



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# A look ahead to the 2018 NATO Summit

By Louisa Brooke-Holland

### Summary

NATO holds its next summit in Brussels on 11-12 July 2018. The recent G7 summit brought to the fore tensions between the US and Europe. Talk of strengthening the 'transatlantic bond' may yet be undermined by rows over defence spending and uncertainty over America's commitment to the principle of collective defence (Article 5). Driven by concerns about Russia, the Summit will announce two new Commands to improve maritime security in the Atlantic and improve troop readiness and mobility. It will also look south and discuss ways to reduce instability in North Africa and the Middle East. Members of NATO's Resolute Support Mission will discuss the situation in Afghanistan. Separately, the UK Ministry of Defence has promised to unveil the headline outcomes of its Modernising Defence Programme by the time of the NATO Summit.

### Relations between Allies

The Transatlantic Alliance is under pressure and the focus is likely to be more on the personal relations between the leaders than on the formal summit agenda. Veteran commentator Edward Lucas wrote recently: "from a military point of view, NATO has rarely looked in better shape. Politically, it is in tatters".<sup>1</sup> Andrew Rawnsley observed: "the poisoned G7 summit in Quebec has left relations between the US and its historical allies in the democratic world in a darker place than at any time in living memory".<sup>2</sup> The head of the Atlantic Council says NATO is facing a "potential transatlantic train wreck of American making".<sup>3</sup>

### On the Agenda

NATO officials identify five [main themes](#) of the summit:

- Deterrence and defence
- Institutional adaption
- Russia
- Challenges from the south
- The 2% spending target

<sup>1</sup> "[Russia stands to gain most from NATO row](#)", The Times, 15 June 2018

<sup>2</sup> "Europe is fast losing interest in the Brexit soap – it has bigger worries", Guardian, 17 June 2018

<sup>3</sup> "[Avoiding a NATO Train Wreck](#)", Atlantic Council, 17 June 2018

## Russia: from ‘deterrence and defence’ to ‘readiness and reinforcement’

NATO adopted a ‘deterrence and defence’ approach to Russia following the latter’s annexation of Crimea in 2014. NATO has significantly strengthened its presence in the Baltics and Central Europe to ‘deter’ Moscow and reassure NATO allies.

The focus now is ensuring significant numbers of troops can easily move to reinforce them.

NATO has [agreed](#) a new **Readiness Initiative** – the ‘**Four Thirties**’ – to have 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels, ready within 30 days or less. Brooks Tigner suggests that if carried out, it “it would be NATO’s biggest preparation for contingency status since the end of the Cold War”.<sup>4</sup>

To enable these troops can get where they are needed, the Summit will announce a new **European Logistics Command**, to be based in Ulm in Germany. This Command will likely work closely with the EU, which is separately endeavouring to [facilitate](#) the movement of military troops and assets across the continent. The British army will [test](#) its ability to move by road in Europe during NATO’s Exercise Trident Juncture this autumn.

Relations with Russia remain fraught. Whilst a senior NATO official has [said](#) “NATO does not see the threat of a massive Russian military invasion of any NATO country”, NATO remains highly concerned about Russia’s behaviour in the past few years.

The focus of recent years has been on the land and air domains but this summit will address the maritime domain with the formal launch of a new **Atlantic Command**.<sup>5</sup> Gavin Williamson has [referred](#) to a “significant increase” in Russian submarine activity in the north Atlantic and maintaining the ‘Sea Lines of Communication’ will be a key task of the new Command.

The Command be based in Norfolk, Virginia, in the United States, the home for much of NATO’s existence of the old Atlantic Command. That Command, and the position of Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (**SACLANT**) ceased to exist in [2003](#) after the 2002 [Prague Summit](#)’s reorganisation of the [command structure](#).<sup>6</sup> Currently the central command for maritime forces is Allied Maritime Command (**MARCOM**) which is headquarters in Northwood, UK. This is reported to be receiving a staff boost.

NATO is also adding a [cyber operation centre](#) into the command structure. NATO declared cyberspace as an operational domain, alongside land, sea and air, in 2016. This move again reflects growing concerns about Russia and its use of cyberspace to “[intimidate and destabilise](#)”.

NATO is also looking to improve its internal management. So ‘**Institutional Adaption**’ includes not just the new Commands mentioned above, but also ways to improve the speed of decision-making and the internal workings and financial management of NATO headquarters.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “NATO ministers approve new standby deployment plan amid growing trans-Atlantic tensions”, Jane’s Defence Weekly, 8 June 2018

<sup>5</sup> Currently the central command for maritime forces is Allied Maritime Command (**MARCOM**) which is headquarters in Northwood, UK. An explanation of the current command structure (as of February 2018) is available in a NATO factsheet: [NATO Command Structure](#).

<sup>6</sup> Another major restructure and reduction in headquarters was agreed at the 2010 [Lisbon Summit](#). An explanation of the current command structure (as of February 2018) is available in a NATO factsheet: [NATO Command Structure](#).

<sup>7</sup> Lords International relations Committee, ‘[The NATO Summit 2018](#)’, 5 June 2018, HL Paper 143 2017-19.

### Box 1: The UK in NATO

The UK plays an active role in NATO. The UK is one of only a handful of Allies to regularly meet the 2% target and regularly contributes forces or HQs to NATO missions. The UK leads one of the Enhanced Forward Presence multinational battalions (in Estonia) and supports the US-led battalion in Poland. The RAF has deployed Typhoons to patrol NATO airspace from airbases in the Baltics, Romania and, in 2019, Iceland. Allied Maritime Command ([MARCOM](#)) is headquartered in the UK and Royal Navy ships frequently participate in naval exercises, maritime standing groups and NATO operations in the Mediterranean (and previously off the Horn of Africa).

## The 2% target

Burden-sharing, and meeting NATO's target to spend **2% of GDP** on defence, will inevitably feature highly at the Summit.

President Trump has long called for European allies to spend more on defence. NATO is keen to prove it is spending more – Jens Stoltenberg recently [told](#) reporters Allies are making “real progress’ on burden sharing and estimated figures for 2018 suggest there have been “four consecutive years of real increases in defence spending”.

Washington has [singled out](#) Germany for not spending enough on defence. Recent [comments](#) by Angela Merkel suggests Germany may move beyond its already stated goal of 1.5% by 2025 (it is currently about 1.2%).

But it isn't just the amount of money but also what Allies are spending it on – ensuring that Allies have the capabilities and resources to contribute to NATO operations and missions.

## Challenges from the South

Countering instability and terrorism emanating from NATO's **southern flank** will also be discussed. Some Allies, like [Hungary](#), suggest NATO has not paid enough attention to the potential threats emanating from the south because of instability in North Africa and the Middle East.

Tackling terrorism is not NATO's primary task but, as it has with migration across the Mediterranean, it has supported the response of European Allies. Operation Sea Guardian is NATO's maritime security operation in the Mediterranean. NATO is also [seeking](#) to ‘project stability beyond its borders to safeguard security at home’ by supporting countries in North Africa and the Middle East. This [includes](#) a new package support for Jordan, a new capacity building package for Tunisia and a new [training mission](#) in Iraq. NATO provides surveillance aircraft (AWACS) to the Coalition against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

## Afghanistan

The Alliance will also reaffirm its commitment to the [Resolute Support mission](#) in Afghanistan and will likely to extend funding for Afghan Forces to 2024. NATO agreed last year to increase troop numbers from 13,000 to 16,000 in 2018. The UK has around 650 troops deployed as part of Resolute Support. See Commons Library briefing paper [Troops in Afghanistan: April 2018 update](#) (CBP08292).

## Further enlargement?

The last summit saw Montenegro join the Alliance. Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have recently agreed a possible solution to its long-standing dispute over the name of the latter. The two countries' leaders signed a deal on 17 June under which the latter will be known as the Republic of North Macedonia. However, both Parliaments still need to

approve the agreement and a referendum held in Macedonia before it becomes official. The NATO Secretary-General [said](#) the agreement “will set Skopje on its path to NATO membership”, after years of [pursuing](#) membership of the Alliance.

## The UK’s Modernising Defence Programme

This is not on the Summit agenda but the UK Ministry of Defence has pledged to announce the headline outcomes of its Modernising Defence Programme by the NATO Summit. It is unclear whether this means an announcement *before* the Summit or *during* the Summit. The Defence Committee published a [report](#) on the MDP on 18 June and said in the context of NATO that the conclusions which emerge “will send a strong message to our allies on how the UK is reacting to developing threats”.

## In Parliament

In Parliament, the Lords International Relations Committee published a short report in early June on [The NATO Summit 2018](#) (HL Paper 143 2017-19), while the Defence Committee continues its inquiry on [US, NATO and UK defence relations](#). The committee took evidence from the Secretary of State for Defence on [22 May 2018](#). A debate on NATO is scheduled in the Commons on Wednesday 20 June 2018.

## Selected material

- [NATO Summit debate pack](#), Commons Library, 18 June 2018. This contains links to recent commentary and recent statements in Parliament
- [The NATO Summit 2018](#), Lords International Relations Committee, 5 June 2018
- [UK defence expenditure](#), 22 February 2018, includes statistics on NATO 2% target
- [NATO Brussels Summit 2017](#), short Commons library briefing looking ahead to the May 2017 summit
- [Russia 2017](#), December 2017, provides a detailed examination of domestic and foreign policy developments in Russia
- [NATO's military response to Russia: November 2016 update](#), provides context to NATO’s initial response to Russia although now out of date

### Box 2: About NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was formed in 1949 as an Alliance of 12 nations dedicated to ensuring their collective security and preservation and intended to counter the perceived threat from the Soviet Union and later the countries of the Warsaw Pact. The main tenet of the Alliance is Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which states unequivocally that an armed attack against one shall be considered an attack against all.

From its inception through the Cold War, NATO looked eastwards to the Soviet Union. Relations with Russia improved in the 1990s and NATO’s focus shifted to Afghanistan in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the end of combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014, coupled with Russia’s military aggression and the threat from ISIS/Daesh from the south, has prompted a significant shift in NATO’s thinking: back to its own territory and challenges emanating from its eastern and southern flanks.

- 29 members
- Secretary-General: Jens Stoltenberg
- Deputy Secretary-General: Rose Gottemoeller
- Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR): General Curtis M. Scaparrotti
- NATO website: [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)

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