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By: TA | AP Brief

NATO is scaling back its high-level meetings



NATO is scaling back its high-level meetings and will not hold a leaders' summit in Albania next year as previously planned amid tension within the alliance over defense spending, Iran and the war in Ukraine.

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama said Thursday that "there is not yet a common position on when the summit will happen, for sure not in 2027."

He said that "in 2028, if it will be a summit, it will be in Tirana," Albania's capital.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte played down the issue. "We are flexible with NATO summits," he told The Associated Press in an interview. "We have summits when we need them," he said, and will hold the next one "when a necessity is there."

Until about a decade ago, NATO held summits every two years.

It's not just about gatherings between U.S. President Donald Trump and his counterparts.

NATO defense ministers usually meet in October, but no talks took place last month, and none are planned for October 2027.

Foreign ministers only have one scheduled meeting next year, instead of two, under what NATO describes as a "reorganization package."

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Secretary of State Marco Rubio have each skipped a NATO meeting or left before talks ended since they came to office. Hegseth has used defense ministerial gatherings to berate or cajole European allies and Canada.

Questions about Albania's defense spending

The planned summit in Albania highlights the alliance's challenges. Albania was appointed next year's host in 2025, but its name was removed from a July summit declaration.

Some allies believe that Albania is not spending enough on defense and they were reluctant to reward the country with NATO's big event.

The government in Tirana is projected to spend 2.15% of its gross domestic product on defense this year.

> Hosting a summit itself has tremendous financial and political costs

NATO's target is for the 32 allies to spend 3.5% of GDP on core defense by 2035, and 1.5% on defense-related infrastructure.

Albania is not the worst offender among the 32 member countries. Spain, Belgium and Slovenia are faring much worse.

But hosting a summit itself has tremendous financial and political costs. The Netherlands required a year of preparation ahead of the 2025 meeting in The Hague, and a roughly $100 million investment.