerships, and identifying new areas of cooperation. In this context, accelerating specific joint defense technology investments, particularly in light of lessons learned from the modern battlefield. Similarly, conducting efforts to translate financial resources into concrete military capabilities.
- Strengthening political solidarity among allies and, in this context, eliminating factors that cause problems. Identifying measures that promote a more equitable burden-sharing arrangement.

- Assessing the effectiveness of initiatives carried out within the framework of NATO, such as the Southern Neighborhood Action Plan and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, in addressing the instability arising on the southern flank.

**RIFAT ÖNCEL**

Rıfat Öncel is a PhD student at the Department of International Relations of the Middle East Technical University. His main research interests include defense policy, the armed forces, and emerging military technologies.

# NATO's Ankara Summit: Agenda and Expectations

Rifat Öncel

**L**The NATO Summit, to be held in Ankara on July 7–8, is of historic importance in terms of the Alliance's adaptation to the new security environment. Key objectives that have emerged in recent years, such as boosting defense and deterrence, accelerating defense industry cooperation, and supporting Ukraine, will remain priorities for the Ankara Summit. Likewise, in the face of the challenges that have intensified in transatlantic relations since the beginning of last year, strengthening political solidarity among allies and resolutely upholding the principle of collective defense will be among the critical priorities of the Ankara Summit.



ANKARA • İSTANBUL • WASHINGTON D.C. • BERLİN • BRUSSELS

[www.setav.org](http://www.setav.org)