

NATO From Formation to Expansion, A Perspective on International Relations

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development and strategic importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), recognized as one of the most resilient and effective international alliances in modern times. Founded in the complex aftermath of World War II, NATO emerged as a response to the Soviet Union's expanding influence across Eastern and Central Europe and as a framework for European unity under American strategic direction. The research analyzes how NATO has sustained its political and military prominence, particularly after redefining its strategic objectives since 2020 to reinforce its transatlantic leadership and global security role. It addresses three key inquiries: NATO's foundational nature, the extent of its success in fulfilling its goals, and the breadth of its political and military capacity. Guided by the main hypothesis that NATO's creation primarily advanced U.S. interests and strengthened Washington's authority in Europe, the study also examines assumptions concerning the Soviet threat, European defense needs, and the alliance's contribution to political and military integration. Employing a historical and descriptive approach, the research follows the circumstances surrounding NATO's establishment, its responses to geopolitical shifts, and its ongoing transformation within the post-Cold War and modern global landscape. The findings emphasize NATO's contribution to reinforcing Euro-Atlantic security through coordinated defense strategies, military-industrial cooperation, and partnerships designed to counterbalance rising powers such as Russia and China. Ultimately, the study concludes that NATO operates both as a guardian of European stability and as a strategic tool of U.S. global influence.

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1. Introduction

NATO is one of the most successful organizations due to its ability to adapt to international environments and the challenges it has faced, namely Soviet domination of Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia, and the changes that have taken place in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Since 2020, NATO's strategic priorities have been redefined to maintain its leadership as the foremost transatlantic military and political alliance. This has increased its global approach, especially after the strategies it has adopted regarding the alliance's position and role in promoting security and stability and protecting its core tasks of deterrence, defense, crisis prevention, and

management. The alliance works to prevent crises that affect its members while supporting partners and developing administrative structures. For geopolitical balance, the alliance expanded to include Central and Eastern Europe and countries outside Europe, while strengthening its political and military capabilities to Russia and Warsaw Pact threats. NATO remained active after the Cold War, reflecting the continued influence of U.S. leadership in shaping global security policies. Politically, since its inception, NATO has held meetings to discuss strengthening European integration and addressing issues of terrorism, the Russian threat, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and various other issues. Most NATO summits emphasize the need to build a military industrial base to supply the alliance with technology, deploy military bases around the world, and increase military spending, which Europe has agreed to because it fears Washington will abandon its leadership of the alliance. NATO members have therefore agreed to strengthen the military arms and develop military industries of all kinds, which is the European-Atlantic strategy that protects Washington's interests.

2. Research Problem

NATO is the largest transatlantic military organization working to protect both European and U.S. security interests. Simplify: The main research problem is that NATO was established in a complex post-war context requiring European integration. Europe is a continent that possesses strategic capabilities, technology, and an economy that works in favor of Washington and its global influence. Therefore, the research questions were as follows:

- 1- What is the nature of NATO's origins?
- 2- To what extent has NATO been able to achieve its goals?
- 3- What are NATO's political and military capabilities?

3. Research hypothesis

The main hypothesis of the research was that NATO was formed as a US interest to dominate Europe, while the sub-hypotheses were:

- 1- NATO was formed in response to the Soviet threat.
- 2- After World War II, Europe needed to protect its territory and resources.
- 3- NATO expansion represented a European demand for political and military integration.

4. Research Objective

The research aims to:

- 1- Identify the factors that led to the formation of NATO.
- 2- Analyze the situation in Europe after the destruction it suffered and its desire for a military force to protect it from Russian influence.
- 3- Europe's capabilities should be integrated to strengthen its unity under U.S. strategic leadership.

5. Importance of the research

This research is important because it examines Europe's post-World War II position and its response to Soviet military threats, which represented the greatest military power, in addition to the role of the United States and its support for the establishment of the alliance in order to draw Europe to its side, as well as other international powers from around the world, by forming partnerships and deploying military bases to control internationally important waterways and contain Russia and China. The research highlights NATO's political and military capabilities and its role in strengthening European-Atlantic security through economic, political, military, and technological support for the alliance.

6. Research methodology

To verify the research hypothesis, a historical approach was adopted by tracing the origins of NATO and identifying the most important factors that led to its creation. A descriptive and realistic approach was also adopted to understand the nature of the alliance and its political and military capabilities.

7. Research Structure

The research consists of a summary and introduction, in addition to two chapters and a conclusion that includes conclusions and recommendations.

Section One

Origins and Expansion Goals

First: The Origins of NATO

Following World War II, the Soviet Union began expanding its influence and dominance across Eastern and Central Europe, which extended its influence in Central and Eastern Europe with a military and ideological bent. At that time, Europe was suffering from destroyed infrastructure, refugees, and millions of orphans. In addition, communists threatened some elected governments in Europe. In 1948, the Communist Party overthrew the democratically elected political system in Czechoslovakia with Soviet support. The communists then besieged West Germany to consolidate their military grip on the region. At that stage, the United States launched the Marshall Plan (1947) to rebuild and revive Europe's economy. Western democracies met with the United States in Washington to devise a means of deterring the communist threat to Europe by establishing a military organization to protect Europe called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). (1) The NATO agreement was signed on April 4, 1949, by the foreign ministers of Western Europe (France, Denmark, Italy, Iceland, Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, Denmark, Canada, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States), but concerns persisted, especially after the Korean War and Soviet support for North Korea against South Korea in 1950, which required strengthening political and military cooperation to meet these challenges (2).

The NATO agreement included several articles, with Article 5 emphasizing collective security, stating that "an armed attack against one or more member states in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against all, and in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, all members shall assist and stand by the attacked member state." Article 3 stipulated the

basis for cooperation in military preparedness among the allies. The agreement affirmed that the security umbrella provided by NATO would lead to political and economic stability in Western Europe. As a result, new allies joined the alliance, such as Turkey and Greece in 1952, followed by West Germany in 1955. For the purpose of balancing power, the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact, which was referred to as the Eastern Bloc in 1955. Despite the Soviets' claim that the organization was a defensive alliance, it soon became clear that its primary goal was to strengthen communist hegemony in Eastern Europe. At that time, Europe entered the Cold War period. NATO developed during the Cold War to meet the challenges posed by the bipolarity between the United States and the former Soviet Union and to achieve military balance between them (3). Between 1989 and 1991, the leaders of the Eastern Bloc countries felt that things were spiraling out of control in their countries, coinciding with the absence of the Soviet role in the region due to the foreign policy adopted by Mikhail Gorbachev. In July 1991, Czechoslovak President (Václav Havel) announced the dissolution of this alliance, which had lasted for about 36 years, ending the mission of the Warsaw Pact. When the bipolar system began to decline and was replaced by a new world order based on unipolarity in 1991, NATO began to restructure and adapt to the new reality after the end of the Cold War by shifting from a defensive military doctrine to an offensive military doctrine and establishing a new political-military alliance in line with the developments of the 21st century and its expansionist plans, represented by wars to control resources. The first step for this alliance (the expansion of NATO) was to include new members from Eastern and Central Europe, which were previously members of the Warsaw Pact. The goal of this step **was** to increase the alliance's military capacity of the alliance, expand its missions from Europe to other parts of the world, and transform it from a military alliance working to protect European security from threats from the Soviet Union to an offensive military alliance participating in US military operations around the world. Countries that were in the Warsaw Pact then joined NATO at the Istanbul Summit in 2004, including Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Bulgaria. Then, in 2009, Albania and Croatia joined, followed by Montenegro in 2017 and North Macedonia in 2020. After the Russian-Ukrainian war and fears of a Russian threat, Sweden and Finland applied to join NATO in 2024 to encircle Russia and limit its advance in Europe. (4)

NATO has entered into multiple partnerships and agreements, including:

1- Partnership for Peace (PFP) – 1994

It is an American project designed to rehabilitate European countries emerging from the Soviet era economically and politically in order to prepare them for NATO membership. Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia joined the project in 1994, and 21 countries participate in the partnership project. The goal of the partnership is to strengthen trust, reduce threats, and build security relations between NATO countries and Euro-Atlantic member states. Since 2011, all partnership activities have been open to all members of the Istanbul Initiative, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, and the Atlantic Partnership. The partnership focuses on six key areas of military cooperation, including training, joint exercises, disaster preparedness, scientific and environmental issues, policy planning, relations with regimes, and professional training. This approach was also implemented in cooperation with Egypt to address migration-related issues. (5)

2- Mediterranean Dialogue – 1997

This is a forum for cooperation between Arab countries bordering the Mediterranean (Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, and Morocco). The dialogue aims to enhance security and stability in the Mediterranean. The dialogue was announced in 1994, and in 2003, the alliance countries announced their intention to develop a framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue to establish more understanding relations. The Mediterranean Dialogue is a kind of adaptation by the

United States to the post-Cold War environment and openness and cooperation with the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean. (6)

3- NATO-Ukraine Council 1997

This is a model of political and security cooperation between NATO and Ukraine. The partnership was activated after the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022 and NATO's political and military support for Ukraine. (7)

4- European-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC)

The partnership began in 1997 as a framework for cooperation between NATO and its partners for peace. The partnership includes all NATO members as well as countries in Central Asia and Europe, such as Switzerland, Austria, and Sweden. This council was established with American planning to bring the former Soviet republics into the West, thereby encircling Russia (8)

5- NATO-Russia Council (NRC) - 2002

The council was established between NATO and Russia for consultation, cooperation, and joint action on security issues. It was established during the Rome Summit and is a forum for cooperation and consultation. After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, NATO suspended all forms of cooperation, although limited communication continued concerning refugee and humanitarian issues. Multiple meetings of the Council were held regarding Ukraine and refugees. After 2014, NATO realized that Russia could no longer be considered a partner (9).

6- Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) – 2004

This is a partnership that aims to contribute to global and regional security and includes non-NATO member states. Arab countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates participate in it, as do Oman and Saudi Arabia in certain activities related to defense planning, defense budgeting, counterterrorism, and the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This initiative came in accordance with the 2004 Istanbul Summit and focuses on the principles of non-discrimination, self-differentiation, avoidance of imposition, and integration with other international initiatives in the region(10).

7- Bilateral partnerships

These are partnership programs designed between some NATO countries and other countries for the purpose of cooperation in the fields of cyber defense, peace and security, military compatibility, defense and maritime security, and the Science for Peace and Security Program. There is cooperation between NATO and Bahrain in this context, as well as cooperation between NATO and Ukraine, in addition to NATO's relationship with countries in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, such as cooperation with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. The alliance cooperates on an individual basis, and Washington uses partnerships as a framework for hegemony, especially since it leads the global system with economic and political power in a complex security environment (11).

In addition to partnerships with international organizations and blocs, including:

- The United Nations
- The European Union
- The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

- International and regional organizations

These partnerships are certainly important for both parties in promoting security and stability at the regional and international levels through the development of military capabilities such as training and military support for partnerships in the fields of defense and security, and addressing common challenges such as terrorism, cybersecurity, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, refugee affairs, women's rights, and many other issues. which leads to international peace and security. NATO maintains relations with 35 non-member countries, which contribute to policy-making and crisis management while promoting democratic values and reforming the institutions of those countries.

Second: Expansion goals and roles

The accession of Central, Eastern, and Northern European countries to NATO came after the political and security vacuum left by the collapse of the former Soviet Union, ensuring the loyalty of those countries to the United States and preventing Russia's rise internationally. The end of the Cold War and the inclusion of former Soviet-aligned states represented a major strategic gain for the transatlantic alliance, which helped establish the Washington-led world order with European support. However, expansion had objectives in Western strategy, which were (12):

- It is a process of forming Europe's military identity and protecting it from nationalist currents.
- Integrating Europe (its center, east, and west) through economic, political, and military integration.
- Imposing American hegemony on Europe under the pretext of ongoing Russian threats to ensure...
- Encircling and besieging Russia and Washington's desire to weaken it and reduce its role in re-engineering the international system to be multipolar.
- Spreading political and economic reform to the newly independent republics, which are economically dilapidated and have dictatorial regimes.
- Spreading a culture of democracy, the rule of law, and human freedoms among NATO countries, even though Russia repeatedly rejected expansion and reached the point of war with Ukraine, a country that sought to join the alliance, with US guidance to drain Russia militarily and economically. Russia considered the expansion of the alliance a threat to its unity and a strengthening of nationalist sentiments within it.

While NATO refrained from direct military operations during the Cold War, it began engaging in international interventions after 1991 and took on roles in the areas of security and defense, represented by (13)

1- Crisis management: NATO intervenes by providing military and humanitarian support to certain countries, as was the case in Libya, Kosovo, and the civil war. The alliance has the military and political capabilities necessary to manage and prevent crises through:

- preventing crises and deterrence, relying on a combination of military and political capabilities and intensifying diplomatic dialogue to promote stability.
- Responding to crises through cooperation with its partners and regional and international organizations, while making important decisions related to military intervention.

2- Security cooperation: NATO communicates through the exchange of information with member states to combat terrorism, environmental issues, drugs, and other issues. NATO has played an important role in crisis management issues in many countries, including:

- Training and consultation provided by NATO to member states and partners in the field of crisis management with continuous logistical support.
- Provision of humanitarian support through medical assistance and in times of disasters such as floods and fires, as well as refugee affairs and others.

NATO has played an important role in crisis management issues in many countries around the world, including the following (14):

- Intervening to stop genocide and violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, supported by UN Security Council Resolution 816, which imposed a ban on military flights over Bosnia and Herzegovina and established a no-fly zone.
- Military intervention in Libya in 2011 and stopping the civil war under Security Council Resolution 1973, which called for a ceasefire between the Libyan army and the opposition and imposed a no-fly zone to prevent Gaddafi's forces from targeting civilians and to ban the supply of weapons to Libya. as well as freezing the assets of the Gaddafi regime and opening the way for humanitarian aid.
- The Kosovo crisis in 1999, when NATO intervened to end the crisis and protect civilians.
- The 2001 Afghanistan crisis, when NATO contributed to crisis management through military intervention and the training and support of Afghan forces.

NATO has taken collective defensive measures in crises including:

- Deploying Patriot missiles during the 1991 Gulf War.
- Agreement on a set of defensive measures during the Iraq crisis in 2003.
- Deployment of Patriot missiles in response to developments in Syria in 2012.

NATO increasingly prioritized combating terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and hybrid warfare. After the Russian-Ukrainian war, European and American concerns increased with the emergence of a new geostrategic landscape, especially after the rise of Russia's ally China and the formation of the BRICS bloc, which brought together emerging and industrial economies with many goals and ambitions.

Section Two

The Political and Military Capabilities of NATO

First: Political Capabilities

NATO summits have historically represented key turning points in alliance decision-making and strategy development, and the summits it holds play a role in strengthening cooperation between member states, as security and political issues are discussed, challenges are addressed, and joint decisions are made. The agenda of each summit addresses issues of comprehensive strategic

importance that strengthen the alliance between NATO members. The alliance's decisions are issued in the form of statements and documents that detail the most important issues discussed. NATO has held numerous summits. From 1949 until the end of the Cold War in 1990, 15 summits were held with the aim of addressing the political and security challenges faced by the international community, namely the conflict between the two superpowers over the arms race, the deployment of military bases, and hegemony (15).

The summits are usually held in any member state of the alliance and sometimes at the alliance's headquarters in Belgium. The summits are attended by the leaders of member states, as well as senior representatives of international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union, the heads of partner states, and the leaders of countries contributing to NATO-led operations (16). NATO holds three main types of summits: regular, extraordinary, and partnership summits:

- Regular summits: These are held periodically to discuss issues and challenges facing the alliance.
- Extraordinary summits: These are held in emergency situations that require quick decisions to address important issues that may threaten the alliance, member states, or NATO partners.
- Partner summits: NATO has multiple partnerships with Asia, Africa, Europe, and other bilateral or individual partnerships that require meetings for political and security reasons.

After World War II and the emergence of bipolarity, NATO adopted balanced policies that worked to strengthen military and political cooperation and responded to the requirements of the international environment by achieving rapprochement between East and West. The political aspect of NATO was highlighted by the decisions issued after each summit, including the following:

1- Paris Summit, December 19, 1957

This summit emphasized the unity of the alliance and coordination among members and emphasized cooperation in (17):

- Eliminating conflict in international politics
- Economic cooperation
- Non-military cooperation among NATO members

2- Summit meetings held from 1974 to 1978

A. Brussels Summit, May 30, 1974: This summit emphasized solidarity among allies to confront the international economic crisis caused by the oil crisis and resulted in the signing of the Helsinki Agreement*.

B. London Summit, May 11, 1977: This summit contributed to the development of defense programs and the improvement of the defense capabilities of NATO members (18).

C. Washington Summit, May 31, 1978: This summit reviewed the decisions of the London Summit, emphasized security and defense, called on countries to increase defense spending, and built bridges between East and West (19).

3. Summit meetings held from 1982 to 1989

A. Bonn Summit, June 10, 1982: Held in West Germany, at which Spain joined the alliance and a summit program was set out covering key issues such as peace, disarmament, defense among alliance members, and strengthening cooperation.

B. Brussels Summit, November 21, 1985: During this summit, consultations were held with former US President Reagan on the results of the Geneva Summit held between the leaders of the two superpowers. The meeting focused on arms control and non-proliferation. Brussels Summit, March 3, 1988: This summit discussed the Harmel Report, which focused on the future responsibilities of the alliance and strengthening stability in Europe (21).

C. Brussels Summit, May 30, 1989: This summit was held to commemorate the 40th anniversary of NATO and emphasized the preservation of the alliance, the strengthening of political participation, and the confrontation of challenges (22).

4- Brussels Summit, December 4, 1989: This summit was held under exceptional circumstances — the conclusion of the Cold War and the Warsaw Pact countries' desire to join NATO (23).

5- Summit meetings held from 1990 to 1999

A. London Summit, July 6, 1990: This summit contributed to the development of cooperation with the independent republics of Central and Eastern Europe, emphasizing the need to maintain diplomatic channels with these countries to become members of NATO(24).

B. Rome Summit, November 8, 1991: During this summit, NATO's new strategy was announced and the Rome Declaration on Peace and Cooperation was published, in addition to discussing reports on Yugoslavia, which was undergoing a period of disintegration (25).

C. Brussels Summit, January 11, 1994: The summit launched an initiative for peace and partnership, publishing a partnership document with the development of a European security and defense identity. The summit called for military intervention, with the support of the United Nations, in Bosnia and Herzegovina to prevent genocide (26).

D. Paris Summit, May 27, 1997: A document was signed to establish cooperation and security relations between the Russian Federation and NATO. The document emphasized that both parties adopted cooperation as a means of dialogue, and a permanent joint council between Russia and NATO was established (27).

E. Madrid Summit, July 9, 1997: The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were invited to begin talks on joining NATO, and a partnership agreement between NATO and Ukraine was signed (28).

F. Washington Summit, April 24, 1999: This summit was held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of NATO's founding, to affirm opposition to the genocide in Kosovo, and to strengthen the Partnership for Peace, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and the Mediterranean Dialogue (29).

6- Summits held from 2002 to 2025

A. Rome Summit, May 28, 2002: The NATO-Turkey Partnership Council was established (30).

B. Prague Summit, November 22, 2002: Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia were invited to NATO accession talks and to take measures to develop military capabilities and stand against terrorism (31).

C. Istanbul Summit, June 29, 2004: The summit was held in the context of NATO expansion and the newly independent Eastern European countries' application for NATO membership. This was achieved through the launch of the Middle East Cooperation Initiative (32).

D. Brussels Summit, February 22, 2005: Leaders affirmed their support for stability in the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan and for strengthening the partnership between NATO and the European Union (33).

E. Riga Summit, February 29, 2006: Developments in Afghanistan were reviewed, security assistance was increased, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia were invited to join the Partnership for Peace program (34).

F. Bucharest Summit, April 4, 2008: Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia were invited to join NATO, and operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan were reviewed (35).

G. Strasbourg Summit, April 4, 2009: Celebrated the 60th anniversary of NATO's founding and called for commitment to NATO's fundamental principles and shared values (36).

H. Lisbon Summit, November 20, 2010: A new NATO strategy was formulated to develop a missile defense system to protect Europe, with an invitation to Russia to cooperate, and an action plan was developed for cyber defense and reform of NATO's military structures and agencies (37).

I. Chicago Summit, May 21, 2012: A strategy was developed to transfer security responsibility to Afghan forces, with NATO committing to train, advise, and assist Afghan forces (38).

J- Wales Summit, September 4, 2014: This summit focused on strengthening NATO's defense capabilities, increasing support for Ukraine, and condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea (39).

K. Warsaw Summit, July 8, 2016: This summit emphasized two pillars: strengthening NATO's deterrence and defense, as well as promoting stability beyond NATO's borders. It also focused on strengthening cyber defenses and recognizing cyberspace as a new operational domain, like air, land, and sea (40).

L- Brussels Summit, July 11, 2018: This summit focused on three main points: strengthening the alliance's deterrence and defense, intensifying counterterrorism efforts, and distributing the burden fairly among NATO members (41).

M. Brussels Summit, July 14, 2021: Leaders agreed to strengthen the alliance as a forum for political consultation, enhance collective defense by increasing readiness, modernize capabilities and increase investments, develop a plan to promote transatlantic innovation and support the existing international system, and address the security implications of climate change. (42)

N. Extraordinary Summit, February 25, 2022: Condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, agreed to restructure deterrence and defense, and pledged support for the Ukrainian government. (43)

O. Brussels Summit, March 24, 2022: Addressed the repercussions of the Russian-Ukrainian war and affirmed their unity and defense of the security of all allies (44).

P. Madrid Summit, July 29, 2022: Leaders agreed to take proactive positions to strengthen response and combat power, They affirmed their support for Ukraine and NATO's open-door policy, invited Finland and Sweden to join NATO, and communicated with their partners in the Indian and Pacific Oceans to support them in confronting terrorism and the global food crisis caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Q. Vilnius Summit, July 11, 2023: NATO members reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening NATO's deterrence and defenses against Russia and terrorism. The allies pledged to invest 2% of their gross domestic product for defense purposes and reaffirmed their continued support for Ukraine. Finland joined the alliance, and members welcomed and agreed to Sweden's accession after Turkey approved Sweden's membership (45).

R. Washington Summit, July 11, 2024: The summit commemorated the 75th anniversary of NATO's founding and focused on three themes: strengthening NATO's deterrence and defense, continuing long-term support for Ukraine, and deepening NATO partnerships (46).

S. The Hague Summit, July 24, 2025: This summit emphasized three key areas: increasing defense investment to 5%, sharing the burden fairly among alliance members, and strengthening the alliance's industrial defense capabilities and increasing production lines, in addition to reiterating NATO's unwavering support for Ukraine (47).

Second: Military capabilities

NATO is considered the largest military alliance in the world and possesses advanced military capabilities and technology, as military manufacturing companies have intensified their efforts to develop their production of various types of weapons. NATO's ground forces consist of eight multinational groups that work in coordination with national defense forces. These groups are not identical in size and structure, They are divided according to threat factors and military location, and these groups have recently been integrated into NATO's command structure to ensure readiness and responsiveness. NATO members have therefore agreed on the following (48):

- 1- Increase stockpiles of equipped weapons and develop advanced defense plans commensurate with the threats.
- 2- Develop command and control and increase advanced capabilities such as missile defense systems.

This agreement on development comes to deter any aggression on land, in the air, at sea, and in cyberspace. The alliance continues its major joint operations through defense planning and defining the alliance's core tasks of deterrence, defense, crisis prevention, and crisis management. The alliance supports multinational cooperation projects to enhance industrial and technological cooperation and create a strong and innovative industrial base. After the accession of Eastern European countries to NATO, the production lines and military factories owned by the republics from the Soviet era were rehabilitated and modernized. The modernization helped increase Western investment in these factories, which encouraged European and American companies to sign military agreements with the new NATO countries. As a result, NATO countries dominated the global arms market with more than 80% of total sales (49). NATO has combat ground forces numbering 8,658,882, including 4,343,065 reservists, with most of the combatants coming from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Turkey, and Italy.

The core countries participating in the alliance are listed in Table No. (1)

Country	Number of Participating Soldiers
United States	1,328,000 soldiers including rapid reaction forces
Turkey	355,000
United Kingdom	184,000
France	200,000
Spain	133,282
Italy	165,500
Germany	181,600
Poland	202,100
Greece	142,700
Belgium	37,000
Netherlands	41,000
Finland	44,000
Norway	68,000
Hungary	81,000
Czech Republic	28,000

Source prepared by the researcher based on: <https://www.statista.com>

These are the estimated numbers of active NATO fighters, in addition to 140,000 rapid response troops. During the 2025 Hague Summit, it was agreed to increase the number to 300,000 fighters, with 4,000 NATO troops deployed in Central Asia, 700 fighters in Estonia, 1,200 in Lithuania, 300 in Norway, and about 800 in Latvia.

The number of US tanks contributed to NATO reached 4,640 combat tanks, which is the largest number among member states, while the number of Turkish tanks participating in the alliance reached 2,238 tanks (50). The United States agreed with NATO members to open new lines of military production (51), such as:

- 1- Manufacturing advanced Abrams tanks with high missile defense capabilities.
- 2- Various types of armored vehicles, including advanced Stryker armored vehicles.
- 3- Increasing production of Leopard tanks manufactured by Germany.

- 4- Increasing the United Kingdom's production of Challenger tanks.
- 5- Increasing the number of factories for the production of ammunition.
- 6- Working on the manufacture of nuclear attack submarines.

NATO is working to increase the military training base for equipment and spare parts in Israel, Brazil, and other countries to support military capabilities. NATO also has an industrial base for the production of armor and anti-missile systems. At the 2025 Hague Summit, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte announced that the alliance requires additional armored vehicles, tanks, and millions of artillery shells. Rutte emphasized that NATO must enhance its strength and combat readiness to deter emerging threats in order to counter the Russian threat (52).

NATO possesses a large fleet of advanced aircraft, including F-35 fighters, helicopters, and reconnaissance planes and drones, in addition to the strategically important MRTT multi-role tanker transport aircraft, of which NATO has 10 (53).

In 2020, the Air Force Research Center (NGR) launched a program to develop aircraft to enter service in 2036, with each NATO member having a share in it. The program consists of five unmanned surveillance and warning aircraft, in addition to a fleet of airborne control aircraft. NATO is also working on the manufacture of an air defense system (Patriot and THAAD) (54). NATO launched the Multinational Special Aviation Program (MSAP), which specializes in training pilots in the insertion and extraction of special operations forces. The program is based in Croatia, as well as another NATO program (NFTE) in Europe for maintenance training, with the establishment of a network of special facilities for multinational training for all types of combat aircraft (55).

NATO also has a variety of ships, ranging from destroyers and frigates to helicopter carriers and aircraft carriers, in addition to nuclear submarines, and the United States has amphibious ships with high capabilities.

NATO members have agreed on defense plans backed by investments to build a defense industrial base and new technologies that include key priorities in air and missile defense and long-range weapons such as ballistic and hypersonic missiles, with joint exercises and updating the command structures of the corps deployed at military bases on every continent, with nuclear warheads deployed at NATO bases such as Incirlik in Turkey, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Eastern and Central Europe, Central Asia, and the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. As part of the NATO strategy outlined by Washington, exercises are conducted to ensure that alliance members are prepared for any threat. Multiple exercises have been launched, including Northern Response, Steadfast Defender, and Steadfast Noon, in addition to joint bilateral and individual exercises aimed at testing military capabilities (56). The estimated military capabilities of NATO can be summarized in the following table:

Table 2: Estimated military capabilities of NATO

Type	Number
Strategic bombers	3,312
Tanker aircraft	1,163

Type	Number
Air transport aircraft	1,479
Electronic warfare aircraft	889
Airborne early warning aircraft	658
Fighter aircraft	9,141
Total aircraft	22,377

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on: <https://www.statista.com>

On March 4, 2025, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, announced a plan called “Re-arming Europe/Readiness 2030.” This five-point strategy aims to:

- Increase defense spending.
- Strengthen the military capabilities of European Union countries.

The most prominent tool in this plan is SAFE, a tool for strengthening security that provides subsidized loans of up to €150 billion to support national defense investments. The plan also emphasizes activating the “national exemption” clause in the Stability and Growth Pact in order to increase defense spending. Sixteen member states have activated this clause, allowing recourse to the Cohesion Fund (CF) for defense purposes and stimulating the European Investment Bank and the European Savings and Investment Fund. In March 2025, the European Commission announced the White Paper on Defense – Readiness 2030, which focuses primarily on closing capability gaps and supporting Europe's defense industrial base. This plan sets out seven priorities (57):

- Air and missile defense.
- Artillery.
- Ammunition and missiles.
- Unmanned aerial vehicles.
- Military mobility.
- Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and cyber warfare.
- Logistical enablement through infrastructure support such as air transport and refueling.

The plan also makes proposals to deepen and increase support for Ukraine, increase joint investment in defense, and strengthen strategic partnerships.

Based on the analysis above, NATO remains the cornerstone of collective defense for its members in Europe and beyond, with cooperation between NATO and the European Union being essential. The European Union contributes primarily to supporting NATO member states through regulatory and financial instruments. Member states are therefore seeking to increase coordination to address defense gaps and strengthen transatlantic ties in line with US expectations. The Russian-Ukrainian

war has played a major role in confirming the fundamental roles of NATO and the European Union in protecting European security.

8. Conclusion

NATO was formed as a result of the need for European-Atlantic integration to counter Soviet threats after World War II. NATO expanded to include Eastern and Central Europe and countries outside Europe to take advantage of their economic and even geographical assets. The alliance has formed multiple partnerships with many countries for political and military reasons, as well as to extend American influence, particularly through the military bases that NATO has deployed around the world. NATO also made efforts to hold political and military summits to enhance European cooperation and integration and to strengthen security and stability, while emphasizing military support, defense agreements, and the creation of a high-tech military industrial base. The research reached a number of conclusions:

1- Despite its capabilities, Europe cannot lead the alliance without its main ally, the United States, due to the latter's economic, military, and technological capabilities. It would be difficult for Europe to lead NATO if the United States withdrew.

2- The United States seeks to maintain NATO as the main security framework supporting its strategic influence in Europe.

3- Europe is experiencing political division, a difficult economic situation, and fears of a Russian attack on European countries.

9. Recommendations

The research recommendations are as follows:

1- European NATO leaders should organize their military capabilities and form a European army under European leadership within NATO (European NATO).

2- NATO leaders should strengthen their relations with Russia for the purpose of containing it.

3- The role of European-led partnerships should be strengthened to secure Europe's regional environment.

4- Military capabilities must be developed technologically and their production increased so that the European market becomes an investment for a European industrial base.

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