



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# The shadow of domestic political uncertainty lingers over the NATO anniversary



When NATO leaders **gather** today at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium in Washington, the site of the treaty's 1949 signing, they will not have much time to reflect on the events of 75 years ago.

This meeting will carry significant symbolism, giving the guests a reason to take pride in the location of NATO's founding. For a start, the Alliance has managed to survive a turbulent three-quarters of a century, unlike its rival, the Soviet military bloc, which collapsed more than three decades ago.

From 12 founders, the alliance has grown almost three times to 32 members today. The most recent enlargement brought with it two traditionally neutral European countries, Sweden and Finland, demonstrating the organisation's intact appeal and vitality.

However, the NATO summit begins under the burden of being the third annual war meeting in a row, after the ones in Madrid in 2022 and Vilnius, Lithuania, last year.

Both times, NATO has been under pressure to demonstrate full unity in support of Ukraine, and the periods between the two summits have shown that it has succeeded in doing so.

## Ukrainian defence as a priority

Now in Washington, it will be under the same burden but with significantly different political circumstances than the last two annual meetings of NATO leaders.

“Our most urgent task at the Summit will be support to Ukraine. Ukraine must prevail, and they need our sustained support. I expect heads of state and government will agree a substantial package for Ukraine,” said outgoing Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg before the summit.

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, again a guest at the NATO summit, was **disappointed** last year that there was no decision on Ukraine's admission to the Alliance.

However, the past year has contributed to a more rational view of cooperation with NATO, as it remains both a priority for the Alliance and crucial for Ukraine's defence.

After much turbulence, particularly with regard to the financing of Ukrainian defence by Western partners, NATO is now more stable in this respect than it was a year or two ago. In April, the US Congress lifted the multi-month blockade on aid money for Ukraine, totalling 61 billion dollars, thus achieving a decisive breakthrough.

## A higher threshold for defence funding

At the summit in Washington, members will be satisfied with the pace at which they are achieving the generally accepted principle of spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. Three years ago, only six members of the Alliance met this criterion, but today there are 23.

With Poland holding the record in this respect, spending more than 4% of GDP on defence, NATO is on the verge of achieving an important goal that demonstrates members' commitment to the organisation's mission.

Given the proximity of the 2% target, it would be no surprise if the Washington summit were to open up the story of a new threshold of 2.5% of GDP for defence costs, which former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had already talked about.

## NATO's challenges are rapidly expanding beyond the Ukrainian and even European frameworks

There is no doubt that Russia's aggression against Ukraine has fuelled this rapid growth in NATO members' defence budgets, and this trend will continue, probably even after the Ukraine conflict ends.

NATO's challenges are rapidly expanding beyond the Ukrainian and even European frameworks. With the treaty of 75 years ago binding it, the Alliance is increasingly orienting itself towards involvement in crises outside the Euro-Atlantic area.

At the next summit, NATO leaders will closely monitor the tensions in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific region brought on by China's policy of economic and security pressure on the environment.

The strengthening of relations with Asian partners, particularly Japan and South Korea, as well as Australia within the framework of the AUCUS project and India within the framework of the Quad programme, are the products of NATO's engagement in a region that will continue to have global security primacy in the coming decades.

## Political unknowns

While there are many reasons to be satisfied with the strength of their engagement in global crises, NATO leaders also face many fears and uncertainties about the Alliance's ability to provide a unified response in the long term.

Since relationship with NATO is central to all its members' domestic politics, especially those that have had elections this year and last, political unknowns will persist.

Internal political turmoil proves to be the greatest challenge to the functioning of the Alliance, much more so than its collective

determination to respond to external crises.

The forthcoming US presidential elections are therefore the biggest question mark over the Alliance's plans, which will be discussed in Washington over the next three days.

## Who's going to hold NATO together like me? - Joe Biden

"Who's going to hold NATO together like me?" asked US President Joe Biden rhetorically in an interview with ABC on Friday. He confidently promoted his leadership role ahead of the NATO summit and immediately after a televised debate with Donald Trump, in which he made a poor impression.

And indeed, the shadow of the possibility of Donald Trump moving back into the White House in his place is the biggest challenge for the participants at the Washington summit.

Regardless of Biden's enthusiasm to stay in the race for the presidency, despite numerous pleas from his camp to drop out, the NATO partners themselves will have reservations about such a decision.

Of course, they will consider option B and the possible consequences for the Alliance's functioning if Donald Trump, with whom they have already had a rather bad experience, reappears as the main partner.

One of the alternative solutions to such a development is to strengthen mutual ties and obligations between the European partners, but even here, things are not going smoothly.

## European response

The new British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, is about to make his international debut at the summit in Washington, and it will certainly be an important contribution to the cohesion of the Alliance, particularly with regard to further support for Ukraine.

His policy of continuing British support for

Kyiv with the same intensity will undoubtedly be an encouragement to European partners.

Western allies.

But some others come to Washington with suitcases full of internal problems over their commitment to the Alliance, most notably French President Emmanuel Macron, who is in the midst of a storm over the formation of a future government after Sunday's surprise election.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also bears the burden of a drop in the poll ratings of his government's parties in June's European Parliament elections, in which the role of Germany, its military, and its industry in supporting Ukraine was a major topic of political controversy.



*Viktor Orbán, the personification of all European dilemmas surrounding NATO, comes to Washington straight from a quick tour of Moscow and Beijing*

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the personification of all European dilemmas surrounding NATO, comes to Washington straight from a quick tour of Moscow and Beijing, the capitals where NATO sees the source of its greatest security challenges.

In the last week alone, Prime Minister Orbán's **meetings** with Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping have weakened the position of the Euro-Atlantic allies towards their main rivals.

The timing of his visit, directly before the NATO summit, as well as the fact that he travelled to two authoritarian capitals in his capacity as acting President of the EU, left room for the hosts to draw conclusions about the weakness of internal relations between the