

# Are Germany and Europe Stepping up? A NATO Perspective

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From a NATO perspective the current overall political landscape can be summarised as follows:

- President Trump's rhetoric regarding NATO, his harsh criticism of European allies, and his unilateral actions have shaken the trans-Atlantic partnership – and sparked a debate about Europe's future strategic orientation aiming at "strategic autonomy". Yet, the US military presence in Europe and its nuclear deterrence extended to Europe remain vital for Europe's security vis-à-vis a confrontational Russia.
- Fair burden sharing has become a defining issue for the transatlantic partnership. The imbalance between the US and European allies in defence spending and the provision of high-end military capabilities for NATO is unacceptable for a defence alliance.
- NATO's security environment has fundamentally changed. To the east, Russia's aggressive posture, its growing conventional and nuclear capabilities, continuous disinformation and intimidation campaigns and cyber-attacks aim to destabilise Western societies and undermine the unity of NATO and the EU. To the south, in North African and the Middle East, continuing crises, state failure and wars have fuelled terrorism and caused mass migration that affect Europe's stability.

NATO has adopted a dual strategy to counter these different threats: strengthening deterrence and defence and projecting stability outside its territory. They complement each other in upholding security at and beyond NATO's borders. NATO's projecting stability efforts focus on providing substantial assistance to partners, such as Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq and Afghanistan, to help them provide for their own security. In light of Russia's strategy, however, deterrence and defence has again become NATO's strategic priority. NATO needs to be able to rapidly respond to simultaneous threats that could emanate from several regions across NATO's entire area. The Alliance must ensure that it has the right forces in the right place at the right time to reinforce, protect or defend threatened allies. At the same time, the Alliance must enhance its resilience against cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns.

To this end, NATO has set up an ambitious programme. A few examples: the size of the NATO Response Force has been tripled to become a joint force of some 40,000 troops. Its spearhead force of some 5,000 troops is ready to move within a few days. The multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, led by Great Britain, Canada, Germany and the US, demonstrate that even in case of a limited incursion to create a *fait accompli*, Russia would immediately be confronted with the Alliance as a whole. The 2018 July Summit in Brussels launched

additional steps to enhance NATO's posture further, such as improving NATO's strategic anticipation capability and accelerating decision-making; adapting the NATO Command Structure to become again capable of commanding the whole range of operations, including large-scale collective defence under cyber threats; the NATO Readiness Initiative "4-30", to enhance the readiness of 30 land battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels, ready to employ in theatre within 30 days; creating the legal and infrastructure conditions to enable rapid military movement across the Atlantic and across Europe; further improving cyber defence; and expanding NATO-EU security cooperation through more than 70 projects.

Are the Europeans and Germany stepping up their contributions to these efforts? The answer is yes and no or not enough. A few examples:

- (1) In the past few years, the EU has spent significant efforts to strengthen European Defence, i.e. enhance border protection, improve the capabilities of EU nations and foster multinational cooperation, while Collective Defence will remain the sole responsibility of NATO. European Defence will also strengthen the Alliance, if military capabilities developed within the EU, including through Permanent Structured Cooperation, are also available to NATO. EU and NATO staffs work together to ensure that capability development in both organisations is complementary and priorities are coherent. But all of this is still subject of planning, the EU need to deliver!
- (2) The EU is working to implement its Action Plan on Military Mobility. It complements NATO's enablement efforts. The European Commission has set up its Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) programme comprising nine core network corridors across Europe to co-finance projects that are of dual, civilian and military, use – roads, railways, bridges, harbours and airports. TEN-T will benefit both NATO and EU nations. It will contribute to facilitating the deployment of US forces to, across and from Europe. It therefore contributes to trans-Atlantic burden sharing. But delivery will take years. The EU must redouble its efforts to accelerate implementation.

- (3) Germany, too, has stepped up its efforts. In Lithuania, Germany leads one of the four NATO Battle-groups in the region. In 2019, it again leads NATO's spearhead force and contributes some 5,000 troops. It leads the new Joint Support and Enabling Command of NATO, which plays a key role in managing the movement of forces across Europe. It has gathered 19 allies to contribute to the German-led Framework Nations Grouping with the aim to create a land Corps capacity; progress achieved so far is impressive. It has significantly increased its contingent in Afghanistan, and supports the UN and the EU in Mali.

But in terms of fair sharing of risks and burdens, most allies believe Germany can and should do more – as the central European power, the biggest European economy and the most prosperous European Ally. Since 2014, Germany has indeed continuously increased defence spending in real terms; for 2019 by some € 4 billion nominally. But it only spends some 1.3 % of GDP. As things stand now, Germany will miss the 2% NATO target by 2024 as it was agreed by all political leaders, although Berlin's objective of achieving 1.5 % by 2024 could result in an increase of the defence budget by some 80%. This not only upsets the US, but also incurs increasing displeasure by European allies. A number of much smaller and less capable allies do already spend 2% – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

Moreover, after many years of focusing on light, deployable contingents for counter-insurgency and peacekeeping and continuous year-by-year reduction of the defence budget, the Bundeswehr is still in bad shape. It faces a multiple challenge: a) reconstituting its existing structures: fully manned, fully equipped, and fully trained formations; b) meeting demanding additional NATO Capability Targets: heavier, more high-end forces and more forces at higher readiness; c) enhancing resilience and cyber defence; and d) sustaining deployments abroad. These requirements necessitate a lot more resources and a steady significant increase year after year, in Germany's own security interests – to make the Bundeswehr fully operational and to appropriately contribute to common operations and missions. Fair burden-sharing among allies is crucial to Alliance solidarity and credibility. It is also essential for Germany's credibility and the future US-European relations.