

ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES FACING NATO

HEARING

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE

BEFORE THE

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ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES FACING NATO

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Keith Self (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SELF. The Subcommittee on Europe will come to order. The purpose of this hearing is to provide members with an informed perspective of the U.S. policy toward NATO and an opportunity to discuss NATO's trajectory in advance of the June summit in The Hague.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN KEITH SELF

The Hague will be focused on funding for NATO. This first chart—and would you put it up and blow it up as much as you can—shows the NATO nations. They are listed top to bottom by GDP. They are listed on the right side by the percentage that they provide. Can you blow that up more?

Okay, so I want to just talk you through this. Of course U.S. is at the top, almost \$29 trillion in GDP. Then you go down to Germany, U.K., France, Italy, Canada, and Spain. Down here you have got the front-line countries, you have got Lithuania, you have got Latvia, you have got Estonia. Some of the Balkan countries are down below.

The ones that I want to point—and the summit tells us that they are going to be going above 3 percent.

So I want to point out right here, we have got some, the major economies in NATO, specifically France, Italy, and Canada, that are well below—Italy, Canada, and Spain, I am sorry, that are well below their current 2 percent of commitment. These are major economies, this is a major change that needs to happen at the summit. Next slide.

Now, just a couple of comparisons. This compares Poland to everyone else on the Eastern Flank, the Eastern Flank being defined as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. Poland has a GDP of about \$840 billion. Eastern Flank is 890. So they are not dissimilar.

The defense budgets are quite a bit dissimilar. Their percentage, though, Poland is at over 4 percent currently and going higher. The

Eastern Flank is at 2.36 and going higher, and it has already committed to go higher. Next slide.

And one more just to give you an idea of where funding in NATO stands, this is Germany versus the Eastern Flank. So we have added Poland to the east of Germany. So Germany has the 4.6, Eastern Flank has 1.7. Here are the defense budgets. Look at this: the Eastern Flank is providing a higher percentage than Germany is.

So my point in all of these three slides is there is work to do in the summit later this month. Now, I know that people have made commitments, but what you just saw were 2024, the last we had a full year's funding toward NATO. That is a major problem that I wanted to highlight. We have got other issues in this briefing, but that is the one that I wanted to start with.

The first thing we have to start with is everyone pulling their weight in NATO. With that, I yield back, and I recognize the ranking member—

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Chairman?

Mr. SELF. Mr. Keating.

Mr. COSTA. Can I make a question inquiry to the chair? Those are important charts that you just presented. Could you make copies so that we could look at them here and—

Mr. SELF. Let's have copies made so—

Mr. COSTA. Shouldn't be that difficult for the staff.

Mr. SELF. And pass out. Absolutely, so we can do it now, Okay.

Mr. COSTA. Okay, thank you.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Mr. Costa, we will do that.

Mr. KEATING. I don't know if this is working. How is this? Oh, good, all right, here we go. Thank you.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER WILLIAM KEATING

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing today, and I want to thank our witnesses for their participation in today's hearing.

More than 75 years ago in the wake of World War II, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established to forge a safe, secure, and prosperous transatlantic alliance. From its inception, NATO's founding charter and its Article 5 principle of collective defense have been the underpinning of our national security and that of our European partners as well.

We saw this in action after 9/11, when our allies sacrificed treasure and blood in our defense. NATO's necessity came into full view in February 2022, when the Russian Federation initiated a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since the invasion, NATO has marshaled billions of dollars in military support to the Ukrainians, who have defended the front line of freedom at great human cost.

During the 2024 Washington Summit, support of Ukraine within NATO was clear as allies agreed that Russia remains the most significant and direct threat to the security of the alliance. Just 1 year later, the Russian threat to NATO remains all-oppressing and the more real.

At that summit, NATO allies also agreed to increase defense spending to build on the alliance deterrence. Countries like Poland

and the Baltic States have well exceeded the 2-percent mark, while others, like the United Kingdom and Germany, have committed to pass legislation to ensure their defense spending increases in accordance with the alliance's requirements.

Meanwhile, other countries have lagged behind the 2-percent mark, and it is absolutely imperative that all allies commit to adequate defense spending levels at the upcoming NATO summit in The Hague.

Unfortunately, NATO continues to face serious threats to its security. The Trump administration, its policy toward NATO has been inconsistent and chaotic. It is no wonder that the alliance is just confused about where Trump and his cabinet are in these critical issues.

On the war in Ukraine, Trump's Secretary of State has said Russia started it. Meanwhile, President Trump said Ukraine started it. Trump's Secretary of the Treasury says Putin is a war criminal. Trump's chief negotiator for Russia, Steve Witkoff, said Putin is not a bad guy, and that he is trustworthy.

Secretary of State often said Putin was a war criminal. When I questioned him 2 weeks ago, Secretary of State wouldn't say that. At the United Nations, the Trump administration abandoned our allies on a resolution, siding with Russia, Belarus, and North Korea. It is no wonder Trump's Ambassador to Ukraine, Bridget Brink, resigned, citing policy disagreements.

As we approach the 76th NATO summit in The Hague later this month, the Trump administration must take advantage of the opportunity and set the record straight.

First, the administration must not step back from its leadership role in NATO. Reported proposals to abandon the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, their European position, or reduce the focus that is there in the force posture in Europe, because any of this will do nothing but harm the deterrent effect of our alliance.

Second, the Trump administration must continue to encourage allies and partners to spend more on defense. I know this sentiment is bipartisan, and I want to thank Secretary General Rutte for, as well as former Secretary General Stoltenberg and Ambassador Smith, for your work on doing this in the previous administration.

Third, the Trump administration must make clear at the upcoming NATO summit that the United States and the entire alliance is prepared to increase the cost on Russia for its ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine.

This must start with acknowledging the facts on the ground, something that the Secretary of State was unable to do when he testified before this committee last month. This includes telling the truth. Russia is the aggressive State. Vladimir Putin is a war criminal who has carried out atrocious crimes in Ukraine, including the kidnaping of 20,000 children.

And the United States must hold the Kremlin accountable for this war and the horrific crimes Russia has committed in its wake. Anything less represents a failure of American leadership and an inability to uphold key American values.

Finally, the Trump administration must build upon the prior administration's effort to expand NATO's relationship with the Indo-

Pacific countries. Russia's war in Ukraine has a direct implication on the Taiwan Strait, and ensuring robust relationships with our Indo-Pacific allies is vitally important for this transatlantic relationship.

I want to thank our witnesses again for being here, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SELF. Other members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

We are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this important topic. I was extremely impressed with the written testimony of all three.

I would like to start and introduce and Rear Admiral (Retired) Mark Montgomery, CCTI Senior Director and Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

Sir, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL MONTGOMERY

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, distinguished members of the committee, on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for having me here to testify.

Look, we are here to discuss the future of NATO, the alliance that successfully led the western democracies through the cold war and the U.S. triumph over the Soviet Union.

And I think that while the political, security, and economic dynamics have changed markedly over the past 30 years, I firmly believe that NATO can still serve as the organizing principle that guides the transatlantic alliance through the challenges posed by a really rapacious, authoritarian State, Russia, as well as the Chinese-led axis of aggressors that really supports and enables Russia.

For far too long, many of our NATO allies have ignored these threats. They have failed to invest in the alliance. Chairman Self's diagram showed you that. They have even failed to invest in their own defense. And warnings by successive Republican and Democratic presidents went unheeded for 30 years.

However, thanks to Vladimir Putin's violent military aggression against Ukraine and its persistent efforts to undermine democratic governments in the Balkans and throughout Eastern Europe, and combined with President Trump's vocal complaints about European defense spending, we are starting to see NATO members finally stepping out to the plate.

I, too, appreciate Secretary General Mark Rutte as he has directed NATO member-he anticipates now that NATO members will agree to increase their defense spending target to 5 percent of gross domestic product, GDP, at the NATO summit in June. This increased spending is essential, and President Trump has been right to call out the previous European apathy on this issue.

And that reason is because Russian and Chinese threats challenge the territorial integrity, democratic stability, and economic prosperity of NATO. Neither Russia nor China will be cajoled or coddled into compliance or even peaceful coexistence. And both Europe and America need to recognize that we are in a long-term fight with the axis of aggressors.

But between these two authoritarians, the chief threat to peace and democracy in Europe is Russia. And Putin is not some misunderstood regional leader or an aggrieved actor reacting to NATO expansion. He is instead a stone-cold killer. He has launched wars of conquest, invading his neighbors three times in the past 20 years.

He has ruthlessly and violently crushed democratic movements growing in his hinterlands. And he is currently harassing, torturing, and murdering his domestic critics.

If NATO is going to prevail against this Russian menace, it is going to need U.S. leadership. It is going to need European defense investments. And it is going to need collective action to punish its adversaries.

My written testimony covered ten recommendations to achieve success. I would like to highlight five of them here. First is the one Chairman Self highlighted: we need to establish and maintain NATO defense spending targets at 5 percent of GDP.

NATO's national governments, even those not within range of Russia's long-range fires, must commit to Secretary General Rutte's proposed new spending pledge of 3.5 percent of the GDP on defense and another 1.5 percent on defense enablers, like their industrial base, infrastructure protection, and cyber security. This includes the United States.

Second, we need to act to protect the critical infrastructure essential to NATO's military mobility. Moving troops and equipment efficiently over land, sea, and air is essential to NATO's ability to project power and sustain forces to fight and win our wars.

European countries must prioritize critical infrastructure spending to align with NATO's war plans, not their domestic plans, particularly as it relates to flowing U.S., U.K., and French forces into and through Europe.

Third, we need to maintain U.S. enablers and force posture in Europe. NATO strength is measured by how quickly it can move and fight. That speed depends on U.S. enablers, our strategic lift, our operational logistics, our intelligence, our command-and-control infrastructures.

These are capabilities that no other NATO ally can provide. That is why forward-stationing U.S. forces and equipment across Europe is essential to NATO's warfighting capacity. The answer to this challenge from Russia is not for America to do less, but for Europe to do more.

Fourth, we need to arm Ukraine to defend itself and survive and not force Ukraine to agree to an unacceptable cease-fire negotiated under duress, or even worse, to lose the war.

And Ukraine needs two things above all else. First, they need constant U.S. intelligence support. And second, they need access to the American-made munitions for them or for Europe to purchase.

And then fifth, we have to punish Russia for its aggression. Putin will only change his calculus if the cost of continuing the war becomes unsustainable for him. The United States and Europe must increase pressure and impose costs on Russia by ramping up sanctions on the Russian war machine, starting with its energy revenues and the shadow fleet of fossil fuel deliverers that support that.

In summary, I think we need a comprehensive transatlantic effort: defense budget that reflect today's challenges, the resilience to withstand assaults from adversaries, and a clear-eyed commitment to the alliance. If we have those three pillars in place, the United States and its European allies will once again prevail over the forces that threaten peace and security, both in Europe and globally.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Montgomery follows:]

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY: FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe

Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO

RADM (RET.) MARK MONTGOMERY

Senior Director and Senior Fellow
Center on Cyber and Technology Innovation
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Washington, DC
June 4, 2025



www.fdd.org

Introduction

Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished members of the committee, on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), thank you for inviting me to testify.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization successfully led the Western democracies through the Cold War and the U.S. triumph over the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. While the political, security, and economic dynamics have changed over the past 30 years, I firmly believe that NATO can serve as the bulwark that brings the transatlantic alliance through the challenges posed by a rapacious authoritarian state — Russia — and the China-led axis of aggressors that supports and enables Russia.

However, for far too long, many of our NATO allies ignored these threats. They failed to invest in the alliance — or even their own defense — and cajoling by successive Republican and Democratic presidents went unheeded. However, thanks to President Donald Trump’s prioritization of NATO defense spending targets — and President Putin’s violent military aggression against Ukraine and persistent efforts to undermine democratic governments in Eastern Europe — more NATO members are finally stepping up to the plate. Just last week, Secretary General Mark Rutte said he anticipates NATO members will agree to increase the defense spending target to a total of 5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) between defense spending and associated security spending.¹

This spending is essential, and it must be focused on the battles NATO needs to be prepared to fight and win today and tomorrow. The Trump administration has been right to call out European lethargy, but the answer to the challenge from Russia is not that America should do less, but rather Europe should do more. As NATO prepares for its next summit in the Hague later this month, my testimony outlines the intertwined threats Washington and its NATO allies face from a growing axis of aggressors and provides ten recommended steps the alliance and the United States should take to defeat these threats.

Way Forward: 10 Recommendations to Meet the Challenge

1. Increase NATO Defense Spending Targets to 5 percent of GDP (including Enablers)
2. Protect the Critical Infrastructure Essential to NATO’s Military Mobility
3. Arm Ukraine to Defend Itself and Survive
4. Incentivize Joint Ventures with Ukraine
5. Punish Russian Aggression
6. Counter Russian Malign Influence Operations
7. Deepen Partnerships to Hold China Accountable for Supporting Russian Aggression
8. Maintain U.S. Enablers and Force Posture in Europe
9. Assign a U.S. Officer as Supreme Allied Commander Europe
10. Stop Antagonizing Denmark Over Greenland

¹ NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte and Prime Minister of Iceland Kristinn Frostadottir, “NATO Secretary General meets the Prime Minister of Iceland,” *Joint Press Conference*, May 28, 2025. (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events_67375.htm)

The Converging Challenges to NATO

NATO faces clear, overt threats from Russia and its partner in the axis of aggressors, China. These threats challenge the territorial integrity, representative democracy, and economic prosperity of both Europe and America. But NATO also faces challenges from within. Europe's lack of investment and commitment to its own security and its lax approach to the threat from China jeopardize the credibility of the alliance. Washington's response to both Russian aggression and European malaise poses an equally risky challenge. Neither Russia nor China will be cajoled or coddled into compliance or even peaceful coexistence, and both Europe and America need to process that reality.

Russia. The Russian Federation, led by its dictator, Vladimir Putin, is the single greatest threat to peace and democracy in Europe. Putin is not a misunderstood regional leader or an aggrieved actor reacting to NATO expansion. He is a stone-cold killer who has launched wars of conquest, invading his neighbors three times in the past 20 years. He is ruthlessly and violently crushing democratic movements growing in his hinterlands and harassing, torturing, and murdering his domestic critics.

Even Putin knows that NATO is not a first-mover military threat to Russia. If it were, he would have fortified his borders with NATO countries, which he has not done. But Putin does have a problem with NATO — countries that are part of the alliance are harder for him to coerce and bully.² Putin is always looking for ways to weaken the alliance and European solidarity. My colleague at FDD, Ivana Stradner, has written extensively on how he is stoking ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans in order to destabilize the region and ignite another conflict on NATO's borders.³ Putin has deployed spies, trolls, and cronies to fuel anti-Western sentiment and attempted to interfere with elections in Moldova, Romania, and Georgia.⁴ Here in the United States, Russia is attempting to pollute the information environment and discourage the public's interest in European security.

When Putin cannot manipulate his way to victory, he uses military force. In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in an unprovoked act of aggression. Putin is solely responsible for the ongoing war in Ukraine. He has conducted the war by means that intentionally target and kill Ukrainian civilians and destroy public health and safety infrastructures. He has overseen the intentional kidnapping and political indoctrination of thousands of Ukrainian children in direct violation of international law. He is, by any reasonable metric, this century's most despicable war criminal in Europe. Anyone who attempts to coddle or build relationships with Putin will have their legacy permanently stained by this thug's blood-soaked hands.

² Bradley Bowman, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Three Years Later," *FDD Media Call*, February 20, 2025. (https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FDD_-_MediaCall_Transcript_-_Russias-Invasion-of-Ukraine-Three-Years-Later.pdf)

³ Ivana Stradner and Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, "Putin Wants War in the Balkans," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2024. (<https://www.wsj.com/opinion/putin-wants-war-in-the-balkans-02bdc5a>)

⁴ Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery and Ivana Stradner, "Russia continues to subvert democracy in Moldova and Georgia," *The Hill*, November 15, 2024. (<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4991880-russia-continues-to-subvert-democracy-in-moldova-and-georgia>)

Putin's invasion of Ukraine is not just about territorial ambition. It is about dismantling the credibility of NATO, reversing post-Cold War progress in Eastern Europe, and upending the transatlantic partnership that has helped fuel American prosperity. If NATO fails to impose severe costs on his regime, the alliance will see this threat metastasize beyond Ukraine — into neighboring countries like Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania but also in more distant regions like the Arctic. There is no room for strategic ambiguity. This is a test of transatlantic resolve.

China. China leads the axis of aggressors — China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran — a bloc of authoritarian states that work together to threaten beleaguered democracies and marginalize the transparent, rules-based trade system that has underpinned U.S. prosperity and the free world. In Europe, China conducts massive cyber espionage, cyberattacks, and influence operations that deliberately target democratic institutions and economic stability. Beijing's goal is not just to steal data — it is to sow confusion, create division, and degrade public trust in democratic governance.

Chinese hackers have targeted European parliaments, defense contractors, and critical infrastructure with increasingly sophisticated malware and phishing operations. The Chinese hacking group APT31, a known affiliate of China's Ministry of State Security, has conducted cyber campaigns targeting thousands of victims from the United States and NATO member states.⁵

At the same time, China has used its illegal business practices and state-subsidized investments in emerging technology to manipulate global markets to establish an uneven playing field and achieve technological dominance in Europe and globally. Over the past decade, China has acquired stakes in more than a dozen European ports, including the port of Piraeus in Greece and terminals in Rotterdam, Valencia, and Antwerp.⁶ Chinese telecommunication giants like Huawei have attempted to dominate Europe's 5G rollout, which would give Beijing direct access to the continent's critical communications infrastructure.⁷ Huawei's manipulation of telecommunications infrastructure not only undercuts innovation but also injects insecurity into NATO's communications and supply chains.

Germany, in particular, has been too lax on Huawei, undermining the European Union's stated policy to remove high-risk vendors from 5G infrastructure.⁸ NATO previously called out Chinese cyber aggression, but thanks to weakness on the part of some EU members, the body failed to condemn Chinese cyber operations earlier this spring.⁹ Hopefully, Beijing's recent,

⁵ Stuart Lau and Paul De Villepin, "China targeted European lawmakers with cyberattacks, Washington says," *Politico*, March 27, 2024. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/china-targeted-european-lawmakers-cyberattacks-washington-says>)

⁶ Joanna Kakissis, "Chinese Firms Now Hold Stakes In Over A Dozen European Ports," *NPR*, October 9, 2018. (<https://www.npr.org/2018/10/09/642587456/chinese-firms-now-hold-stakes-in-over-a-dozen-european-ports>)

⁷ Sherisse Pham, "Huawei's hopes of global domination have been dashed," *CNN Business*, July 15, 2020. (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/15/tech/huawei-fallout-5g-hnk-intl>)

⁸ Noah Barkin, "Watching China in Europe—April 2025," *German Marshall Fund*, April 1, 2025. (<https://www.gmfus.org/news/watching-china-europe-april-2025>)

⁹ Noah Barkin, "Watching China in Europe—March 2025," *German Marshall Fund*, March 7, 2025. (<https://www.gmfus.org/news/watching-china-europe-march-2025>)

brazen attack on the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs will remove Brussels' rose-colored glasses.¹⁰

Beijing's economic influence is matched by its growing strategic ambition to cleave Europe from the United States and weaken America's relationships with its allies and partners from within. Chinese government officials and state and party media have flooded social media platforms with pro-Russian narratives, amplifying the Kremlin's agenda and undermining Western support for Ukraine.¹¹

China's support for Russia is not merely a symbolic act — it is part of a strategic plan. As Western nations cut Russia off from trade opportunities, Beijing has become Moscow's economic lifeline. Since the 2022 invasion, China has become a major importer of Russia's cheap energy supplies and has remained the largest buyer of Russian fossil fuels,¹² helping Russia stabilize its energy revenues and fund its warfighting machine. China acts as a force multiplier for the Kremlin, exporting UAV parts, semiconductors, and even dual-use technologies to Russia.

Beijing is watching Ukraine carefully — not as a bystander but as a strategist. How the West responds to Ukraine will shape China's calculus on Taiwan, the South China Sea, and beyond.

Europe. Like it or not, Europe finds itself on the front line of global democratic defense. NATO's credibility rests on whether Europe can serve as both a shield and a spear — defending its citizens, deterring its adversaries, and deploying power where needed. After Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Eastern European nations — particularly the Baltic states and Poland — began reinvigorating their military preparedness. These same Eastern European countries doubled down on this effort after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and they have achieved measurable results — increasing defense budgets, delivering advanced weapons systems, improving military readiness, and fortifying NATO's eastern flank. But the recovery of European defense capacity and capability is far from done.

This is because some NATO members still do not pull their own weight. Defense spending in large economies — especially Spain and Italy but also Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, the so-called “leaders of Europe” — has lagged behind, despite the severity of the situation at hand. That must change. And quickly. If countries with more limited economic resources like Poland can contribute 4 percent of GDP,¹³ and the Baltic states are pledging to hit

¹⁰ “EU stands in solidarity with Czech Republic after cyberattack blamed on China,” *Reuters*, May 28, 2025. (<https://www.yahoo.com/news/eu-stands-solidarity-czech-republic-091547090.html>)

¹¹ U.S. Department of State, The Global Engagement Center, Public Statement, “People's Republic of China Efforts to Amplify the Kremlin's Voice on Ukraine,” May 4, 2022. (<https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/peoples-republic-of-china-efforts-to-amplify-the-kremlins-voice-on-ukraine>)

¹² Vaibhav Raghunandan, “January 2025 — Monthly analysis of Russian fossil fuel exports and sanctions,” *Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air*, February 11, 2025. (<https://energyandcleanair.org/january-2025-monthly-analysis-of-russian-fossil-fuel-exports-and-sanctions>)

¹³ Anthony Reuben, “How much do Nato members spend on defence?” *BBC* (UK), February 18, 2025. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074>)

5 percent within the next two years,¹⁴ then other, wealthier nations must do more than scrape by the 2 percent commitment level.

A positive sign is that NATO is increasing its ready brigade target from 80 to 130 brigades — about 600,000 soldiers, nearly all European. This will require member states to invest in readiness alongside procurement in a manner they have not in the past.¹⁵

These extra ground forces will be needed as Europe's geography creates a major challenge for NATO unity. Thanks to the accession of Sweden and Finland into NATO, the Baltic Sea is now a heavily contested space for the Russian Navy. But defending any one of the Baltic States or the Suwalki Gap (the 60-mile strip between Poland and Lithuania) from Russian ground aggression remain NATO's most daunting tasks. With Kaliningrad to the West and Belarus to the East, Russia could seize this strategic corridor and sever Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia from the rest of Europe. This would not only isolate these Baltic nations geographically but also fatally erode NATO's unity and ability to move troops across the eastern flank. With only two major roads and a single rail line available in this strip to move troops and heavy equipment in a crisis, there remain too many bottlenecks that could and would compromise troop movement, igniting a broader conflict in the region.

Meanwhile, Europe's energy supply is no longer just an economic issue — it is a bargaining chip. Russia made that clear when it weaponized the Nord Stream pipelines in the 2000s and 2010s. Europe's overreliance on Russian gas was a policy failure that gave rise to national security vulnerabilities that Putin exploited with lethal precision. To their credit, European nations have made real progress since the invasion of Ukraine. REPowerEU — the European Commission's €300 billion plan to end its reliance on Russian energy — is shaping how energy flows across the continent.¹⁶ Russian gas exports into the European Union fell by nearly 60 percent in 2024. Countries like Germany, long criticized for their dependence on Nord Stream, have rapidly pushed toward building and commissioning floating liquid natural gas (LNG) terminals to reduce their dependence.¹⁷ As one might expect, Lithuania was a pioneer in becoming fully independent from Russian gas years earlier.¹⁸

But progress in energy resilience has not been distributed evenly. Much of Central and Eastern Europe remains vulnerable to supply shocks and grid instability. Nations like Hungary and Slovakia continue to undermine collective resilience, showing no signs of decoupling from Russian gas. Meanwhile, LNG infrastructure is disproportionately concentrated in Western

¹⁴ Joshua Posner, "Lithuania pledges to hit Donald Trump's 5 percent defense spending target," *Politico*, January 17, 2025. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/lithuania-pledges-to-hit-donald-trumps-5-percent-defense-spending-target>)

¹⁵ Sabine Siebold, "Exclusive: NATO to ask Berlin for seven more brigades under new targets, sources say," *Reuters*, May 28, 2025. (<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/nato-ask-berlin-seven-more-brigades-under-new-targets-sources-say-2025-05-28>)

¹⁶ "REPowerEU," *European Commission*, accessed May 28, 2025. (https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/repowereu_en)

¹⁷ Jack Burke, "Germany brings third floating LNG terminal online," *Compressor Tech2*, May 27, 2025. (<https://www.compressortech2.com/news/germany-brings-third-floating-lng-terminal-online/8062069.article?zephrossoott=4k2AJP>)

¹⁸ Rob Schmitz, "Lithuania has become the 1st European country to stop using Russian gas," *NPR*, May 26, 2022. (<https://www.npr.org/2022/05/26/1101568189/lithuania-has-become-the-1st-european-country-to-stop-using-russian-gas>)

Europe. Grid interconnections needed to distribute surplus electricity from the West to the East remain limited and underdeveloped, exacerbating the region's energy insecurity. This is not just an infrastructure gap. It is a strategic risk.

Above all, Europe must remain politically unified. NATO is not here for a debate — it is a warfighting alliance. Populist movements, far-left pacifism, and far-right Kremlin apologists all threaten the cohesion of the NATO alliance.

United States. The United States has always been the strategic backbone of NATO. No other nation has the same combination of power projection capacity, warfighting enablers, cyber capabilities, nuclear deterrence, and global reach. American leadership is existential to the alliance's success, but NATO is also essential to the United States — it is the security partnership that complements America's most prolific trade partnership. In 2024 alone, NATO countries represented more than 35 percent of U.S. trade.¹⁹ Policymakers who advocate "leaving Europe to the Europeans" conveniently ignore this relationship and put America's economic future at risk.

U.S. credibility is built on presence and power projection. Today, over 80,000 U.S. troops are permanently stationed across Europe, with tens of thousands more temporarily, rotationally deployed — a force posture that has deterred Russian escalation and reassured European allies and partners since the invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. military remains a forward line of deterrence, backed by persistent rotational deployments in Poland and Romania, pre-positioned stocks in Germany and the Baltics, and high-readiness air and naval assets in Italy, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom — all of which are essential parts of NATO's deterrence architecture.

The United States provides the NATO alliance with strategic airlift, long-range fires, nuclear deterrence, and theater-level command and control — capabilities that turn military planning into operational reality. U.S. forces do not just complement NATO, they enable it. Without U.S. logistics, surveillance, or command networks, even the most advanced European forces cannot sustain operations at the necessary tempo or scale.

This deterrence architecture, the enablers of military operations, and the logistics and command networks must all be maintained and hardened against enemy sabotage, cyberattacks, and political uncertainty.

Maintaining U.S. posture in Europe gives NATO's Article 5 its teeth. The credibility of NATO's deterrence depends on American commitment, and any chaotic step back could signal to Moscow to test the alliance's limits, particularly in areas like the Suwalki Gap. The proper response to Russia's authoritarian actions is not for the United States to do less but for Europe to do more.

President Trump is right to demand that the Europeans do their fair share. American leadership within NATO must shape the alliance's modernization strategies and reinforce burden-sharing

¹⁹ "United States Exports By Country," *Trading Economics*, accessed May 28, 2025. (<https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/exports-by-country>)

through responsible and reliable political and fiscal commitments. Downscaling U.S. leadership would be misguided — leadership does not mean shouldering the whole burden ourselves. Rather, it means setting the tone and holding the line for others to follow. America's role in NATO is not charity work. It is an investment in our own national security, economic productivity, and resilience. An unstable Europe means weak U.S. allies and partners that welcome more cyberattacks on Americans, more Chinese leverage across the globe, more vulnerable trade relationships, and a higher likelihood that U.S. troops will have to respond to a war that could have been prevented. As Ben Franklin spoke to these risks eloquently in 1776, it is far cheaper — and smarter — to deter conflict alongside allies than to fight alone later.

NATO needs a steady commander, and the United States must continue to lead from the front.

Way Forward: 10 Recommendations to Meet the Challenge

Today, the European geopolitical landscape is more dangerous than at any point since the end of the Second World War. NATO stands in the breach, but U.S. leadership, European defense investments, and collective action to punish our adversaries are all necessary if democracies are to prevail against the axis of aggressors. Congress has the opportunity to set the course of U.S. policy and defend U.S. national security.

1. Increase NATO Defense Spending Targets to 5 percent of GDP (Including Enablers):

Agreed upon at the 2014 Wales Summit,²⁰ the benchmark target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense was never intended to be a ceiling — it was the floor. Yet still, ten years later, only 23 of 32 NATO member countries are expected to meet that low threshold.²¹ Over the past decade, security conditions in Europe have worsened, and Russia's aggressive intent is abundantly clear. If NATO fails to resource its defenses today — especially in high-demand areas like air and missile defense, cyber, space, and industrial base development — it will pay a much higher price in the future in dollars, territory, and lives. If they wish to maintain their security, NATO's national governments — even those not within range of Russian long-range fires — must commit to Secretary General Mark Rutte's proposed new spending pledge of at least 3.5 percent of GDP on defense and another 1.5 percent on defense enablers like infrastructure protection and cybersecurity.

This defense spending target should include the United States, whose defense spending has also slipped since the end of the Cold War. As my colleagues at FDD, Bradley Bowman and Ryan Brobst, have pointed out, U.S. defense spending is hovering near 70-year lows as a share of GDP — at a shade over 3 percent.²² The Trump administration's proposed fiscal year 2026 defense

²⁰ "Wales Summit Declaration," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, September 5, 2014.

(https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)

²¹ John Hardie, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, Bradley Bowman, and Joe Dougherty, "The leverage Trump needs when talking with Putin," *FDD Media Call*, page 12, January 27, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/FDD-MediaCall-Transcript-The-leverage-Trump-needs-when-talking-with-Putin.pdf>); Chris Lunday, "NATO's Rutte embraces 5 percent defense spending goal," *Politico*, May 26, 2025. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/mark-rutte-embrace-5-percent-defense-goal-nato-summit>)

²² Bradley Bowman and Ryan Brobst, "Trump Can't Have 'Peace Through Strength' on a Biden Defense Budget," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, May 6, 2025. (https://www.fdd.org/analysis/policy_briefs/2025/05/06/trump-cant-have-peace-through-strength-on-a-biden-

budget request of \$892.6 billion fails to keep pace with inflation or meet the requirements of the administration's "Peace Through Strength" agenda. Unless Congress appropriates the full \$150 billion in reconciliation and increases the base budget by 3 to 5 percent above inflation, U.S. defense spending will fall below 3 percent of GDP by 2027. An effective decrease in U.S. defense spending is hypocritical as the United States pushes allies to spend more on defense.

Without adequate funding, NATO countries will end up with forces that might look ready on paper but cannot move, shoot, or sustain a fight. The longer we wait, the worse it will get. "Peace Through Strength" requires the 'strength' part to be real. That begins with both Europe and the United States committing 3.5 percent of GDP to defense spending and 5 percent in defense-related expenditures — nothing less.²³

2. Protect the Critical Infrastructure Essential to NATO's Military Mobility: Moving troops and equipment efficiently over land, sea, and air is essential to NATO's ability to project power and sustain forces to fight and win wars. In the United States, civilian-owned rail networks, commercial ports, and airport authorities will transport the majority of service members and materiel during a significant, rapid mobilization. My colleague, Annie Fixler, and I have written an extensive monograph on the severe challenges America faces in securing this infrastructure against Chinese and Russian cyber-enabled threats. Our monograph contains more than a dozen recommendations, all of which can be acted on by Congress.²⁴ While the cyber resilience of this infrastructure is insufficient, the Pentagon has at least taken the first step of identifying the strategic railways, seaports, and airports it needs the most in a crisis. The United States needs our partners and allies to do the same.²⁵

Across Europe, NATO forces rely on critical infrastructure owned and operated by local governments and companies. Its military readiness requires reliable, secure infrastructure wherever NATO forces operate. If Washington asked NATO to identify its critical infrastructure priorities, it should not respond with one priority from each NATO member. Its critical infrastructure priorities must align with its war plans, particularly as it relates to flowing U.S., UK, and French forces into and through Europe. Washington must push its allies to consider critical infrastructure resilience through this lens and prioritize this issue as a supreme allied commander Europe (SACEUR)-NATO problem, not a NATO secretary general consensus issue, as ultimately, NATO force mobilization affects America's ability to fight with and through our allies.

[defense-budget](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/12/05/u-s-defense-spending-visualized)); Bradley Bowman, "U.S. Defense Spending: Visualized," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 5, 2024. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/12/05/u-s-defense-spending-visualized>)

²³ Bradley Bowman and Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, "Trump Can — and Should — Fully Fund Our Military," *National Review*, November 29, 2024. (<https://www.nationalreview.com/2024/11/trump-can-and-should-fully-fund-our-military>)

²⁴ Annie Fixler, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, and Rory Lane, "Military Mobility Depends on Secure Critical Infrastructure," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, March 27, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/03/27/military-mobility-depends-on-secure-critical-infrastructure>)

²⁵ Retired Gen. Mike Minihan, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, Annie Fixler, and Bradley Bowman, "Persistent Access, Persistent Threat: Ensuring Military Mobility Against Malicious Cyber Actors," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 17, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/events/2025/04/17/persistent-access-persistent-threat-ensuring-military-mobility-against-malicious-cyber-actors>)

Deterrence requires a forward posture, and NATO must shift from reactive defense to forward defense. That also includes a long-overdue shift in how we treat energy. NATO must begin treating pipelines, LNG terminals, and power grid infrastructure in the same way it treats airfields, ports, and railways — as strategic military assets. NATO must include critical energy corridors in military mobility planning, integrate energy disruption scenarios into NATO tabletop exercises, and invest in cyber and physical protections for energy infrastructure, which are now prime targets for hostile actors like Russia and its allies.

3. Arm Ukraine to Defend Itself and Survive: The U.S. objective must be to secure a peace that allows Ukraine to survive and thrive as a democratic state — not for Ukraine to reach an unacceptable ceasefire negotiated under duress, and certainly not for it to lose the war. Ukraine needs two things above all else — constant U.S. intelligence support and access to American-made munitions.²⁶ It specifically needs access to the U.S. defense industrial base and a consistent, high-volume supply of 155 mm artillery shells, guided multiple launch rocket system (GMLRS), and air defense munitions like advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles (AMRAAMs), and Patriots. NATO allies can provide the funding, but sufficient quantities of these weapons can only come from the U.S. defense industrial base, either through direct delivery from U.S. stocks or through foreign military sales.

One specific recommendation comes from my visits with Ukrainian F-16 units. Currently, Ukrainian forces are often using \$400,000 AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles to shoot down Iranian Shahed drones that cost Russia tens of thousands of dollars to produce. For Kyiv, this is a current tactical necessity — but a costly strategy. Washington should accelerate the transfer of more cost-effective alternatives like the air-delivered version of the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon Systems — precision-guided 2.75-inch rockets — which cost between \$15,000 to \$20,000 per unit and are already fielded by Ukraine's ground forces.

Ukrainian commanders are being forced to conserve ammunition while facing daily missile and drone attacks, making life-or-death calculations daily. A prolonged war or “frozen conflict” which weakens Ukraine's position will only embolden Russia, undermine NATO's credibility, and set the stage for another future invasion. The United States cannot afford to be a fickle ally. Washington must act decisively and provide Ukraine with the tools it needs to break Russia's resilience.

4. Incentivize Joint Ventures with Ukraine: In the face of Russian onslaughts, Ukrainian companies have demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in designing cost-effective and combat-tested solutions.²⁷ Ukraine's drone industry is growing rapidly — developing scalable, low-cost, first-person-view (FPV) drones that are reshaping the battlefield and outpacing Russian adaptations. But without sustained support from its allies and partners, Ukraine's tactical edge may not last. The U.S. defense industry's manufacturing scale is America's greatest asset, but it

²⁶ “Ukraine needs U.S. intelligence, precise munitions — Admiral Mark Montgomery,” *Espresso*, May 21, 2025. (<https://global.espresso.tv/russia-ukraine-war-ukraine-needs-two-things-from-us-continuous-intelligence-support-and-specific-ammunition>)

²⁷ Isaac Harris and Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, “How Ukraine can help accelerate US defense technology,” *The Hill*, December 18, 2024. (<https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/5045668-how-ukraine-can-help-accelerate-us-defense-technology>)

often struggles to adapt rapidly to changing needs. Ukrainian expertise in battlefield innovation and rapid prototyping could complement U.S. capabilities and bolster U.S. preparedness for future conflicts. As a first-order effort, Washington and Kyiv need to align export controls and intellectual property protections to facilitate the transfer of sensitive technologies for defense collaboration. Next, the two countries should create a defense innovation fund to support research and development in critical technologies, including autonomous drones and electronic warfare. This collaboration can deliver tangible results on today's battlefield and beyond, even stretching to the Taiwan Strait.

5. Punish Russian Aggression: Putin will only change his calculus if the cost of continuing the war becomes unsustainable for him. The United States and its European allies must increase pressure and impose costs on Russia by backing Ukraine with military aid while ramping up a coordinated economic warfare campaign. This means targeting the financial arteries of the Russian war machine — starting with its energy revenues. For instance, 75 percent of Russia's fossil fuel exports are sustained by China, India, and Turkey. My colleagues at FDD, Max Meizlish and John Hardie, have detailed how Russia has adapted to sanctions by utilizing state-owned enterprises and building sanctions-evading networks in places like China, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. These networks continue to fund and supply the Kremlin's war effort by enabling Moscow to import and export resources with few consequences.²⁸ Meizlish and Hardie recommend incrementally tightening enforcement of the G7 oil price cap to get prices as close to the cost of production as possible. Washington should also enforce secondary sanctions on Russia's enablers, designate shadow fleet tankers and their financiers, and extend price controls and restrictions to high-revenue sectors, like metals, minerals, nuclear fuel, and technology — recommendations I wholly endorse. Congress should also be prepared to use its authorities under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act to block the Trump administration from prematurely or inappropriately lifting sanctions.²⁹ Restrictions on Russia's defense industrial base, meanwhile, should remain in place regardless of any potential ceasefire deal.

Without cutting off Russia's access to global markets via secondary sanctions and strategic chokepoints, Russia's wartime economy will continue to adapt and recover. NATO must be prepared to stifle Moscow systemically, targeting the broader ecosystem that maintains Russia's footprint — not just in Ukraine but across its authoritarian operations worldwide.

6. Counter Russian Malign Influence Operations: Moscow — as well as Beijing and Tehran — is attempting to corrupt the information space by spreading propaganda and conducting cyber-enabled influence operations in the United States. Russia is attacking the American homeland, but because information is the weapon and cyberspace is the domain, the Kremlin is getting away with it. The Trump administration has spent the past four months dismantling capabilities at the Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security that were designed to identify foreign malign influence campaigns and counter Russian and Chinese lies at home and

²⁸ Max Meizlish and John Hardie, "Trump's Russia Sanctions Toolkit," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, May 14, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/05/14/trumps-russia-sanctions-toolkit>)

²⁹ John Hardie, Peter Doran, Matthew Zweig, and Nick Stewart, "On Crimea and Russia Sanctions Relief, Congress Has Leverage," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, April 25, 2025. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/04/25/on-crimea-and-russia-sanctions-relief-congress-has-leverage>)

abroad.³⁰ Now, Washington is left wringing its hands as our adversaries undermine our civil society and weaken our alliances abroad. We must reverse this course and reconstitute U.S. capabilities to counter the lies of our adversaries.

7. Deepen Partnerships to Hold China Accountable for Supporting Russian Aggression:

Dictators and despots are using the ambiguity of the gray zone — coercion short of war — and cyber operations to pressure free nations. And these nations are enabling each other's aggression. The United States and its allies need new tools to counter this authoritarian playbook and, in particular, to hold China accountable for enabling the aggression of other members of the axis. The United States needs to work closely with its European allies to align export controls to prevent China from acquiring cutting-edge technology. Washington needs to push its European partners to make hard decisions to excise Chinese companies from critical infrastructure and sensitive supply chains. And most specifically for NATO, the United States should work with its allies to develop a playbook that not only counters Chinese economic coercion and financial warfare against Taiwan but also punishes Beijing for its support of Moscow's war machine. This playbook should cut across traditionally stove-piped authorities and develop responses that combine cyber, economic, military, legal, and diplomatic levers. Rather than being subject to the crisis of the moment, the playbook should have options that are pre-vetted and reviewed by the lawyers. As part of the playbook development, Washington should work closely with allies to analyze key intermediary components and materials that China needs in its support of Russia and for its ability to threaten Taiwan — and identify how to cut off supplies of these components. In anticipation of further Chinese aggression against Taiwan, this joint escalation playbook should plot a path for imposing significant costs up front, lest Beijing adapt to gradually increasing sanctions as Russia has done.³¹

8. Maintain U.S. Enablers and Force Posture in Europe: NATO's strength is not measured by how many nations it includes but by how quickly it can move and fight. That speed depends on U.S. enablers — strategic lift, logistics, intelligence, and command-and-control infrastructure — that no other ally can match. That is why maintaining — and forward-deploying — U.S. forces and equipment across Europe is essential to NATO's capabilities. NATO cannot afford to wait for a crisis to move resources across the Atlantic or through bottlenecks in the region. It must prepare for action — blending traditional deterrence with modern technology while maintaining enhanced air and naval assets. NATO must take on a more forward defense posture — pre-positioning forces and equipment in Poland and the Baltic states — expanding its permanent presence and upgrading the reliability of its mobility infrastructure in order to sustain combat operations.

One of NATO's greatest vulnerabilities remains the Suwalki Gap. In war, that corridor could be cut off by Russia in a matter of hours. Belarus — which served as a launchpad for the invasion of Ukraine — sits on one side. Kaliningrad, Russia's most militarized outpost in Europe, sits on the other. NATO must reduce its reliance on the corridor for transporting troops and equipment in a

³⁰ Ari Ben Am and Johanna Yang, "China and Russia Rejoice as the U.S. Cuts Its Global Media," *The National Interest*, April 13, 2025, (<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/authoritarians-rejoice-as-the-u-s-cuts-its-global-media>)

³¹ Craig Singleton, Retired Rear Adm. Mark Montgomery, and Benjamin Jensen, "Targeting Taiwan: Beijing's Playbook for Economic and Cyber Warfare," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, October 4, 2024, (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/10/04/targeting-taiwan>)

crisis. Instead, NATO forces, including U.S. forces, must already be pre-positioned in the Baltics and Poland before a crisis starts. For Putin, taking control of the Suwalki Gap is a low-cost and high-impact maneuver that could fracture NATO, isolate the Baltics, and call Article 5 into question. We cannot allow that scenario to remain viable.

U.S. force posture is critical in this exact scenario. The more than 80,000 forward stationed forces in Europe that serve as enablers and warfighters as well as the U.S. rotational fighting forces that serve in Poland and the Baltics must be at the front at the start of the crisis. Europe must do more to build its capacity of front-line forces in and near the Suwalki Gap and the Baltics, but the United States should not step back here. America can and should, however, withdraw the thousands of U.S. forces sent over to Europe to facilitate logistics and training for Ukrainian forces. As these missions are transferred to NATO and European responsibilities, these temporary, rotational forces should return to America.

9. Assign a U.S. Officer as Supreme Allied Commander Europe: The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) is the military commander of NATO — and an American officer has always filled the post. This has not just been out of tradition but also out of strategic necessity. The SACEUR also commands U.S. European Command (EUCOM) — a dual-hatted structure that gives NATO direct access to U.S. military equipment, manpower, and first-class intelligence and logistics capabilities, cyber support, operational planning, and nuclear deterrence. Without a U.S. commander as SACEUR, NATO may fail to coordinate with EUCOM and U.S. Strategic Command during a crisis — creating potential unnecessary and unprecedented disasters. Additionally, placing a non-American officer in this role would force American troops to operate under foreign command in a major Article 5 war. Were that to occur, it would be the first time American forces did so since World War I.³² Removing the integration between EUCOM and NATO commands would complicate nuclear command-and-control protocols, which currently allow for dual authority between the two commands.³³ Upending this integration risks creating gaps in decision-making during a contingency. As NATO continues to face Russian aggression, undermining a structure that has worked for decades would be a short-sighted move.

10. Stop Antagonizing Denmark Over Greenland: Denmark is a vital ally with strategic geography, a responsible Arctic presence, and a history of military cooperation with the United States dating back to World War II. Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, plays a strategically important role in U.S. missile defense and space surveillance. It hosts the Pituffik Space Base (formerly known as the Thule Air Base), the northernmost U.S. military installation, which provides early warning of missile launches and conducts more than 15,000 satellite contacts a year to support U.S. space surveillance capabilities. This installation is not just a Cold War relic — it is a frontline asset in modern deterrence, missile defense, and great power competition. At a time when Russia is reactivating Arctic bases — deploying S-400 air defense systems along its northern coast — and China is seeking economic ties to influence and

³² Valerie Insinna, “A non-American as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO? That’d be ‘problematic,’ Cavoli says,” *Breaking Defense*, April 3, 2025. (<https://breakingdefense.com/2025/04/a-non-american-as-supreme-allied-commander-of-nato-thatd-be-problematic-cavoli-says>)

³³ “Why SACEUR Has Always Been an American Officer?” *Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. (<https://shape.nato.int/page214845858>)

RADM (Ret.) Mark Montgomery

June 4, 2025

insert itself in polar governance frameworks, we should be working more closely with our allies, not bullying them.

Undermining our relationship with Denmark over Greenland's internal affairs is short-sighted and strategically reckless. In 2018, Copenhagen blocked a Chinese bid to build dual-use airport infrastructure in Greenland.³⁴ Denmark has also aligned its Arctic strategy with NATO priorities and actively supports U.S. basing and intelligence operations on its territory. Washington should be strengthening its partnership with Copenhagen to secure Arctic mobility, surveillance, and communications — not antagonizing one of our most capable and cooperative northern partners.

Conclusion

Geography and politics in Europe make defending the freedom and prosperity of democratic nations challenging. But NATO is well positioned for the task if its members invest in their own defense. This includes Washington. We cannot push our allies to increase defense spending while simultaneously cutting ours. We need a comprehensive effort: a defense budget that reflects today's challenges; the resilience to withstand cyber and gray zone assaults from our adversaries; and a clear-eyed commitment to our alliances. With those pillars, the United States and its NATO allies will once again prevail over the forces that threaten global peace and security, both in Europe and globally.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

³⁴ Patrik Andersson, "Greenland Eyes China Amid Denmark-US Tensions — But Chinese Investors Won't Rush In," *The Diplomat*, April 24, 2025. (<https://thediplomat.com/2025/04/greenland-eyes-china-amid-denmark-us-tensions-but-chinese-investors-wont-rush-in>)

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Admiral. We had a clock malfunction, just like they do in basketball games. But thank you for your testimony.

I now introduce Dr. Nile Gardiner, Director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom and Bernard and Barbara Lomas Fellow at The Heritage Foundation.

Welcome, sir. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF NILE GARDINER

Mr. GARDINER. My name is Nile Gardiner, I am the Director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own. My remarks today are a summary of my written statement.

NATO remains the essential force that holds back the Russian bear on its eastern flank and keeps in check the imperialist ambitions of Vladimir Putin's murderous regime. Its role is vital in the defense of Europe in the face of Russian aggression.

Without NATO, the brutal reality is that Russian forces would very likely today be rolling into the Baltic States and deep into Europe. We should not underestimate Putin's malevolent intentions and his desire to conquer further territory in Europe.

To sustain the alliance, America's NATO allies must fully participate in burden-sharing with the United States. The Trump presidency is rightly applying pressure on America's allies to do far more to foster true partnership rather than dependency, especially as the U.S. must increasingly focus on the immense threat from communist China in the Indo-Pacific.

This cannot be a two-tier alliance where the United States carries the overwhelming military burden for the defense of the free world while some European allies build vast welfare states. In 2024, only 22 NATO members spent the 2-percent of GDP on defense agreed to by the alliance in 2014. This is hugely irresponsible.

This includes some of the biggest nations in NATO, including Italy, Spain, and Canada. Last year, Canada embarrassingly spent just 1.4 percent of GDP on defense, a shockingly low figure for the world's tenth largest economy.

As Heritage Foundation research has shown, European NATO members have collectively underfunded their own defense by \$827 billion since 2014, nearly equal to the entire annual U.S. defense budget. This is a staggering figure.

As NATO leaders gather shortly in The Hague, there is, however, growing cause for optimism. President Trump's tough-love strategy has made a tremendous impact. In just the first few months of his presidency, Donald Trump has already significantly strengthened the resolve of the NATO alliance.

President Trump is not the destroyer of NATO, as his critics allege, but the savior of NATO. Trump's presidency is a wake-up call for a complacent alliance that had been sleepwalking to decline and possible self-destruction.

Thanks to U.S. leadership today, which was strikingly absent under Joe Biden, who was barely in command on the world stage, the complacency of past decades has been thrown out of the window.

Since Donald Trump took office in January, there has been a dramatic change of approach among our 31 NATO partners, including Europe's economic powerhouse of Germany, with nearly every European NATO member announcing plans to significantly increase defense spending, enhance overall military capabilities, and grow the defense industrial base. This is the Trump effect in action across the Atlantic.

But words are not enough. It is time for all of America's NATO allies to make a firm commitment to immediately match America's current spending level of 3.5 percent of GDP and pledge to raise defense spending to 5 percent of GDP.

The U.S. also cannot allow NATO to be undercut by grandiose visions of a European Union army that would split the alliance and divert vital resources away from NATO. One of the biggest threats to the future of NATO is posed by French President Emmanuel Macron's calls for greater strategic autonomy for Europe, moving away from the United States and moving closer to an accommodation with Beijing.

The United States must fight the flawed notion that Europe's security rests upon delusional ideas of a militarily powerful EU which would replace NATO nation-State cooperation with Brussels-imposed sovereign nationalism. Macron's perilous rhetoric is exactly what Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Premier Xi Jinping wish to hear.

The U.S. should also strongly oppose the massively reckless and incredibly dangerous decision taken by Britain's socialist government, led by Keir Starmer, to hand over direct control of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, a close Chinese ally. The islands are the home of the vital Anglo-American military base of Diego Garcia.

This is a major gift to communist China at Britain's expense and greatly undermines U.S. strategic interests and NATO cohesion. The Chagos surrender is the worst foreign policy move by a British prime minister in the modern era, and a betrayal of the U.S.-U.K. special relationship.

In conclusion, the United States has a significant national interest in supporting a strong NATO alliance. A secure Europe and a robust transatlantic alliance greatly advances the security of the American people.

American exceptionalism is the most powerful force for liberty in the world today. It is greatly strengthened by America's alliances, and NATO is at the very heart of the transatlantic partnership. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gardiner follows:]

ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES FACING NATO

**Testimony Before
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe**

United States House of Representatives

June 4, 2025

**Dr. Nile Gardiner
Director
Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom
The Heritage Foundation**

My name is Nile Gardiner. I am the Director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

On June 24-25, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will mark its first 76 years at its summit in The Hague. Since 1949 it has served as the beating heart of the transatlantic partnership, and a vital force uniting the United States, Canada, and our allies across the Atlantic. With the recent accession of Finland and Sweden, the alliance today has 32 members.

NATO remains the essential bulwark that holds back the Russian bear on its eastern flank and keeps in check the imperialistic ambitions of Vladimir Putin's murderous regime, which has been amply evident in Russia's savage and barbaric invasion of Ukraine. Its role is vital in the defense of Europe in the face of Russian aggression. Without NATO the brutal reality is that Russian forces would very likely today be rolling into the Baltic States and deep into Europe. We should not underestimate Putin's malevolent intentions and his desire to conquer territory in Europe. This must not be allowed to happen, and a Peace Through Strength approach is needed throughout the NATO alliance.

The United States has a significant national interest in supporting and strengthening the NATO alliance, which has been the beneficiary of a huge investment by US taxpayers for over three quarters of a century. A secure Europe and a robust transatlantic alliance, including the US/UK Special Relationship, advances the security of the American people. As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher noted in a speech in 1991 to the Foreign Relations Council of Chicago, "the United States needs friends in the lonely task of world leadership."

However, to sustain the alliance, America's NATO allies must be prepared to fully participate in burden sharing with the US. The Russians clearly view NATO as weak and divided and are increasingly willing to test its resolve. We need to see real material unity and not just rhetoric. The US presidency must apply concerted pressure on America's allies to do far more to foster partnership rather than dependency, especially as the United States must increasingly focus on the immense threat in the Indo-Pacific presented by Communist China.

This cannot be a two-tier alliance, where the United States carries the overwhelming military burden for the defense of the free world, while some European allies build vast welfare states. In 2024, only 22 NATO members spent the 2 per cent of GDP on defence agreed to by the alliance in 2014. This is unacceptable. It leaves the alliance dangerously vulnerable when it should be projecting strength and resolve. Countries that spent less than 2 percent of real GDP on defence last year included Italy (1.5 percent), Canada (1.4 percent), Spain (1.3 percent), and Belgium (1.3 percent). In contrast, Poland (4.1 percent), Estonia (3.4 percent), Latvia (3.2 percent), and Greece (3.1 percent) all spent above 3 percent of GDP.¹

Justin Trudeau's now departed Canadian government was among the very worst slackers in the NATO alliance, consistently underinvesting in Canada's military with shockingly low figures for a nation with the 10th largest GDP in the world. His successor as prime minister, Mark Carney, has vowed to raise Canadian defense spending to 2 percent, but this is simply not enough. Ottawa needs to be serious about NATO's mission, and playing a full part in the alliance in the coming decades. Under Liberal Party rule for the past ten years, Canada's exceptionally low levels of defense spending have been woefully pathetic, and an insult to the unity of NATO.

As Heritage Foundation research has shown, "European NATO members have collectively underfunded their own defense by \$827.91 billion since 2014 – nearly equal to the entire annual US defense budget."² This is a staggering figure and completely unacceptable. These figures are a damning indictment of a culture of complacency and dependency in many NATO allies over the past decade.

Not only should every NATO member immediately invest the minimum agreed level of spending on their own defence, they should also commit to matching the current US level of 3.5 per cent of GDP, and pledge to reach 5 percent of GDP, which is expected to be the new benchmark set at the forthcoming NATO summit according to NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte.

President Trump's pressure on NATO partners to spend more on defense is already having a major impact. After decades of reckless underinvestment, Germany, the world's fourth-largest economy and the biggest in Europe, has announced plans for a dramatic increase in defense spending, and has accepted in principle that German defense spending must eventually rise to 5 percent of GDP if it is serious about defending its own borders from a potential attack by Russia.

France, which has barely reached the agreed minimum two percent of GDP on defense in recent years has announced that it will push European defense spending levels to 3-3.5 percent of GDP ahead of the Hague summit. Even Belgium, one of the most lacklustre members of NATO, has declared a goal of boosting defense spending to 3.5 percent of GDP.

¹ Based on Statista figures, as of February 14, 2025 at <https://www.statista.com/chart/14636/defense-expenditures-of-nato-countries/>

² Miles Pollard and Jordan Embree, "NATO's Underspending Problem: America's Allies Must Embrace Fair Burden Sharing", Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, March 31, 2025, at <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/natos-underspending-problem-americas-allies-must-embrace-fair-burden-sharing>

The UK has just announced a \$20 billion investment in its nuclear warhead program, and the construction of 12 nuclear-powered attack submarines, as part of its new Strategic Defense Review, released this week.

While much of Western Europe is now starting to wake up with regard to their NATO obligations, the Baltic States and Poland are already building on their robust records by pledging significant further increases in the years ahead. Poland will spend 4.7% of GDP on defense this year, while Estonia has committed to spending 5.4 percent of GDP on defense through until 2029. Lithuania will spend 5-6 percent on defense from 2026 to 2030, and Latvia will spend 5 percent by 2026.

The positive developments in Europe should be warmly welcomed in Washington, with a new sense of urgency across the Atlantic. At the same time the US cannot allow NATO to be undercut by grandiose visions of a European Union army that would split the alliance and divert vital resources away from NATO missions. One of the biggest threats to the future of NATO is posed by French President Emmanuel Macron's calls for greater "strategic autonomy" for Europe, moving away from the United States, and moving closer to an accommodation with Beijing. Macron, who has dismissed NATO in the past as "brain dead," offers a reckless vision of a European future increasingly detached from the transatlantic alliance, and which clearly benefits the West's adversaries, especially China and Russia.

The United States must be crystal-clear in rejecting the hugely flawed idea that Europe's security rests upon delusional ideas of a militarily powerful EU, which would replace NATO nation-state cooperation with Brussels-imposed supranationalism. Macron's dangerous rhetoric is exactly what Russian president Vladimir Putin and Chinese premier Xi Jinping wish to hear. The United States must confront the machinations of Macron and the Eurofederalists and declare that NATO and the transatlantic alliance is the only vehicle for the security of Europe.

As President Trump has bluntly put it, Macron's rallying cry for an EU military to "protect" Europe from not only Russia and China but also the United States is "insulting," especially from the leader of a country liberated in large part by the blood, sweat and tears of American sacrifice.

The role NATO plays today is as vital as it has ever been. The strength and breadth of the NATO alliance is the most powerful deterrent in the world to those forces that threaten the United States and our partners. As it has done since World War Two, the US must lead. But its allies must stand with it, both in word and deed. That must include a renewed commitment to rebuilding Europe's militaries, and a willingness to fight for and defend NATO territory, and confront adversaries that threaten our security, including those in Asia and the Middle East.

In just the first few months of his presidency, Donald Trump has already significantly strengthened the NATO alliance. President Trump is not the destroyer of NATO, as his critics have alleged, but is in fact the savior of NATO.

Trump's presidency is a wake-up call for a complacent alliance that had been sleep walking to decline and possible destruction. Previous US presidents, from Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to Barack Obama and Joe Biden, had all urged European allies to do more, but their entreaties had fallen on deaf ears. It has taken the tough love, no-nonsense straight talk of Donald Trump to make European leaders sit up and take notice.

In many ways the Trump presidency has been the antithesis of the weak-kneed Biden presidency. The humiliating debacle of Biden's reckless Afghanistan withdrawal would not have happened under Donald Trump, and nor would Russia's reckless invasion of Ukraine.

With bold US leadership at the helm, NATO still has the vision, capacity and energy to thrive and prosper for the next 75 years. But the long term success of the alliance rests upon the willingness of all its member states to invest in their common defense and share the economic and military burdens that are necessary to keep the likes of Russia at bay. And the EU can never replace NATO.

Vladimir Putin does not fear the empty rhetoric and grandiose dreams of the European Union. But he does respect the might and power of a robust alliance of nation states led by the United States that will fight to defend freedom and sovereignty.

In the years ahead, the United States must project strength and resolve on the international stage, and stand steadfast with its allies in confronting the forces of barbarism and tyranny from Beijing to Moscow and Tehran.

American exceptionalism is the most powerful force for liberty in the world today. It is greatly strengthened by America's alliances with key partners, and NATO is at the very heart of the transatlantic partnership.

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Mr. SELF. Thank you, sir. I now recognize Hon. Julianne Smith, former U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO at the U.S. State Department. Recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MS. JULIANNE SMITH

Ms. SMITH. Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity today to speak to you about NATO.

For more than 75 years, NATO has been the bedrock of transatlantic security. From the cold war to the Balkans, from counterterrorism to cyber defense, the alliance has consistently adapted to meet new challenges. Yet NATO's enduring strength lies not only in its military might, but in the shared values of its members and their collective commitment to defend one another.

For these past decades, NATO has superbly served both U.S. and European interests by keeping the peace in Europe, which allowed our economies to boom. In recent years, NATO has undergone one of its most significant transformations in decades.

In response to Russia's vicious invasion of Ukraine, the alliance has shown historic unity and resolve. Every single member of the alliance has offered economic, humanitarian, or military support to Ukraine. And NATO launched a new NATO Ukraine council to enable Ukraine to sit at the table as an equal partner.

NATO also welcomed two new members, Finland and Sweden, and on the Eastern Flank, NATO established for new multinational battalions, bolstering the alliance's forward defense posture from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

At the same time, NATO has expanded its partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. That reflects our shared recognition that security challenges like cyber-attacks are increasingly global. In 2022, NATO mentioned China in its strategic concept for the very first time. And most critically, we have seen a striking rise in European defense spending.

Allies are investing more in their own security. Today, 23 allies spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense, up from six just 4 years ago. That momentum is set to accelerate.

Later this month, NATO leaders will gather in The Hague for their annual summit. Allies are expected to announce a new commitment to spend 3.5 percent of GDP on hard defense and another 1.5 percent on related items like infrastructure. This is very good news.

For decades, Europeans have under-invested in their own security, and due to Europe's generous military support to Ukraine in recent years, the current capability gaps in Europe are acute. We should celebrate this progress, but we must also be clear-eyed about some of the associated challenges, and let me mention just three.

First, more money alone will not fix the fragmentation of Europe's defense industrial base. Without meaningful work to coordinate procurement, standardize requirements, and deepen defense industrial cooperation, this influx of funding runs the risk of simply reinforcing the inefficiencies that have long plagued European defense.

Consider tanks. Unlike the U.S., which fields a single main battle tank, the M1, NATO's European members have more than a dozen different types of tanks. This kind of fragmentation complicates joint operations, undermines NATO's cohesion, and slows production and procurement. NATO must ensure that increased spending leads to increased capability, not just duplicated or siloed efforts.

Second, spending needs a strategy, and right now the alliance lacks a coherent approach to dealing with Russia beyond deterrence. NATO's long-term posture remains unsettled, and so do our collection objectives regarding Moscow.

NATO allies created a plan to tackle such questions when they committed last year to unveil a new Russia strategy during this year's summit in The Hague. But the alliance paused work on that strategy for fear that it might not reach consensus in the current political climate.

That was a mistake. Without a clearly articulated and forward-looking Russia strategy, we risk losing the political rationale for sustained investment.

Finally, the alliance today is grappling with a growing trust deficit, which is quietly shaping the way that allies approach increased defense spending. Many European governments worry that U.S. support for NATO is now conditional and subject to sudden shifts.

Some allies worry about the recent U.S. shift away from support for Ukraine. These new uncertainties are leading allies to hedge their bets. Instead of making bold, long-term investments in shared NATO capabilities or better co-production efforts with the United States, some allies are focusing solely on capabilities made in Europe.

Unless this trust gap is addressed directly with steady U.S. leadership, transparency, and a shared strategic vision, America's security will be undermined and the alliance as a whole will risk missing the full potential of the current momentum.

In sum, NATO remains the most successful military alliance in history, and it is crucial to both U.S. and European security. But the way we manage this moment will define the next generation of transatlantic security.

We must lead with vision, with principle, with humility. And we must invest wisely and anchor our efforts in strategy and solidarity.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.
[The prepared statement of Ms. Smith follows:]

**Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe
Prepared Remarks on “Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO”
Julianne Smith, Former U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO (2021-24)
June 4, 2025**

Chairman Self, Ranking Member Keating, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about NATO, its ongoing transformation, its centrality to U.S. national security, and some of the challenges ahead.

For more than seventy-five years, NATO has been the bedrock of transatlantic peace and security. From the Cold War to the Balkans, from counterterrorism to cyber defense, the Alliance has consistently adapted to meet new challenges. Yet NATO's enduring strength lies not only in its military might but in the shared values of its members and their collective commitment to defend one another. For these past decades, NATO has superbly served both U.S. and European interests by keeping the peace in Europe, which allowed our economies to boom and expanded the zone of democracy.

In recent years, NATO has undergone one of its most significant transformations in decades. In response to Russia's vicious and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, the Alliance has shown historic unity and resolve. Every single member of the Alliance has offered economic, humanitarian, or military support to Ukraine. NATO launched a new NATO-Ukraine Council to enable Ukraine to sit at the NATO table as an equal partner. NATO also welcomed two exceptionally capable new democracies as members—Finland and Sweden. That has strengthened our collective defense and sent a clear message to Moscow that its aggression has consequences. On the eastern flank, NATO established four new multinational battalions, bolstering the Alliance's forward-defense posture from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

At the same time, NATO has expanded its partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. That reflects our shared recognition that security challenges like cyberattacks are increasingly global. In 2022, NATO mentioned China in its Strategic Concept for the first time. And perhaps most critically, we have seen a striking rise in European defense spending. Allies are investing more and more in their own security, spurred both by U.S. leadership and by the specter of Putin's highly aggressive Russia. Today, 23 Allies spend the agreed-upon 2 percent of their GDP on defense—up from just six in 2021.

That momentum is set to accelerate. Later this month, NATO leaders will gather in The Hague for their annual summit. Allies are expected to announce a new commitment to spend 3.5 percent of GDP on hard defense and another 1.5 percent on related items like infrastructure and cybersecurity. This is very good news. For decades, Europeans have underinvested in their own security. And due to Europe's generous military support to Ukraine in recent years, the current capability gaps across the continent are acute.

We should celebrate this progress, but we must also be clear-eyed about some of the associated challenges. Let me mention three.

First, more money alone will not fix the fragmentation of Europe's defense industrial base. Without meaningful work to coordinate procurement, standardize requirements, and deepen defense industrial cooperation, this influx of funding runs the risk of simply reinforcing the inefficiencies that have long plagued European defense. Consider tanks for just one example.

Unlike the U.S., which fields a single main battle tank—the M1 Abrams—across its forces, NATO's European members have more than a dozen different types of tanks in service. This kind of fragmentation complicates joint operations, undermines NATO's cohesion, increases costs, and slows production and procurement. NATO must ensure that increased spending leads to increased capability—not just duplicated or siloed efforts.

Second, spending needs a strategy. Right now, the Alliance lacks a coherent approach to dealing with Russia beyond deterrence. NATO's long-term posture remains unsettled, and so do our collective objectives regarding Moscow—including the future of the NATO Russia Founding Act and the NATO Russia Council. NATO Allies created a plan to tackle such questions when they committed last year at the Washington summit to unveil a new Russia strategy during this year's summit in the Hague. But the Alliance has paused work on that strategy for fear that it might not reach consensus in the current political climate. That was a mistake. Without a clearly articulated and forward-looking Russia strategy, we risk losing the political rationale for sustained investment. Allies need clarity about what they are building toward and defending against. And NATO must continue to develop a toolkit to address Russia's hybrid tactics.

Finally, the Alliance today is grappling with a growing trust deficit, which is quietly shaping the way that Allies approach increased defense spending. Many European governments worry that U.S. support for NATO is now conditional or transactional and subject to sudden shifts in domestic politics. Some Allies worry about the recent U.S. shift away from support for Ukraine, which served as the chief organizing principle of NATO unity for these past three years. These new uncertainties are leading Allies to hedge their bets: instead of making bold, long-term investments in shared NATO capabilities or co-production with the United States, some Allies are focusing solely on capabilities made in Europe. Unless this trust gap is addressed directly—with steady U.S. leadership, transparency, and a shared strategic vision—America's security will be undermined, and the Alliance as a whole will risk missing the full potential of the current momentum. Burden-sharing with our Allies must be pursued through partnership, not threats to disengage.

Ladies and gentlemen, NATO is one of our greatest strategic assets. NATO remains the most successful military alliance in history, and it is crucial to both U.S. and European security. But the way we manage this moment will define the next generation of transatlantic security. We must lead with vision, principle, and humility. And we must invest wisely, and anchor our efforts in strategy, security, and solidarity. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions

Mr. SELF. Thank you very much for three strong testimonies. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I want to start with, yes, I want to start with what I think is one of the most unstable areas of NATO, and that is in the Western Balkans. As you know, or may not know, General Cavoli told me in my recent visit with him that Bosnia and Herzegovina could collapse overnight.

And you may remember back in 1999, NATO in actually their first operation, went to war for Kosovo by bombing Serbia. We now have, and if you look at the map, you have Slovenia, you have Croatia, there is Bosnia, there is Montenegro, there is Albania, there is Bulgaria, there is Romania surrounding three entities that are not part of NATO. Everyone I just named are part of NATO.

You have got Bosnia-Herzegovina that is split between the Croata and the Republika Srpska. You have got Serbia, and you have got Kosovo. Kosovo wants to be, the President tells me that NATO membership of Kosovo is the most important issue for Kosovo. And yet we have four NATO members, some of whom actually were in NATO back in 1999, that participated in protecting Kosovo from Serbia.

Now, I would like to start with you, Dr. Gardiner. What can we do to bring more stability to the western Balkans, which is a flashpoint, has been historically and traditionally a flashpoint, to bring stability to the western Balkans through admitting Kosovo to NATO? Is that a viable solution?

Mr. GARDINER. Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Chairman. And I think the situation in the Balkans today is one of upheaval, ongoing crisis, especially with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina, where we have a fundamental, I think, lack of national sovereignty, self-determination.

You have in effect a sort of European elite that rules over Bosnia-Herzegovina, and we need to see, I think, the restoration of full sovereignty and self-determination. And I think as long as you have this E.U.-driven elite that actually in effect controls the Nation, you are not going to be able to move forward, and I think the tremendous tensions that exist within that region.

With regard to Kosovo, I think great steps are being taken in terms of advances within the Nation. They clearly seek to be part of the NATO alliance. I think that with regard to Kosovo, there has been a lot of positive developments.

I think we will have to assess how things move in the coming months and the next 2 years or so. But I have to say that there is growing optimism with regard to the broader outlook for Kosovo and for future participation in NATO. So I do remain optimistic on that point.

Mr. SELF. Thank you. Admiral Montgomery.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I will take a slightly more aggressive approach and say that I think Serbia and the Republika Srpska are both bad actors who place Balkan stability at risk.

I think their leaders, Vucic and Dodik, are thugs who are intentionally trying to make the Republic of Bosnia largely a tinderbox. And Vucic has aims on eliminating Kosovar sovereignty.

Our response needs to be strong. We need to support KFOR, the NATO force that is in Kosovo as a stabilizing force, make sure it

is properly equipped and enabled with European and American support.

But most importantly, we do need to move Kosovo along the path to further European integration, through both the European Union and NATO. And the United States needs to use its significant power to push countries like Spain who oppose this into doing the right thing and allow Kosovo to enter the broader European environment.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, Ambassador, I need to make one point. I appreciated your point about more money does not mean our industrial base is sufficient. And you pointed out that European industrial base, but our own industrial base needs reform and reenergized as well. Would you like to comment on that in my last 20 seconds?

Ms. SMITH. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for raising the western Balkans. Just quickly, this is a region that demands attention from three different corners of the world. NATO has to remain engaged, the European Union must stay engaged to continue to pursue diplomatic efforts to work toward peace.

And the U.S. needs to show up and be present and engaged. If not, Russia and China are waiting in the wings and play a very active role in that neighborhood, trying to defy the folks in the region and divide Europe from the United States.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, my time is up. So to honor the time, I will have that question submitted to you in writing.

I now recognize Mr. Keating, the ranking member.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Smith, I was curious too, and I think this is worth mentioning, the U.S. commitment to Ukraine just isn't one with NATO. As we are dealing with continued nuclear threats, particularly in Iran, we know the danger of those threats.

Well, decades ago, there was a commitment made to Ukraine. Can you talk about the U.S. commitment to Ukraine before and why that commitment was so important?

Ms. SMITH. So there have been multiple—thank you, Ranking Member Keating—there have been multiple commitments to Ukraine over the years. First and foremost, the NATO alliance promised in 2008 that Ukraine would become a member of the alliance.

But Ukraine has also gone through its own process of ridding itself of any sort of nuclear weapons program, with the hope that the United States and other countries would come to its aid and—

Mr. KEATING. How big an arsenal was that? I mean, it was the U.S., it was Russia. Where was Ukraine back then?

Ms. SMITH. It was significant.

Mr. KEATING. Was it the third?

Ms. SMITH. Not on the scale of Russia, but this was an arsenal that would have, had it remained, served as a very effective deterrent to Russia's aggression that we saw unfold in February.

Mr. KEATING. So the U.S. commitment was before even this.

Ms. SMITH. Indeed. Well before, well before.

Mr. KEATING. And that commitment said that the U.S. would defend aggression against Ukraine.

Ms. SMITH. Indeed.

Mr. KEATING. And so here we are. And now we have NATO allies—so I am curious, how many times has Article 5 been implemented by NATO?

Ms. SMITH. Only once, sir, and that was of course after 9/11—

Mr. KEATING. So who benefited from that?

Ms. SMITH [continuing]. here in the United States, when European allies came to our—

Mr. KEATING. We all benefited, but indeed, I was in Afghanistan and Iraq, I saw NATO soldiers. I saw them there defending, and many times unpopular in their own countries, the U.S. defense in that regard.

I am curious, too, if Putin is successful in Ukraine, Admiral, what would that mean for U.S. investment? You know, we are talking a lot about money here. What about the cost of Putin being successful in Ukraine?

What would NATO, what would the United States, do you believe, have to deploy in Eastern Europe, and how expensive would that be?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Well, if he is successful in Ukraine, I don't think he will be, but if he was successful in Ukraine, it would put tremendous pressure on the Baltic States and Poland. The Suwalki Gap, the area that he would like to grab there, is very easy.

So for us to counter that, it would take,—we already have a brigade in Poland, would take a division in Poland. We have battalions in the Baltic States, it would take brigades in the Baltic States. In other words, at a time when we are considering reducing our footprint in Europe, we would actually have to significantly increase at least those rotational forces.

Mr. KEATING. And wouldn't you say, in your experience, deployment of troops is far more expensive than assets?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. It is, yes, sir. And it would be a lot more expensive than the thirty-two or thirty-four billion dollars' worth of weaponry we provided.

Mr. KEATING. And we talked, too, about the need for our own country to do better in terms of procurement and dealing with our assets. But wasn't in fact—we were in a period of modernization in our own country, among armed services as well. And so we were modernizing our forces.

And many of these outdated by our perspective assets were so useful to Ukraine. And wasn't, Ambassador Smith, wasn't the investment of U.S. dollars, most of that money stayed here, is that true? Most of it stayed here in jobs and to modernized our own? So we benefited by this investment, not just Ukraine.

Ms. SMITH. Absolutely. In many cases, Europeans have been purchasing equipment in the United States from our defense industrial base to send to Ukraine, as well as they have purchased equipment for their own use after they have donated more dated equipment to Ukraine.

So these contributions have come back to the United States. And America's own commitments, the money that has been dedicated to Ukraine, has gone into building out our own capabilities as we have donated others.

Mr. KEATING. And how important, from a diplomatic standpoint, is it to be consistent? You know, I listen, as many people do, to the comments of Viktor Orban in Hungary and the things he is saying. How discordant is the comments by someone like Viktor Orban in Hungary in our effort?

Ms. SMITH. Well, it is disturbing to hear comments from our friends in Hungary that they have very mixed views on supporting Ukraine. They have found some smaller ways to support Ukraine. But this has been a challenge across the alliance to maintain that unity.

But the key to it has been U.S. leadership. And when the U.S. leads, it brings the allies together.

Mr. KEATING. Quickly, I have got 6 seconds left. Would you say a savior of NATO would say you are on your own or go it alone? Does that make sense?

Ms. SMITH. No, no.

Mr. KEATING. Donald Trump said those. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. Thank you. I now recognize the representative from Ohio, Mr. Davidson.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Thank you, Chairman, thank our witnesses. Appreciate the timely hearing today.

It works, just not well. So if the sound guy can do something about that, it would be great, but. So let me start over.

So thank you for the hearing. It is timely, and I would ask unanimous consent to submit Vice President Vance's speech in Munich for the record.

Mr. SELF. Accepted.

Mr. DAVIDSON. The administration sets the foreign policy for our country, and the administration has been very clear where the Biden administration wasn't. The Biden administration never would define the mission in Ukraine. They would never say what exactly they want to accomplish.

The Trump administration has been clear in Ukraine by saying we want to help restore peace. And that is what the President and Secretary of State and every other tool in the executive branch is trying to do, is to restore peace.

When you look at Vice President Vance's speech in Munich, he asked the fundamental question: what exactly are we defending? And not just territory, but ideas and values.

And I think it is noteworthy, because we see people from western Europe claiming asylum in Hungary so they don't go to jail for free speech or for participating in a political party like AfD. Or the now-majority party in Poland, or the winner of the Presidential election from the conservative party there.

So you see values that are undermining the institution. And the United States, by funding NATO, essentially becoming the de facto security force for NATO, has enabled Europe to spend their money on everything but defense.

We have served as their defense, and it has been the umbrella to which they have extended their membership eastward. So we are pulling security while they are undermining the values that made us the West, the values that when I was in Berlin walking through Checkpoint Charlie in the days after 9 November 1989 that we said we were defending. And instead, it is the other way.

So you know, Ambassador Smith, I just want to be clear because of this ongoing discussion about Ukraine, is Ukraine a NATO member country?

Ms. SMITH. It is not today.

Mr. DAVIDSON. I didn't think so. Yes, we are certain of that.

Ms. SMITH. It is one of NATO's closest partners.

Mr. DAVIDSON. But we seem to keep treating Ukraine as a member of NATO. Should we make Ukraine a member of NATO?

Ms. SMITH. The alliance agreed in 2008 and stated that Ukraine will someday become a member. Right now there is no consensus across the alliance to do so.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Yes, there is clearly not a consensus, and I think for good reason. Because if we brought Ukraine into NATO, we would immediately be in a State of war.

One of the things that people like to refer to is Article 5.

So you know, Admiral Montgomery, you said in your testimony that, "The U.S. posture in Europe gives NATO's Article 5 its teeth." I worry that, you know, that kind of proves my point that it enables the European Union member countries to basically rely on America's blanket of security and under-invest in their own.

And I guess at some point, is your own view that Article 5 would obligate us to fight a war, actually be immediately in a State of war, if a NATO member country was attacked?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. If there is an Article 5 violation determined by the alliance, then I think it is highly likely the United States would participate in that war. And I do think we are the enablers and there is no doubt, our GDP is equal to all of Europe.

So it is likely that if we were all spending three point—five percent, we are currently spending, I know the graph said something else, but I think we spend about 3.02 percent, 3.025 percent, to put a specific number on it on defense.

We don't spend that—I mean, I got to be clear here, we are barely clear of the numbers we want them to get to. But if we are spending that much, and they spend that much, we will be able to secure ourselves and deter Vladimir Putin from doing things.

My goal is not that we fight Article 5, but we make it clear to Putin that should you attack a treaty ally of ours like the Baltic States or Poland, we will hold you accountable. And therefore when he sees how strong we and Europe together—and I agree with you completely, Europe needs to carry its load. And Europe was apathetic for 30 years.

But they are coming around, led by the Eastern Europeans. And even the President has acknowledged that the Eastern Europeans were spending four and now soon 5 percent, deserve our support. The President has spoken about the Baltics that way.

Mr. DAVIDSON. It is good and I am glad you acknowledge that Congress actually has the decision on whether we go to war. So Article 5 doesn't automatically trip it.

You know, my time is largely expired here, but I just want to point out that, you know, President Eisenhower thought that if we were in NATO for 10 years, that we would have not succeeded in the mission of NATO. So I think it is worth questioning, as Vice President Vance did in Munich, what are we doing here.

Mr. SELF. Thank you, and I now recognize the representative from Nevada, Ms. Titus, for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

All right, just taking a little different tack. We have seen Russia launch information attacks on European countries that are in sensitive political contexts, and we have seen it in Georgia, we have seen it in Moldova. It has also extended to NATO countries like Romania in their recent election.

And all these attacks are aimed at causing confusion. They deepen political and social divisions. They destabilize societies. And the ultimate goal is weakening NATO, I believe.

So Ambassador Smith, I will start with you. Can you tell us how NATO is working with allies, partners, and private sector actors to kind of identify, expose, and address and combat this foreign disinformation that is coming from Russia?

Ms. SMITH. Thank you very much, Representative, for raising Russia's hybrid tactics. They use a variety of tools to try and divide societies from within and divide Europeans from each other and Europe from the United States. They fly into NATO airspace, they use disinformation campaigns.

There have been incidents of sabotage where suddenly we have seen arson attacks of warehouses full of weapons destined for Ukraine. We have seen undersea cables cut.

So this is a standard playbook on the part of the Russians. NATO has increasingly turned to improving and strengthening its toolkit. We have better cyber security tools. We now exercise and train to test where we would hit that Article 5 threshold under some potential hybrid attack from Russia.

We have better surveillance in the Nordic Baltic space, looking for incidents where they are about to clip another undersea cable. So NATO is the place where we can work hand in glove with our European allies to get a stronger and better toolkit to deal with Russian gray zone tactics.

Ms. TITUS. I am glad to hear we are doing those things, but at the same time, we are eliminating the Global Engagement Center. Can you address how that might work to our disadvantage?

Ms. SMITH. Well, that is unfortunate, because right now in the U.S. Government, it seems that this administration is not placing any importance on those types of efforts to combat disinformation stemming from not only Russia, but Iran, from China. These countries work together to share messages to learn from one another in how they promote these pieces of disinformation.

And the U.S. traditionally has been a leader in helping allies understand how to counter those efforts. But right now, with the elimination of the Global Engagement Center, we will likely not be the beating heart of those efforts going forward.

Ms. TITUS. I agree with you.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Can I add one thing on that, ma'am? The Trump administration didn't get rid of the Global Engagement Center, Congress did. You allowed it to its authorities to expire last December. And that was, I agree it is a mistake.

But what the Trump administration has done has gotten rid of the Voice of America and most of the other distributions systems, which is a mistake. That tells the truth about America for people

to hear. When I lived in the Soviet Union in the early 1980's, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe were what you could hear there to hear the American story.

So I am disappointed in the Trump administration for that. But I don't blame them for the Global Engagement Center. You in Congress allowed that to expire in December of last year.

Ms. TITUS. I didn't. Don't say I did. But, yes, some did.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. You.

[Laughter.]

Ms. TITUS. Okay. Well, you have done a few things too. Let me ask you this, shifting over here to you, Admiral. Excuse me for saying General.

We are fixing to go to the NATO summit in The Hague. Now, we have got two allies in a part of the world that needs more and more attention, the eastern Mediterranean. So many things are happening in that area, from Israel, Syria, Lebanon, you name it.

We got two NATO allies there. We got Greece and Turkiye. Greece is a friend, Turkiye is not such a reliable ally. What is the message we should be sending to Turkiye when we go to The Hague next week?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I agree with you, and I am glad we are selling Greece F-35s. I think we should continue to sell Greece significant weaponry as necessary so they can do their job securing the Aegean and southeastern Europe.

Turkiye needs to get a strong message from us that they should not be eligible for the F-35 until they completely give up the S-400. I am very concerned that the administration is going to, you know, remove one little part, direct the movement of one little part from the S-400, and then say Turkiye can buy F-35s. That is a mistake.

Turkiye needs to be held accountable for its bad decisionmaking on the S-400's and on its support for Hamas. And I think that is strong message that needs to be delivered by the administration in The Hague and elsewhere.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the representative Mrs. Kim.

Mrs. KIM. Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Chairman Self and Ranking Member Keating, for holding today's hearing. And thank you for joining us today.

I want to ask my first question to Mr. Montgomery. You know, NATO's ability to deter threats from Russia depends on a robust and responsive defense industrial base.

However, Europe's defense industries face critical vulnerabilities in supply chains, production capacity, and procurement strategies, as highlighted by Russia's war against Ukraine. And with some NATO allies still falling short of the 2-percent GDP defense spending pledge, that also limits investments in modernization and in readiness.

So can you talk about the specific steps that NATO allies can take to address any vulnerabilities in Europe's defense industrial base, especially when it comes to critical munitions and advanced systems production?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Thank you for bringing that up. And you are absolutely right. You know, as we look, as we sourced Ukraine

over the last 3 years, 95 percent of what U.S. provided was U.S. equipment. But more than 50 percent of the western equipment provided by the Europeans was U.S. equipment. They do not have a effective defense industrial base.

I also don't believe they can properly conceive of what is needed. It took you, Congress, 40 years to build the current defense industrial base and trillions and trillions of dollars in direct investment. And the Europeans have not made those commitments.

And when I hear President Macron talk about a European solution to this, the amount of money he discusses is way too low. So the truth is the Europeans are going to need to rely on us over the next decade to rearm themselves, and they are also going to need to build their own defense industrial base.

Mrs. KIM. Specifically, I need to ask how the United States can help European allies in overcoming those shortfalls. And at the same time, we need to ensure the interoperability within our alliance.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I think we should take the Rheinmetall, that example we have right now with Rheinmetall, the German artillery firm, which is partnering with the United States, with U.S. firms so that they can scale their production properly.

So, what I think is joint ventures between U.S. companies and European companies that build both in the United States, for jobs in the United States, but also in Europe, for jobs in Europe, with that European money. That is the most logical, cost-efficient way. It is not what the French are proposing, but I think long-term that is how NATO needs to settle out.

Mrs. KIM. Next I want to talk about Russia and China.

You know, in your testimony, Mr. Montgomery, you made it very clear that Russia under Putin is the, in quotes, "single greatest threat to peace and democracy in Europe."

You also noted the role that China has played in helping sustain Russia's war in Ukraine, and providing dual-use technologies and economic support.

So, we know China is bolstering Russia's defense industrial base with microelectronics, telecommunications equipment, and drone technology.

So, in that context, how should NATO adapt its deterrence and defense strategies so they can address the combined military and technological threats posed by a Russia-China partnership?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. And you are exactly right, what I am saying there is that Ukraine is actually fighting four countries right now: Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran. And I would say most of us think North Korea and Iran are the next biggest problems. They are not. It is China.

China is backstopping Russia's economy. They have increased their imports and exports more than 30 percent. As you said, they provided the microelectronics. They are supporting the Kh-101, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles. They are striking Ukraine every night.

We absolutely have to hold China accountable for its support to, to Ukraine.

Mrs. KIM. Is there specific capabilities or partnerships that NATO should prioritize to counter those threats?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Yes. So, I do believe it is NATO's role in an Asia-Pacific context will be very economic in nature. So that what we need to do is start working together on how we sanction and export control China properly. And we need to get the Europeans more engaged in that, and committed as we are.

Mrs. KIM. I have one more question regarding the NATO and Western Balkans. The Western Balkans is a critical region for NATO staffers to promote stability and counter external influence. Russia has intensified its efforts to undermine NATO in EU integration in countries like Serbia, using disinformation, economic leverage, and political interference.

So, what specific strategy should NATO employ to counter Russian influence in the Western Baltics—or Balkans? And particularly in Serbia, as I mentioned, and where the, you know, favorable perceptions of Russia are growing, especially, like I said, in Serbia?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I think you are exactly right. President Putin has supported both Vucic in Serbia and Dodik in Republika Srpska. We need to fully support Kosovo in its efforts to enter the European Union and NATO.

But more importantly, we need to ensure the stabilizing force, NATO's KFOR force in Kosovo is properly manned and equipped to do what it has to provide the warning that is necessary so that Washington can hold Serbia accountable for threats to Kosovo.

Mrs. KIM. Thank you very much. My time is up. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the representative from California, Mr. Costa.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

For the purpose of my 5 minutes I want to focus on NATO and Ukraine. But let me first remind ourselves of a bit of history.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, there was strong bipartisan support that this was about good versus evil. Very clear, good versus evil.

Let me quote from a speech that President Ronald Reagan gave in 1983.

"To ignore the facts of history and aggressive impulses of an evil empire is simply to call the arms race a giant misunderstanding, and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong, and good and evil." President Ronald Reagan in 1983.

I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, and members of the subcommittee, that this is still about good versus evil, bottom line. Okay?

So, when we look at NATO, and when we look at the United States post-World War II, do we not witness that the United States and whoever has been President of the United States, World War II to today, has been viewed as the indispensable leader of the free world, Ambassador Smith?

Ms. SMITH. Absolutely, Representative. The U.S. has led the alliance since it was created 76 years ago. It has provided not only—

Mr. COSTA. The indispensable leader of the free world.

Ms. SMITH. Yes. Absolutely.

Mr. COSTA. Dr. Gardiner, would you agree?

Mr. GARDINER. One hundred percent the United States is the indispensable leader of the free world, and remains so today.

Mr. COSTA. Rear Admiral Montgomery, what would you say?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I would say absolutely. And we should keep the command of SACEUR as part of that indispensable leadership.

Mr. COSTA. So, we are part of a seminal moment in world history today as we look at what has taken place. Because Putin has been very clear, although the Soviet Union has imploded he still has visions and dreams of restoring the Russian Empire, does he not? Would all three of you agree?

Mr. GARDINER. Yes.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Yes.

Ms. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. I mean he has been very clear in all of his speeches here.

So, Ambassador Smith, yes or no, do you believe a strong NATO alliance is important to counter the rising and aggressive forces of China?

Ms. SMITH. Yes, I do. Not to suggest that the NATO alliance is going to operate in the Indo-Pacific, but its deepening partnerships with Japan, South Korea—

Mr. COSTA. China is very carefully watching what we are doing in Ukraine—

Ms. SMITH. Indeed.

Mr. COSTA [continuing]. would all three of you agree?

Ms. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. GARDINER. Yes.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Yes.

Mr. GARDINER. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Whether or not we are going to maintain our commitment to our allies and to a democratic and free Ukraine,—

Ms. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. COSTA [continuing]. the world is watching, would you not say?

Ms. SMITH. Absolutely.

Mr. COSTA. So, therefore, this is a seminal moment in American and world history with our NATO allies?

Ms. SMITH. Yes.

Mr. GARDINER. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. Admiral Montgomery, the probable outcome of the support, and you have been there, I know, recently, in Ukraine, the F-16s and other support to ensure that—and, of course, we are all amazed, but we shouldn't be because, once again, I remember all the intelligence briefings we received prior to Russia's invasion of over-expectations and under-expectations.

But Ukraine, the Ukrainian brave people are the MacGyvers of this, of this new type of warfare. Would you not agree, Admiral Montgomery?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I do. And their use of the F-16 has been exceptional in the few months they have been operating.

Mr. COSTA. And what should we be doing to ensure that those aircraft are fully operational and able to achieve their capability?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. We gave them the F-16s, the European countries did, without what is called lifecycle maintenance: the consumables, the equipment, the training, and the maintenance stuff they need. We need to fully provide the lifecycle maintenance

and we need to provide the right weapons systems to be used as a counter-drone.

Mr. COSTA. And our allies, the Danish and the Netherlands have provided the aircraft. We are helping to try to train the pilots. But we need to do more; is that not correct?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. That is correct. We need to do the supply chain, the logistics. And we can just sell it to them. We don't need to give it to them. We can sell it to them, but we have to provide that lifecycle maintenance.

And, sir, I have to emphasize, we need to give them the counter-drone rocket systems, the APKWS that you need to fire from those systems.

Mr. COSTA. You wrote a column about this last week. There are varied types of systems that the aircraft are lacking that we should provide. What are they?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. The rocket system I just mentioned, and an active jamming system.

Mr. COSTA. The jamming system is very important to the protection of these systems; that is right, isn't it?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. That is right. We want to make sure that the pilots who are trained in the United States and the aircraft, of which they have limited numbers right now, as you said, the Netherlands, and Denmark, and eventually Norway, survive. They are fighting them exceptionally but they could use more support from us.

Mr. COSTA. Let me finally indicate, when Secretary Rubio testified before the committee here about a week ago they talked about maximum, maximum pressure on Iran to prevent them from obtaining nuclear weapons. And by the way, I agree with that.

And I understand the Secretary, what are we doing to put maximum, maximum pressure on Russia to ensure that they understand that we mean business and we are going to stay with our allies? What should we be doing?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. We should be sanctioning the people who are helping the shadow fleet evade sanctions. In other words, Chinese, Indian, Turkish companies that are taking the fossil fuels that are shipped from Russia in their shadow fleet and allow them to circumvent the existing sanctions that neither the Biden administration nor the Trump administration has properly enforced sanctions to allow that to happen.

Mr. COSTA. And if we put maximum, maximum pressure, maybe Russia will come to the realization that we mean business?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Potentially. He is Vladimir Putin, so I won't say yes.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you.

I have used my time, Mr. Chairman. And I will submit further questions for the record.

Mr. SELF. And I recognize the representative from Florida, Ms. Luna.

Mrs. LUNA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First and foremost, I am going to have to disagree with my colleagues' sentiment as Ukraine as our ally. Ukraine is not a member of NATO.

But aside from that, Zelenskyy hasn't held actual elections since the war started. So, I don't know what free and fair democracy does that.

But aside from that, if we are looking at the U.S. total spending in NATO, it is 3.3 percent of the defense budget, which is a lot of money. My question, and I would like to actually point out we just saw two senators took a vlogging trip to Ukraine yesterday. It was Senator Blumenthal and Graham. I guess it was over the weekend.

But to put simply, their sanctions bill with Graham is basically another D.C. classic. Their Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025, there is a 500 percent tariff, and banking bans at Moscow. But where is the accountability for how billions in Part A were spent?

Biden's admin shoveled millions and millions of dollars into Ukraine with zero oversight, no audits, no results. Now this bill demands 55 million for monitoring, while Section 17 slaps tariffs on other countries buying Russian oil, which China will bypass through third parties.

Trump's America First politics does not write blank checks, it demands verifiable wins. And if Europe is not going to step up militarily, why should U.S. taxpayers fund their security theater? Sanctions without enforced negotiations are just performative politics.

You know, I was just with the House Democracy Partnership Institute. We were actually in Belgium. We met with the European Union. We met with the NATO countries. And what I can tell you is you have these countries who are not surrounding the Ukraine, and they are advocating for war.

But you have countries like Romania, Russia—countries like Moldova that want peace, and thoroughly back President Trump's agenda.

The reason that I bring that up is because I do believe if we continue funding NATO in our current capacity we are simply making excuses, not forcing them to take a realistic approach at peace negotiations.

My first question would be to Mr. Montgomery. If you could just go back and elaborate really quickly on what you had stated in regards to oil?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Yes. Right now the Russians are able to shift their fossil fuels and avoid existing sanctions, which both the Biden and Trump administration have in place, by finding third parties. They ship them on illegal shadow ships. And third parties, and you mentioned China, India, Turkiye, are receiving that.

The way you normally stop that is you then sanction the companies receiving that, the ports receiving it, and the banks involved in the, in the procurement. And then those companies back off.

And historically we have seen that happen with Iran, with North Korea, with others.

So, all we have to do is enforce the existing laws, the existing sanctions, and we will, we will take away Russia's, what is funding Russia's military operations.

Mrs. LUNA. Instead of performative politics; correct?

I mean, I agree with you.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Right. Oh, instead of the—Yes.

Mrs. LUNA. Yes.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I think we can do that regardless of the sanction bill going on in the Senate.

Mrs. LUNA. Cool.

And aside from that, just with that same perspective, do you think that it is a good idea for members of our Senate, Members of Congress to go outside of the policy being set forth by the White House and the Secretary of State in regards to policy with Russia that we are seeing currently?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Well, I certainly feel it is fair for senators and Congressmen to go on whatever congressional delegations they want. I have supported thousands in my career. And I, and I have no opinion on when Republicans, you know, criticize Democrat administrations or Democrat representative criticize Republican administrations.

And to my military knowledge, that appears to be the normal way of doing business.

Mrs. LUNA. Do you think, though, that it is dangerous to have people that are advocating for a policy that is pro war when they are first and foremost not the ones on the front line, and also to receive massive contracts from defense contractors—or not massive contracts but massive donations and support from defense contractors?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I know Senator Graham, and I believe he honestly believes——

Mrs. LUNA. This isn't directed at Senator Graham, sir.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Oh.

Mrs. LUNA. That seems to be a problem not just in the House but also in the Senate, not specific to one member, both Democrat and Republican.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I, as a retired military officer, I would never hold a politician accountable for, you know, expressing his or her views.

Mrs. LUNA. Sorry?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. A politician should be allowed, able to express his or her views.

Mrs. LUNA. Oh, no, that, I mean, I understand that, sir. I was just asking simply.

I thank you for your time. And, obviously, not trying to attack you on this. I appreciate you being here today.

Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the representative from Rhode Island, Mr. Amo.

Mr. AMO. Thank you.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

We know that the United States' leadership in NATO is essential to our own national security. We must support our European allies as they take meaningful steps to ensure and increase their own defense spending and capabilities. And we cannot pull away and isolate ourselves as the current Republican administration seeks.

Maintaining a strong leadership role in NATO means standing up to the biggest threat facing our European allies: Russia's aggression. But Republicans on this very committee remain silent as Donald Trump scolds our NATO allies, parrots Putin's talking points, and retreats on the global stage.

As Russian attacks are stepping up, Trump is stepping back. He is not lifting a finger to support Ukraine in their fight for freedom, sovereignty and security. And Russian aggression toward our allies can be seen in their sabotage of essential underwater technologies and infrastructure.

At least 11 undersea cables in the Baltic Sea have been damaged since October 2023, including cables disrupting essential energy and internet services to our allies in Sweden and Finland.

Ambassador Smith, could you explain how NATO is countering attacks against undersea infrastructure?

And how can the U.S. support this work and protect our own underwater infrastructure from this sabotage?

Ms. SMITH. Thank you, Representative, for raising this particular issue.

The clippings of or cutting of undersea cables is increasingly a topic of conversation across the NATO alliance. And allies have increased their surveillance, particularly in the Baltic Sea. They are sharing more intelligence, sharing best practices, and putting together a toolkit that will enable the alliance to fortify itself to these types of hybrid tactics.

This is an area where U.S. leadership is indispensable. And if we continue to work through this particular issue through NATO, we will see a stronger collective alliance response to these types of incidents.

Mr. AMO. Thank you.

And, you know, this is an example where our adversaries, especially China, are watching NATO's response to Russia's aggression. Our response, our collaboration, our refusal to retreat from this task is a signal that I think is incredibly important.

And, you know, this is, you know, emblematic of the response that we need to have in—to the increased coordination and cooperation between Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran as they, you know, of course form a significant threat against Ukraine and NATO.

And, so, China's continued investments in critical infrastructure and telecommunications systems in particular across Europe raises alarms about this coordination.

And I would love for you to share a little bit more about how NATO can and should counter the combined threat of coordination between those actors, Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, especially with the investments from China in critical telecommunications systems.

Ms. SMITH. Well, this is actually a remarkable bipartisan story. And I guess there are not as many of those these days as we would all wish.

But in the Trump administration's first term they pushed the alliance to conduct a China review that put China on the map and got allies talking about what China is doing in and around Europe.

The Biden administration grabbed the baton. We were able to get China into NATO's strategic concept, deepen our partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. And now handed the baton back to the second Trump administration.

My hope is that this administration will continue to run down this path to heighten allies' awareness of what China is doing in

Europe, whether it is economic coercion, disinformation, or fueling and helping supply Russia's war in Ukraine.

Mr. AMO. And I think it is so important that you highlighted the fact that the sort of current context of the Trump administration and its questioning of the NATO relationship doesn't have to be. And they have already proven that through the types of collaboration and commitment that we saw prior, carrying on from an administration whether or not it is a Democratic or Republican administration. These are about values, American values that we share.

And the last thing I will touch on, and I may not be able to get your answer but I will try to do so in writing. The point I want to make here is that it is really essential that NATO maintain a unified position against the threat of Russia and their new partners.

I have questions about Turkiye in this moment. And, you know, if you could, briefly, how should the United States and NATO approach member nations who are maintaining those ties with Russia that imperil the strength of the NATO relationship?

Ms. SMITH. Well, Turkiye is an important but complicated ally in the alliance. The U.S. needs to work with Turkiye where our interests coincide.

But in cases where we are at odds, we have to approach them with honesty and work through our differences, whether it is inside the alliance or in our bilateral relationship, or in their relationship with Russia.

I will say on Ukraine in that first year in 2022, Turkiye played an important role in trying to bring the parties together. We have recently seen renewed efforts to do so, welcoming both Ukrainians and Russians back to Turkiye to, hopefully, negotiate.

Mr. AMO. Hopefully, that is a trend line that we see continue.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. SELF. And I recognize the representative from Texas, Ms. Johnson.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

And to our panelists, thank you so much for being here today.

I want to echo my colleagues and our witnesses' comments that NATO's very existence has averted world wars and made the United States safer. Let me be clear, it is not a waste of resources when we come together as allies to defend one another, as implied by some other members of this committee.

The security and prosperity that we have enjoyed since world wars is no accident. Out of the fog of war, the United States helped found this 80-year-old alliance that guaranteed under Article 5 that should any NATO nation come under attack, the other members will consider it as an attack against members all, and will take all actions it deems necessary to assist.

Article 5 has been invoked once in NATO's history, and that was on September 12th, 2001, 1 day after Al Qaeda killed almost 3,000 people here in our homeland.

In the following years our NATO allies came to our aid and 1,000 troops died in combat alongside Americans.

But now we have a President who questions that same security assistance we relied on to keep our own nation safe. Just a few

weeks ago he said in the Oval Office, “You know, the biggest problem I have with NATO, if the United States is in trouble and we call them, do you think they are going to come and protect us? They’re supposed to. I’m not so sure.”

I find these comments incredibly reckless, and irresponsible, and dangerous to our national security in light of the one time when NATO’s been activated, it was in our defense.

Ambassador Smith, how does this suggestion that NATO allies will not defend each other impact our adversaries’ perception of credible deterrence?

And does this undermine our own security?

Ms. SMITH. Well, thank you, Representative.

When the war in Ukraine started, I think both President Xi in China and President Putin in Russia made an assumption, and that was that the NATO allies would grow weary, that they would grow impatient, that they would grow distracted, and they wouldn’t be able to maintain focus on Ukraine.

But we have maintained focus on Ukraine. We remain united. I am worried that won’t continue to be the case. I want to see continued U.S. leadership, which is critical to alliance unity.

And while the Europeans are increasing their defense budgets, it makes perfect sense to remain committed to this alliance. It serves our interests in addition to the interests of our allies.

So, I firmly believe that the U.S. should maintain its commitment to this alliance, and that doing so will send a very strong signal not just to Moscow but to China, Iran, North Korea, and other countries around the world.

Ms. JOHNSON. And it seems to me like the administration is sort of doing the hokey-pokey: we are in 1 day, we are out 1 day, we are in 1 day, and we are turning it all about. And that is not the way to have sustained, reliable, persuasive foreign policy in my opinion.

Do you agree?

Ms. SMITH. Yes, Representative.

I will tell you that the day that the Trump administration suddenly, without consultation with any of our allies, flipped off and turned off intelligence sharing to Ukraine, and all military assistance—it was eventually turned back on—but that day sent a chill through our European allies, our friends in Canada, who were worried that this now signals a new era where at any moment the U.S. can have a sudden shift without any close coordination or cooperation with them.

Ms. JOHNSON. The President just sent over a rescission bill that will defund, remove funding, critical funding for the U.N. I am curious as to how this panel feels about the U.S. decreasing its financial commitment to the U.N. and what that would do to our national security interests.

Yes?

Mr. GARDINER. Thank you very much for the question.

I fully support efforts to reduce funding for the United Nations because the United Nations is riddled with corruption and inefficiency, and frequently acts against U.S. national interests.

And I think that the Trump presidency is pushing for greater accountability from the United Nations. And that is absolutely, absolutely right.

And so——

Mr. JOHNSON. Admiral, how do you feel about that?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I am uncomfortable with the rescission plan with the United Nations, but more, more so with the reduction in USAID funding for, particularly I study the cyber capability capacity building that we have been doing in Eastern Europe and in the Balkans, and I think the cutting of that funding, the reduction in that funding will make us, it will make it much more difficult for U.S. forces to operate, to move in and through these countries as we like to do with our forces.

So, we have to be very careful with these reductions and our overseas assistance. If they have a legitimate national security value, they should be maintained. And when you eliminate 100 percent of everything, I tend to think you really didn't do a legitimate review.

Ms. JOHNSON. I couldn't agree with you more.

Thank you all so much for your testimony. I am out of time and I yield back.

Mr. SELF. With that, I recognize the representative from Illinois, Mr. Schneider.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for allowing me to join this hearing. And to our witnesses, I appreciate your insights.

You all used similar imagery. You talked about NATO as the beating heart, the bedrock, the bulwark. That was very consistent.

Ambassador Smith, you also spoke about a trust deficit. And I will paraphrase, but many governments are worried that the U.S. commitment to NATO is conditional or transactional.

Are European allies right to worry about the U.S., Ambassador Smith?

Ms. SMITH. Well, I will tell you, having just got back from Spain a couple of days ago, and having the opportunity to meet with a number of allies across Europe, there is a real concern that the United States right now is unpredictable, and that its position both on Ukraine and on the NATO alliance is entirely unclear. They do not like that unpredictability and worry about whether or not U.S. leadership will continue.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I am going to ask for my time back because I want to move on to other things.

But, Dr. Gardiner, right to worry?

Mr. GARDINER. If I could respond to that, actually. I have met with dozens and dozens of European here at Washington over the past few months, and also been to several European capitals recently. And the message from our European friends is that President Trump is actually applying the right kind of pressure on NATO to increase defense spending to do more.

He is really shaking up the trans-Atlantic alliance in a very positive way. And I have not, I have not heard the negativity that you are——

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And I have got it covered, so I appreciate that.

Mr. GARDINER [continuing]. that you are referring to.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Rear Admiral Montgomery?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. So, I don't think this has been a wise maneuver, just like I didn't think it was wise to pull out of Afghanistan without informing our NATO allies. I think we have about a 5-year streak right now of being too unpredictable and too unfocused on the actual rapacious authoritarians staring us in the face.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And if I can pick up from there.

I remember the images from Bucha: the bodies in the street, the hands tied behind backs, the faces of ordinary people, men, women, and children massacred in cold blood by Russian troops. Russia's goal was not just to seize territory, it was to extinguish a nation, to remind those still under its power that resistance is fatal, and to warn those who escape that their safety was not assured.

There was no ambiguity. It was terror. It was annihilation. And it was specifically staged for the world to see. And the world responded.

NATO reinforced its eastern flank. Our allies rose to the moment. And for the time, I would argue, so did we.

But I think at this moment the United States is drifting. Not drifting, we are actually being led away, led away from principle toward paralysis. The President has remained silent as Russia renews its campaign of drone strikes against civilians. He has not condemned the atrocities. He has not mobilized support. He has not led.

And many in Congress, including some of my colleagues who are on the other side today, have followed that example. They speak, of Ukraine's cause but shrink from its defense. They block aid, delay action, and offer platitudes in place of policy. Some have mistaken political convenience for principle, or they have lost both.

We are once again at a point of strategic and moral clarity. Ukraine is not asking for our troops, it is asking for our resolve. NATO is not demanding escalation, it is asking for consistency.

Each day that the United States hesitates, NATO's deterrence is tested, and not only in Kyiv, but in Warsaw, Tallinn, and beyond. And if Ukraine chooses to pursue NATO membership, as we promised in 2008, as Ukraine as part of an agreement to relinquish its nuclear weapons, as part of the family of nations, there has to be a clear and credible path forward for Ukraine, who has made sacrifice, who has bravely fought the Russians.

We need to honor our commitments and admit that door to NATO remains open to free nations, not just Ukraine but free nations who meet its obligations and share its values.

So, my question, I will turn to Ambassador Smith again. Bucha was a moment of clarity. The President has been silent on Bucha, been silent on the new campaign, Russia's new campaign of drone strikes against civilians. He told Zelenskyy that he had no cards to play in the Oval Office. I can only imagine what Zelenskyy was thinking, knowing that there were plenty of cards left to play, as we saw this weekend.

What does the President's silence communicate to our NATO allies, and to Moscow in particular?

Ms. SMITH. It has led to uncertainty about whether or not the U.S. is clear-eyed here about who is the aggressor and who is the

victim. The U.S. needs to State repeatedly that Russia is the aggressor and Ukraine is the victim.

We must apply more pressure on Russia to move toward peace, but we also have to ensure that the Ukrainians don't have any limits on the size of their forces or whether or not they can build a future force so that this doesn't happen again.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. I am over time.

As has been noted here, NATO came to the United States' aid under Article 5 after we were attacked on September 11th. NATO has led the way in ensuring that Ukraine is able to defend itself against aggression from Russia. There is no dispute. There should be no question. We have to be clear that that was the case.

I appreciate the witnesses' testimony. And I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the representative from Delaware, Mr. McBride.

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Chairman, I request 30 seconds to make a unanimous statement.

Mr. SELF. You are recognized, Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Last hearing you referred to Representative McBride as representative, and I can't fathom how you just can't continue to do that. In any case, it is obvious to me that Representative McBride wants to focus on the job she was elected to do.

So, going forward, every time you do this she will demonstrate who she is, and you will demonstrate who you are.

With that, let us focus back on the hearing.

Ms. MCBRIDE. Thank you, Ranking Member Keating. I am indeed here to talk about strengthening our national security by bolstering our NATO alliance because democracy is under attack, both in the U.S. and around the world.

NATO, grounded in shared cultural values with our trans-Atlantic allies, plays a vital role in defending democracy and sustaining the U.S.-led democratic world order that protects our freedoms every single day.

NATO has been a defender of democracy both at home and in Europe for over 75 years, fostering both one of the longest periods of peace between great powers in human history, and the greatest expansion of freedom and individual liberty ever.

On the global stage, this administration is attacking our NATO allies Denmark and Canada, canceling foreign aid without notice, and defending Putin's illegal war in Ukraine.

Most dangerously, this administration is undermining Article 5 in explicit ways. But the threat to NATO and to the security it has fostered is even more insidious than just that.

Here at home we are seeing a democratic backsliding and dangerous illiberalism take hold. When due process is infringed upon and the First Amendment is trampled upon we are not simply violating domestic norms and constitutional freedoms, we are communicating to Vladimir Putin that we no longer cherish the shared values that underpin our commitment to NATO.

We communicate we aren't willing to defend democracy here at home and, in so doing, that we are not willing to defend it overseas, that democracy and individual liberty are not principles that we will fight for.

And this is part and parcel of a broader global project aimed at dismantling democratic institutions and shifting toward totalitarianism.

NATO is and has been a crucial alliance for our shared national security goals and our shared values. And I intend to work with this committee, with serious members on this committee to ensure that we remain a leader and supporter of NATO's mission.

So, my question for you, Ambassador Smith, as someone who has represented the U.S. in Europe, I am curious what long-term strategic consequences could arise if the perception takes hold globally that the United States is retreating from our democratic values, and how could that impact NATO's unity, its mission, and its effectiveness?

Ms. SMITH. Well, thank you very much, Representative, for that question.

Look, the NATO alliance is rooted fundamentally in our shared values. And our shared values starts and ends with a commitment to democracy, to the rule of law, to human rights, et cetera.

And, so, if we have a situation where certain allies are starting to question America's fundamental commitment to those democratic values, the foundation of the alliance simply won't hold. So, the United States needs to not only continue to ensure that it leads this alliance as it has done for now 76 years, but it has to be the beacon on those democratic values. Without it, the NATO project, again, simply doesn't work.

And it would be ultimately a win for China, for Russia, for Iran, for North Korea, and others to see the collapse of those shared values. So, the U.S. has a key role in maintaining them.

Ms. MCBRIDE. So, I want to build off of that point, Ambassador, specifically around the message it sends to China and Russia.

You know, I touched on in my opening comments how a receding of democratic norms, and values, and rights here in the United States could communicate to Vladimir Putin that we are less committed to the values that underpin NATO. So, I would love to hear your perspective on how that illiberalism here, how that democratic backsliding here could potentially embolden Vladimir Putin?

Ms. SMITH. Well, we can't do anything, Representative, to signal to Moscow that we are backsliding on any of those core values. And we have to ensure that America's commitment to the alliance is ironclad.

It is there, NATO is there to defend our shared values. We do not want to give Russia any impression that we are backing away from that commitment.

Ms. MCBRIDE. And then, finally, you know, in terms of NATO's unity, I would love to hear a little bit more from you, Ambassador, about the public attacks by U.S. leaders on longstanding NATO allies, and how that is impacting or potentially could impact cohesion and mutual trust within NATO?

Ms. SMITH. Well, look, we have been in this alliance for 76 years, and we argue all the time. I am here to tell you, as the U.S. Ambassador I spent each and every week having debates, fierce debates, sometimes shouting debates with our closest allies. That is the way it goes in the alliance. It is like a family. Everyone feels comfortable arguing.

But what you don't want to do is let those fierce debates internally boil over and give leaders around the world, autocrats, the feeling that NATO unity is cracking. You have to take those arguments head on but work toward unity.

And what I want to see is this administration re-assuming and taking on that leadership role in the alliance, calling out Russia for its aggression and indiscriminate attacks on civilians inside Ukraine, and putting maximum pressure, not just on Iran, but maximum pressure on the Russians.

Ms. MCBRIDE. Thank you.

I am over time. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. The ranking member has agreed that we will have a second round.

So, I recognize myself for 5 minutes. And I will start out. I have got a potpourri of questions here.

But, Dr. Gardiner, you responded to that last, and I thought you wanted to give a response to one of those last questions. If you will take a few seconds.

Mr. GARDINER. Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And I would like to respond to the, to the remarks made by Representative McBride because I think the, the comments there were absolutely ridiculous. And the attack on the United States as a nation supposedly backsliding on democracy bears no relation whatsoever to, to reality.

And I am proud to live in the freest nation on earth. And the United States fights every day for freedom and democracy across the world. And I find it absolutely astonishing that a Member of Congress would compare the United States to Putin's Russia.

And the United States today is the beacon of democracy and freedom in the world. And we see that on a daily basis. And I just want to mention on the record that I find it absolutely appalling that a Member of Congress makes astonishing attacks on the United States, full of lies, that carries no relation whatsoever to reality.

American leadership is incredibly powerful on the world stage right now. And the United States is leading the NATO alliance based upon the principles of freedom, and democracy, and individual liberty. We are seeing that.

And we should be proud of that record, instead of trying to tear America down, as the left does all the time. We should be proud of everything this great nation stands for, and that includes at its very heart the freedom and liberty that is the foundation of this great nation. Thank you.

Mr. SELF. Thank you.

And to get back to some of the details, I would like your opinion, Dr. Gardiner, of the arrest warrant for Dodik and the potential impact on the Western Balkans, and their refusal to carry through with that arrest warrant.

Mr. GARDINER. Yes. Actually, on that particular issue I am going to defer to my colleague Mr. Montgomery, who I think has a more detailed—

Mr. SELF. Admiral.

Mr. GARDINER [continuing]. understanding of that particular issue. Thank you.

Admiral MONTGOMERY. I do think it is a—thank you, Nile—I will tell you, I am not optimistic that the arrest warrant will be executed. I am confident that Dodik is a criminal and should be held accountable.

And I am afraid I think I share your sentiment concerning the previous questions, Nile, that the Balkans are a tinderbox, and that our inability to hold Vucic and Dodik accountable is eventually going to lead to inflammation and a deeper requirement for European and, potentially, America, the United States, to get involved.

So, I wish it would be executed properly. I suspect it won't, sir.

Mr. SELF. Okay, very good. We had a very short conversation about the Suwalki Gap. That is in my mind the second most important issue facing NATO.

So, would you give us a tutorial on the Suwalki Gap and the Kaliningrad enclave and what that enclave represents to Russia?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. Well, as a retired Army officer, I am not surprised you bring that up. But I agree with you completely, the Suwalki Gap is a narrow throat that Russia would like to grab in order to bring itself with, Greater Russia with Belarus, in contact with the Kaliningrad Oblast, which is the most heavily fortified geographic position in the world.

Despite the war in Ukraine, the Russians have not backed off one iota from packing weapons systems into there that hold Poland and the Baltic states at risk. The ability to close that I think 60 kilometer gap would be very rapid in war. But I believe the Russians can do that. And, certainly, with what they have learned in Ukraine they will be able to do that.

So, I share your concern about the Suwalki Gap. This is one of those issues where Europe and NATO need to be thinking very hard about how you persistently deter Russia from being able to do that.

I do not think you can get the weapons systems there five, six, 7 days after the fact. It will be lost by then. And the Baltic states and Poland share your concern.

Mr. SELF. And my last point in my last 30 seconds is FMS reform. We have a great need to reform FMS. And I will just make that point on the record. We have still billions of dollars behind in weapons systems that Taiwan has already paid for. Saudi Arabia stands in front of Taiwan for the Harpoon missiles, having paid for the re-start.

So, it is something we cannot take our eye off the ball. Ambassador, you mentioned the defense industrial base. FMS reform I think is vital for the future of everything we have been talking about.

With that, I yield my time. And I recognize Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There is a lot of misinformation, I believe, that is going around the U.S. and around the world regarding the commitment of our NATO allies, our European allies, in fact, the 50 country allies that all are working to, as one, to defeat Russian aggression in Ukraine.

So, I would like, Ambassador, could you take some time and straighten the record out here. I mean, the contribution from Europe is extraordinary. And so, if you could take some time and correct some of those misconceptions.

Ms. SMITH. Yes. Thank you very much. There are some folks out there that believe that the U.S. has been supporting Ukraine over these last three-and-a-half years largely in isolation. And that is simply not the case. Our European allies have given an enormous amount of support to Ukraine. They have housed millions of refugees, they have provided critical economic and humanitarian support.

But they have sent weapons. Some countries have sent them everything they had. The Baltics, the Poles, a country like Romania that sent essentially all of its air defense, these contributions have been critical to what Ukraine has been able to do to defend its territory against Russian aggression.

So, I completely appreciate your point. I think it is important for folks to understand that this has been an effort not just with our European allies but with 50 countries around the world.

Secretary Austin, when he was Secretary of Defense, regularly convened 50 countries from around the world, including friends in the Indo-Pacific, to each month send more critical support to our friends in Ukraine. One of those meetings is happening today. And the U.S. Secretary of Defense will not be attending the UDCG, the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

That is a shame in my mind. It is a group that requires U.S. leadership at the highest levels. And the United States started this group and it needs to continue to lead it.

Mr. KEATING. Yes, the Contact Group is essential. And, in fact, it is a way the U.S. is leveraging, you know, their assets around the world, too. And so, I think it is critical in that regard.

I also wanted to just touch base. The Russian elections that occurred where they voted to have legitimate control over areas of Ukraine in violation of every international law that you could think of. How would you categorize those elections?

Ms. SMITH. Well, it is a pretty short answer, Representative: it was a sham. And we cannot allow this to stand. In my mind, we cannot allow Russia to come in and make these assumptions and claims that the Zelenskyy administration is somehow a Nazi regime, that this territory that they are currently occupying belongs to Russia, that they have a right to own Crimea. None of this adheres to Ukraine's very clear territorial integrity and sovereignty. And we have to continue to stand up and push back against those types of Russian assertions.

Mr. KEATING. Speaking of elections, in World War II martial law declared in the U.K. They did not have elections then.

Ms. SMITH. Correct. Correct.

Mr. KEATING. And it is somewhat similar with—

Ms. SMITH. So, yes.

Mr. KEATING [continuing]. the Ukraine Constitution.

Ms. SMITH. Right. Right now under martial law.

Mr. KEATING. There is martial law.

Ms. SMITH. They are not voting. Yes.

Mr. KEATING. Martial law was called because of the Russian aggression.

Ms. SMITH. Because of the war. Correct.

Mr. KEATING. Their constitution would not allow that even if they wanted to have that; is that correct?

Ms. SMITH. Indeed.

Mr. KEATING. Admiral Montgomery, I don't think we spent enough time talking about Putin and who he really is. You mentioned that in some of your remarks. And we are looking at this negotiation that is going on which is, you know, negotiations are always a good thing. Talking is always a good thing.

But how would you categorize Putin's response to these negotiations?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. The offer in Istanbul last week was an insult to President Trump. President Trump has told President Putin several times, come to the table with a serious deal. And he has told him stop doing the, you know, Vladimir, stop doing the bombing.

I thought there was a potential this time, there would be a reasonable response. But, instead, it was, you know, just a laundry list of every illegitimate Russian claim to Ukraine, and every ridiculous request that they basically neuter themselves, demilitarize, and take no western support.

It was an absolute insult to President Trump, who has given President Putin more than enough time to come to the right answer.

Mr. KEATING. Great.

My time is expired. I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the representative from Nevada, Ms. Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

Admiral, the Trump administration was not that one that eliminated the Global Engagement Center but, rather, you, pointing in this direction, I said it wasn't me, but you meant Congress simply allowed it to expire.

Now, the White House Republicans did indeed refuse to include the extension of sunset in the Fiscal Year National Defense Authorization Act. And based on some sense to debunk conspiracy theories.

But the Biden administration tried to keep their work going by putting this mandate in the State Department's Counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Office, the R/FIMI.

Now, unfortunately, then on April the 16th Secretary Rubio announced the closure of that office as a way to, and I quote, "champion free speech." Now, since you asserted that Congress failed in its decision to not reauthorize the GEC, do you also believe that the Trump administration failed in its decision to close the R/FIMI?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. So, and I know your staff will go do more research, and you will read that I have written three articles condemning the closure of the Global Engagement Center, and President Trumps' closure of this.

I absolutely believe we need to counter disinformation. The closure of the Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI, and Department of Homeland Security's disinformation shops was equally reckless by this administration.

So, I absolutely think that we should be looking for disinformation. Russia and China are aggressively conducting cyber-enabled economic warfare and influence operations campaigns against this country.

But one final thing I will say is the most deleterious, worst information operations campaign going on in this country is the use of TikTok. TikTok, you in Congress properly banned it last year. President Biden signed it into law.

TikTok is being used by China to change the social narrative in our country to tell the 180 million 18 to 35 year olds who use it that the United States is not a great country, that China, that China's suppression of Uyghurs is Okay, that China's suppression of Taiwan is Okay, that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is Okay, and that Hamas' terrorist act against Israel is Okay.

TikTok needs to be banned. To me, that is the worst disinformation operation. But I would agree with you completely that we need a global, something like the Global Engagement Center. I have argued for it for about two-and-a-half years now.

I was just pointing out that the actual problem was Congress failing to reauthorize it.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I just wanted the record to clearly show who all was responsible, and what the whole context of the story was. And if I—if you were answering it the way I hoped you would I would take offense that you think my staff has to do my research. But you can write you own books.

But thank you for that answer.

Mr. SELF. I now recognize the representative from Illinois, Mr. Schneider.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman Self.

And before I do ask my question, Dr. Gardiner, I have to tell you I take great offense at your—respectful people, honorable people can disagree on policy. To question Democrats' commitment and patriotism is unacceptable.

I love my country. And I know my colleagues do. I am committed to the country like Rear Admiral Montgomery, Ambassador Smith, our colleagues here. We take an oath to defend the Constitution, and we do that with seriousness and integrity.

So, I take great offense. We live in a great country. We are a beacon to the world. I am the father of a Navy veteran. Like Admiral Montgomery, he was a surface warfare officer. And we can disagree. We don't need to besmirch each other's commitment to our country.

Rear Admiral Montgomery, in your opening remarks you stated, and I am going to quote you here, "I firmly believe that NATO can serve as a bulwark that brings trans-Atlantic alliance through the challenges posed by a rapacious authoritarian State, Russia, and the China-led axis of aggressors that supports and enables Russia." And I agree on that.

My question for you: is it can, or is it must? Must NATO be at that forefront?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. In my written I said "can," and in my oral I said "must," because I believe it is must.

I mean, look, there is no substitute for us. I agree with Nile and his characterization of French President Macron's initiatives here. They are going to go nowhere. It needs to be us. It needs to be NATO.

And myself, Chairman Self, others have served with NATO over 40, 50 years. We are the bulwark of democracy in Europe. And we are the only thing that is strong enough to defeat them together.

Europe has to spend more. We have to spend more. We are going to go below 3 percent in real GDP, defense spending in GDP, not the numbers that we get from some disarmament agency in Scandinavia. We are going to go below 3 percent over the next two to 3 years.

We need to get ours up. They need to get theirs up. It is the only way we can defend ourselves.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And I think it was Ambassador Smith, you talked about it, we need to do that in a coordinated way. We need to have a strategy. And a strategy follows a vision of the role of NATO, what role it plays today but also into the future.

What do you see as the role for NATO looking to the future?

Ms. SMITH. Well, I would like to see Russia—I mean, I would like to see the alliance complete that strategy on Russia. I think existing in a world where the allies can't agree on a Russia strategy doesn't bode well for the future in this huge surge of spending.

But from a more technical perspective, I think NATO can help drive co-production. We have heard a couple of great examples today.

I often point to the case of Spain, Romania, Germany, and the Netherlands coming together with Raytheon to build the GEM-T missiles for the Patriots. Those types of co-production efforts are the wave of the future. And NATO can help that happen, but not if the alliance is hemorrhaging trust and Europeans feel like they want to back away from us.

So, the U.S. has to recommit. This summit is going to be very important in terms of the signals the Trump administration is going to send. And it should, in my mind, allow the alliance to move forward both with the Russia strategy, and allow it to push forward on those joint ventures that I just mentioned.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I couldn't agree more. You answered, actually, my followup question, which is that U.S. role.

What is the impact of messages coming from the administration, the going one way on Monday, and a different way on Tuesday, and a complete reversal on Wednesday? What is the impact of getting to the strategy and the vision we need to achieve?

Ms. SMITH. Let me give you just one example of where we are with public attitudes in Europe.

In Denmark they have created this app on your phone so that you can go through the store and find U.S. products so that you can avoid them. That is where we are right now.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I attended a——

Ms. SMITH. In Denmark.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Yes. I attended a wedding in Canada last week-end, week before last, and——

Ms. SMITH. It is not good. It is not good.

Mr. SCHNEIDER [continuing]. we went in to buy a bottle of wine. There is no American alcohol in the liquor stores. And we are seeing that.

Rear Admiral Montgomery, let me give you the last word here. What is the impact of the inconsistency from the U.S. if we are

going to achieve the strategy you talked about, if NATO must lead the way?

Admiral MONTGOMERY. As a military planner, I ran our plans in U.S. European Command and our operations in the U.S. Pacific Command through my career. And the one thing that any military planner or operator wants is consistency. We need to have consistent, stable resources, operational plans, and direction from senior leadership.

In the end, the President makes the direction, and we need to flex to it. But consistency is always a preferred condition.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. SELF. I thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony, the members for their questions.

The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses. I will ask you to respond to those in writing. I will certainly have one.

Pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record, subject to the length and limitations.

Without objection, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



Chairman Brian Mast

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe
Keith Self (R-TX), Chairman

May 28, 2025

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe at 10:00 a.m. in Room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Wednesday, June 4, 2025

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

LOCATION: 2200 RHOB

SUBJECT: Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO

WITNESSES: RADM (ret.) Mark Montgomery
CCTI Senior Director and Senior Fellow
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Dr. Nile Gardiner
Director, Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom
and Bernard and Barbara Lomas Fellow
The Heritage Foundation

The Honorable Julianne Smith
Former U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO
U.S. Department of State

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF EUROPE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date June 4, 2025 Room 2200 RHOB

Starting Time 10:00 Ending Time 11:46

Recesses ☐ (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Self

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

None

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 11:46

Mag Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe
119th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO

Date: June 4, 2025

[illegible]

JD Vance

Vice President of the United States of America

One of the things that I wanted to talk about today is, of course, our shared values.

And, you know, it's great to be back in Germany. As you heard earlier, I was here last year as a United States senator. I saw Foreign Minister — excuse me, Foreign Secretary David Lammy and joked that both of us last year had different jobs than we have now.

But now it's time for all of our countries, for all of us who have been fortunate enough to be given political power by our respective peoples, to use it wisely to improve their lives.

And I want to say that, you know, I was fortunate in my time here to spend some time outside the walls of this conference over the last 24 hours, and I've been so impressed by the hospitality of the people, even, of course, as they're reeling from yesterday's horrendous attack.

And the first time I was ever in Munich was with my wife, actually, who's here with me today, on a personal trip. And I've always loved the city of Munich, and I've always loved its people.

And I just want to say that we're very moved, and our thoughts and prayers are with Munich, and everybody affected by the evil inflicted on this beautiful community. We're thinking about you, we're praying for you, and we will certainly be rooting for you in the days and weeks to come.

[...] I hope that's not the last bit of applause that I get.

We gather at this conference, of course, to discuss security. And normally, we mean threats to our external security. I see many great military leaders gathered here today.

But while the Trump administration is very concerned with European security and believes that we can come to a reasonable settlement between Russia and Ukraine, and we also believe that it's important in the coming years for Europe to step up in a big way to provide for its own defense, the threat that I worry the most about vis-à-vis Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor. And what I worry about is the threat from within, the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values — values shared with the United States of America.

Now, I was struck that a former European commissioner went on television recently and sounded delighted that the Romanian government had just annulled an entire election. He warned that if things don't go to plan, the very same thing could happen in Germany, too.

Now, these cavalier statements are shocking to American ears. For years, we've been told that everything we fund, and support is in the name of our shared democratic values.

Everything from our Ukraine policy to digital censorship is billed as a defense of democracy, but when we see European courts canceling elections and senior officials threatening to cancel others, we ought to ask whether we're holding ourselves to an appropriately high standard. And I say "ourselves" because I fundamentally believe that we are on the same team. We must do more than talk about democratic values. We must live them.

Now, within living memory of many of you in this room, the Cold War positioned defenders of democracy against much more tyrannical forces on this continent. And consider the side in that fight that censored dissidents, that closed churches, that canceled elections. Were they the good guys? Certainly not and thank God they lost the Cold War.

They lost because they neither valued nor respected all of the extraordinary blessings of liberty, the freedom to surprise, to make mistakes, to invent, to build.

As it turns out, you can't mandate innovation or creativity, just as you can't force people what to think, what to feel, or what to believe. And we believe those things are certainly connected.

And unfortunately, when I look at Europe today, it's sometimes not so clear what happened to some of the Cold War's winners.

I look to Brussels, where EU commissars warn citizens that they intend to shut down social media during times of civil unrest the moment they spot what they've judged to be, quote, 'hateful content.'

Or to this very country, where police have carried out raids against citizens suspected of posting anti-feminist comments online as part of, quote, "combating misogyny on the internet, a day of action."

I look to Sweden, where, two weeks ago, the government convicted a Christian activist for participating in Quran burnings that resulted in his friend's murder. And as the judge in his case chillingly noted, Sweden's laws to supposedly protect free expression do not, in fact, grant — and I'm quoting — "a free pass to do or say anything without risking offending the group that holds that belief."

And perhaps most concerningly, I look to our very dear friends, the United Kingdom, where the backslide away from conscience rights has placed the basic liberties of religious Britons, in particular, in the crosshairs.

A little over two years ago, the British government charged Adam Smith-Connor, a 51-year-old physiotherapist and an army veteran, with the heinous crime of standing 50 meters from an abortion clinic and silently praying for three minutes — not obstructing anyone, not interacting with anyone, just silently praying on his own.

And after British law enforcement spotted him and demanded to know what he was praying for, Adam replied, simply,

it was on behalf of the unborn son he and his former girlfriend had aborted years before.

Now, the officers were not moved. Adam was found guilty of breaking the government's new "buffer zones" law, which criminalizes silent prayer and other actions that could "influence" a person's decision within 200 meters of an abortion facility. He was sentenced to pay thousands of pounds in legal costs to the prosecution.

Now, I wish I could say that this was a fluke — a one-off, crazy example of a badly written law being enacted against a single person. But, no, this last October, just a few months ago, the Scottish government began distributing letters to citizens whose houses lay within so-called "safe access zones," warning them that even private prayer within their own homes may amount to breaking the law.

Naturally, the government urged readers to report any fellow citizens suspected guilty of thought crime.

In Britain, and across Europe, free speech, I fear, is in retreat.

And in the interest of comity, my friends, but also in the interest of truth, I will admit that sometimes the loudest voices for censorship have come not from within Europe but from within my own country, where the prior administration threatened and bullied social media companies to censor so-called misinformation — misinformation like, for example, the idea that coronavirus had likely leaked from a laboratory in China. Our own government encouraged private companies to silence people who dared to utter what turned out to be an obvious truth.

So, I come here today not just with an observation but with an offer. And just as the Biden administration seemed desperate to silence people for speaking their minds, so the Trump administration will do precisely the opposite, and I hope that we can work together on that.

In Washington, there is a new sheriff in town. And under Donald Trump's leadership, we may disagree with your views, but we will fight to defend your right to offer them in the public square, agree or disagree.

Now we're at the point, of course, that the situation has gotten so bad that, this December, Romania straight up canceled the results of a presidential election based on the flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency and enormous pressure from its continental neighbors.

Now, as I understand it, the argument was that Russian disinformation had infected the Romanian elections, but I'd ask my European friends to have some perspective. You can believe it's wrong for Russia to buy social media advertisements to influence your elections. We certainly do. You can condemn it on the world stage even. But if your democracy can be destroyed with a few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising from a foreign country, then it wasn't very strong to begin with.

Now, the good news is that I happen to think your democracies are substantially less brittle than many people apparently fear, and I really do believe that allowing our citizens to speak their mind will make them stronger still.

Which, of course, brings us back to Munich, where the organizers of this very conference have banned lawmakers representing populist parties on both the left and the right from participating in these conversations.

Now, again, we don't have to agree with everything or anything that people say, but when people represent — when political leaders represent an important constituency, it is incumbent upon us to at least participate in dialogue with them.

Now, to many of us on the other side of the Atlantic, it looks more and more like old, entrenched interests hiding behind ugly, Soviet-era words like "misinformation" and "disinformation," who simply don't like the idea that somebody with an

alternative viewpoint might express a different opinion, or, God forbid, vote a different way, or, even worse, win an election.

Now, this is a security conference, and I'm sure you all came here prepared to talk about how exactly you intend to increase defense spending over the next few years in line with some new target. And that's great, because as President Trump has made abundantly clear, he believes that our European friends must play a bigger role in the future of this continent. We don't think — you hear this term, "burden sharing," but we think it's an important part of being in a shared alliance together that the Europeans step up while America focuses on areas of the world that are in great danger.

But let me also ask you, how will you even begin to think through the kinds of budgeting questions if we don't know what it is that we're defending in the first place?

I've heard a lot already in my conversations — and I've had many, many great conversations with many people gathered here in this room — I've heard a lot about what you need to defend yourselves from, and, of course, that's important. But what has seemed a little bit less clear to me and certainly, I think, to many of the citizens of Europe, is what exactly it is that you're defending yourselves for. What is the positive vision that animates this shared security compact that we all believe is so important?

And I believe deeply that there is no security if you are afraid of the voices, the opinions, and the conscience that guide your very own people.

Europe faces many challenges, but the crisis this continent faces right now, the crisis I believe we all face together, is one of our own making.

If you're running in fear of your own voters, there is nothing America can do for you. Nor, for that matter, is there anything that you can do for the American people who elected me and elected President Trump.

You need democratic mandates to accomplish anything of value in the coming years. Have we learned nothing, that thin mandates produce unstable results? But there is so much of value that can be accomplished with the kind of democratic mandate that I think will come from being more responsive to the voices of your citizens.

If you're going to enjoy competitive economies, if you're going to enjoy affordable energy and secure supply chains, then you need mandates to govern, because you have to make difficult choices to enjoy all of these things. And, of course, we know that very well in America.

You cannot win a democratic mandate by censoring your opponents or putting them in jail — whether that's the leader of the opposition, a humble Christian praying in her own home, or a journalist trying to report the news. Nor can you win one by disregarding your basic electorate on questions like who gets to be a part of our shared society.

And of all the pressing challenges that the nations represented here face, I believe there is nothing more urgent than mass migration.

Today, almost one in five people living in this country moved here from abroad. That is, of course, an all-time high. It's a similar number, by the way, in the United States — also an all-time high.

The number of immigrants who entered the EU from non-EU countries doubled between 2021 and 2022 alone. And, of course, it's gotten much higher since.

And we know the situation, it didn't materialize in a vacuum. It's the result of a series of conscious decisions made by politicians all over the continent, and others across the world, over the span of a decade.

We saw the horrors wrought by these decisions yesterday in this very city. And, of course, I can't bring it up again without

thinking about the terrible victims who had a beautiful winter day in Munich ruined. Our thoughts and prayers are with them and will remain with them. But why did this happen in the first place?

It's a terrible story, but it's one we've heard way too many times in Europe and, unfortunately, too many times in the United States as well: an asylum-seeker, often a young man in his mid-20s, already known to police, rams a car into a crowd and shatters a community.

How many times must we suffer these appalling setbacks before we change course and take our shared civilization in a new direction?

No voter on this continent went to the ballot box to open the floodgates to millions of unvetted immigrants. But you know what they did vote for? In England, they voted for Brexit. And agree or disagree, they voted for it. And more and more, all over Europe, they're voting for political leaders who promise to put an end to out-of-control migration.

Now, I happen to agree with a lot of these concerns, but you don't have to agree with me. I just think that people care about their homes. They care about their dreams. They care about their safety and their capacity to provide for themselves and their children.

And they're smart. I think this is one of the most important things I've learned in my brief time in politics. Contrary to what you might hear a couple mountains over in Davos, the citizens of all of our nations don't generally think of themselves as educated animals or as interchangeable cogs of a global economy, and it's hardly surprising that they don't want to be shuffled about or relentlessly ignored by their leaders.

And it is the business of democracy to adjudicate these big questions at the ballot box.

I believe that dismissing people, dismissing their concerns, or, worse yet, shutting down media, shutting down elections, or shutting people out of the political process protects nothing. In fact, it is the most surefire way to destroy democracy.

And speaking up and expressing opinions isn't election interference, even when people express views outside your own country, and even when those people are very influential.

And trust me, I say this with all humor, if American democracy can survive 10 years of Greta Thunberg's scolding, you guys can survive a few months of Elon Musk.

But what German democracy — what no democracy, American, German, or European — will survive is telling millions of voters that their thoughts and concerns, their aspirations, their pleas for relief are invalid or unworthy of even being considered.

Democracy rests on the sacred principle that the voice of the people matters. There is no room for firewalls. You either uphold the principle or you don't.

Europeans, the people have a voice. European leaders have a choice. And my strong belief is that we do not need to be afraid of the future.

You can embrace what your people tell you, even when it's surprising, even when you don't agree. And if you do so, you can face the future with certainty and with confidence, knowing that the nation stands behind each of you.

And that, to me, is the great magic of democracy. It's not in these stone buildings or beautiful hotels. It's not even in the great institutions that we have built together as a shared society.

To believe in democracy is to understand that each of our citizens has wisdom and has a voice. And if we refuse to listen to that voice, even our most successful fights will secure very little.

As Pope John Paul II — in my view, one of the most extraordinary champions of democracy on this continent or any other — once said, “Do not be afraid.”

We shouldn’t be afraid of our people, even when they express views that disagree with their leadership.

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Europe
“Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO”
June 4, 2025
RADM (ret.) Mark Montgomery
Rep. Self**

Question 1:

You mentioned that “One of NATO’s greatest vulnerabilities remains the Suwalki Gap,” and that a pre-positioned NATO forces in the Baltics are a necessary deterrence to a potential corridor cut-off by Russia.

What does the current landscape of NATO forces in the Baltics look like, and what may be needed to bolster these forces to deter a Russian takeover of the Suwalki Gap?

First, do no harm: Keep U.S. forces currently there in place. The answer to Russia’s challenge is not for the United States to do less, but for Europe to do more.

Europe can do more – First, expand UK-led battlegroup in Estonia, which is the only Baltic state that has yet to secure a commitment for its eFP battlegroup to be expanded to brigade size (per 2022 summit decision). The Canada-led battlegroup in Latvia was scaled up to brigade-size in 2024, and the German-led battlegroup in Lithuania is in process of doing so. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

In this vein, the United States Could also permanently enhance U.S.-led battlegroup in Poland to brigade size.

Additionally, we should follow through on July 2024 U.S.-Germany statement on deployment of long-range fires in Germany <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/07/10/joint-statement-from-united-states-and-germany-on-long-range-fires-deployment-in-germany/>

Finally, the United States could consider making more of its forces in Europe permanently stationed forces rather than rotational deployments (this would reduce optempo (deploy to dwell) impacts and would also be cheaper.

Question 2:

One of your recommendations to NATO is to appoint a US officer as the next Supreme Allied Commander of Europe, a precedent that has been kept since World War 2. I have no doubt that whoever replaces outgoing SACEUR General Chris Cavoli will have big shoes to fill.

In addition to being a US officer, could you go deeper as to what traits, experience, and qualifications the next SACEUR should possess?

The SACEUR Commander should be a joint and coalition experienced officer with significant operational and planning assignments.

The officer nominated by the President – LtGen Alexis Grynkeiwich has all of the skills needed. He worked with me at U.S. European Command for nearly there years as a young Colonel (he was the J35) and I have watched him develop into a great future Combatant Commander.

We are lucky to have such a superb officer.

Question 3:

Non-monetary challenges such as insufficient manufacturing capacity, the time to develop such capacity, and the supply shortfalls that come with it are major issues within the Defense Industrial Base that cannot be fixed by merely throwing more money at the problem. In fact, in Ms. Smith's testimony, she attested that "more money alone will not fix the fragmentation of Europe's defense industrial base." I agree with her point.

What is your proposed solution to overcoming these non-monetary challenges within the DIB?

There are several non-monetary solutions that can help address the overall issue of insufficient manufacturing capacity. My colleagues at FDD, Bradley Bowman and Ryan Brobst, have published a major report on the defense industrial base entitled "[Arsenal of Democracy](#)." It contains many recommendations on how to strengthen the American defense industrial base. Many of their recommendations could and should be adopted by our NATO allies. Our allies can take several steps before production begins to reduce the time between the decision to procure a system and receiving final delivery. Reforming and expediting decision making and defense contracting processes, which can sometimes drag on for many months or even years, and are often defined by legal statutes and government policies, should be a top priority and is independent of manufacturing capacity. Too often, governments have prioritized risk mitigation and savings over speed and scale, which ultimately draws out the procurement cycle and may actually increase long-term costs. Additionally, consistent with the "Arsenal of Democracy" monograph's recommendations, NATO countries should seek to procure the maximum available quantities from industry for key systems and munitions and require prime contractors to submit plans to increase maximum production capacity, including the necessary steps, challenges, predicted timelines, and respective costs, as to better understand the roadmap to increasing capacity, as Bowman and Brobst argue.

Awarding more multiyear procurement contracts can create certainty for industry and incentivize private investment that can increase production capacity and speed delivery timelines. Reliance on the “just-in-time” model, combined with small and irregular orders, eroded the defense industrial base over time. Once contracts are awarded, licensing the production of sub-components to multiple companies can turn the duplication of some defense production capabilities across Europe from a liability into an asset by allowing the rapid scaling of certain in-demand segments of weapons systems.

However, there is a significant monetary component to addressing manufacturing capacity and supply chains. Many items, such as advanced sensors, engines, and explosives, have few or no civilian applications. If countries are not purchasing these items consistently at scale from industry, it is no surprise that production capacity is lacking or non-existent. Many of the challenges and shortcomings we see in the defense industrial bases of allies are a result of a long-term failure to spend enough on defense and there is no substitute for increased defense spending when it comes to increasing defense industrial capacity. Let's hope NATO member countries honor their defense spending commitments from the summit this month. Delaying investment now will only delay the ramp up of production.

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Europe
“Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO”
June 4, 2025**

Dr. Nile Gardiner

**Response to Additional Questions
Rep. Self**

Question 1:

Dr. Gardiner, how would you assess the threat level of efforts by some of our European counterparts to move away from the US and closer to the PRC?

Answer: While the open infiltration of PRC influence into the economies and societies of our European allies has diminished from its 2010s peak, there remain concerns over critical infrastructure security (especially ports and telecommunications) and investment screening on the Eastern flank of Europe. Further, Europe’s aggressive transition from reliable fossil fuels to expensive and unreliable renewables, besides undermining their industrial base, increases their energy dependence on Communist China.

Question 2:

As you are probably aware, a court in Bosnia issued an international arrest warrant for Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik who is accused of attacking the constitutional order and for traveling abroad in defiance.

What are the implications for this arrest warrant as it pertains to stability in the Western Balkans?

Answer: Mr. Dodik has facilitated Russia’s nefarious goal of destabilizing Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Montenegro, a NATO member. However, this crisis also exposes the failed thirty-year and multi-billion-dollar nation building effort that has eroded the Dayton Accords’ equal protections to Serbs, Croats and Muslims by centralizing government authority into the hands of a radicalized Muslim majority. The U.S. government should step in to restore these protections and end this nation-building disaster.

Question 3:

As Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, one of my gravest concerns for the future of the continent is the instability of the Western Balkans.

Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Christopher G. Cavoli reported to me that the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina could collapse overnight.

Then, you have the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo, with several of our NATO allies who took part in our 1999 bombing mission on Serbia now refusing to recognize Kosovo's independence. Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain do not recognize Kosovo as an independent state. In fact, Spain was a member of NATO when we conducted the mission, and we added Romania to NATO to help stabilize the Balkans.

Why are these four NATO members holding up the stability of the region by refusing to recognize Kosovo as an independent state?

Answer: The four NATO members mentioned each have contested territorial boundaries or contain internal groups who have pushed for independence and therefore see recognition of Kosovo's independence as weakening their case for national sovereignty. Greece continues to claim sovereignty over Cyprus which is split between Greece and Turkey along a line of control. Romanian leaders have, at different times, claimed sovereignty over Moldova and parts of Ukraine in contestation of post-World War II decisions. In the context of fractious Balkan history, Slovakia does not recognize Kosovo to avoid giving their minority populations a window to push for autonomy. Catalan and Basque separatist groups continue to agitate for independence from Spain to this day, so Madrid does not recognize Kosovo's independence to avoid creating a precedent those groups might cite.

Question 4:

Non-monetary challenges such as insufficient manufacturing capacity, the time to develop such capacity, and the supply shortfalls that come with it are major issues within the Defense Industrial Base that cannot be fixed by merely throwing more money at the problem. In fact, in Ms. Smith's testimony, she attested that "more money alone will not fix the fragmentation of Europe's defense industrial base." I agree with her point.

What is your proposed solution to overcoming these non-monetary challenges within the DIB?

Answer: Defense industrial base fragmentation is an important issue, which was why I welcome The Hague Summit Declaration's call to "rapidly expand transatlantic defence industrial cooperation" and "eliminate defence trade barriers among Allies." To support this goal and overcome fragmentation, Congress should reform America's International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) and the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process to streamline approvals for allied countries. By reducing the red tape and speeding up the process, our NATO allies will not be forced to look for alternative weapons suppliers as often, which would reduce fragmentation. Additionally, expanding codevelopment and coproduction efforts by building on the lessons of F-35 and NASAMS efforts with our European allies would reinforce common platforms, munitions, and standards while diversifying the supplier base across transatlantic partners.

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Europe
“Assessing the Challenges Facing NATO”
June 4, 2025
The Honorable Julianne Smith
Rep. Self**

Question 1:

Non-monetary challenges such as insufficient manufacturing capacity, the time to develop such capacity, and the supply shortfalls that come with it are major issues within the Defense Industrial Base that cannot be fixed by merely throwing more money at the problem. In fact, in Ms. Smith’s testimony, she attested that “more money alone will not fix the fragmentation of Europe’s defense industrial base.” I agree with her point.

What is your proposed solution to overcoming these non-monetary challenges within the DIB?

Answer:

Overcoming non-monetary challenges within the Defense Industrial Base (DIB) in Europe will require greater coordination among European governments. Those governments should establish multi-year procurement plans that give industry predictable demand signals, incentivize co-production and joint ventures across borders to reduce fragmentation, and streamline export controls and regulatory barriers. Investing in workforce development and advanced manufacturing technologies is another important way to scale capacity over time. Ultimately, the solution lies in building trust and long-term partnerships between governments and industry.