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*MD Rakib Jahan & Stéfanie von Hlatky*

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June 2025

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## Introduction

Last year, NATO was marking its 75th anniversary in Washington, D.C. Against the backdrop of the U.S. Presidential election, the mood was celebratory but cautious, with the expectation that a Trump win could mean the end of NATO. With Trump back in office, the upcoming NATO Summit in The Hague on June 24–25, 2025, is therefore a significant event with regards to American engagement with the Alliance. This gathering also comes at a critical juncture for Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia's closer partnership with China, the proliferation of threats in the cyber and information domains, and more heated debates about defence expenditures and burden-sharing. The point of the Hague Summit, like all NATO summits, is to exhibit the unity and resolve of allies, while articulating clear signals, to adversaries and partners alike, about prevailing threats and NATO responses. The 2025 summit will also be a critical platform for the reaffirmation of NATO's foundational purpose: the collective defence of its members, as established in the 1949 Treaty. At the same time, it signifies the Alliance's constant commitment to the foundational principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. For Canada, the summit will be an opportunity to advance its own understanding of Arctic security, to strengthen transatlantic connections amidst its strained relationship with the United States, and to convey a credible defence investment plan.

## Setting the Stage: Context and Background

The 2025 NATO Summit will take place at the World Forum in The Hague, representing a momentous inaugural event for the Netherlands as a host nation. NATO Secretary General and former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte emphasized its importance from both a national and allied perspective: “The Netherlands is a founding member of NATO and makes critical contributions to the deterrence and defence of the Alliance.” The 2025 NATO Summit will be the largest diplomatic and

logistical operation in Dutch history, with 27,000 police officers, 5,000 military, and several governmental entities mobilized to protect over 6,000 delegates, including 45 heads of state (Cluskey 2025; Government of the Netherlands 2024). The effort, led by Pieter-Jaap Aalbersberg, the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), targets not just physical security but also the expanding risks of cyberattacks, espionage, and disinformation (Dutch News 2025). In response to mounting threats, the Netherlands has stepped up its counter-disinformation operations.

On almost all fronts, the summit in The Hague is much harder to predict. While last year's NATO summit delivered impressive achievements, some important decisions may have lost favour with the United States. In 2024, allies expressed their support for Ukraine's “irreversible path” to NATO membership, discussed China's role as a “decisive enabler” of Russia's war and committed to maintain substantial defence contributions (NATO 2024g; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission 2024; NATO 2024a). The Trump administration has repeatedly countered NATO commitments and claims since returning to office. Trump even threatened to withdraw U.S. support to Ukraine during his tense February 28, 2025, Oval Office meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy (Baker 2025; Liptak et al. 2025). Trump defied Zelenskyy, saying “You are either going to make a deal or we're out, and if we're out, you'll have to fight it out, and I don't think it's going to be pretty” (Baker 2025). Trump then instructed Zelenskyy to “come back when he is ready for peace” (Hutzler 2025), which significantly undermined NATO's united front on Ukraine, a factor that will play out at the summit.

## Current Security Environment

The geopolitical landscape pertaining to the summit is influenced, first and foremost, by Russia's ongoing conflict with Ukraine, which has now persisted for four years. NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept states that “The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security

and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area” (NATO 2022, 4). The NATO foreign ministers meeting in April 2025 underscored the ongoing significance of aiding Ukraine through both political and practical measures. The establishment of the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), a new multinational command located in Wiesbaden, Germany, represents a key development in this respect. Consisting of around 700 individuals, NSATU is responsible for organizing military assistance, supervising the training of Ukrainian troops, and facilitating the long-term enhancement of Ukraine’s defence capabilities. This new organization signifies a substantial transition from the previous U.S.-led approach to a more expansive NATO-led one (Shape 2024). Since the Washington Summit, the centre of gravity for coordinating aid to Ukraine has shifted from the U.S to European member states.

A recurring theme of NATO summits is for Europe and Canada to assume greater responsibility for collective defence, particularly by augmenting defence expenditures, a commitment that many allies have repeatedly made but failed to entirely fulfill (NATO 2025). As a founding NATO member with a distinct Arctic identity and a reliable contributor to allied operations, Canada is strategically positioned to impact critical decisions but will lack credibility if it does not deliver a credible plan on defence spending, keeping pace with its allies. On June 9, 2025, Prime Minister Carney accelerated the pace of defence spending to reach the 2% benchmark by 2026, but this is already two years late and the defence investment pledge is a moving target (Carney 2025).

In addition to the immediate threat posed by Russia, the alliance confronts complex problems that expose the increasingly intertwined security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic regions. The conflict in Ukraine exemplifies this increasing interdependence, as China, North Korea, and Iran actively support Russia’s military campaign. China has rendered essential assistance by ignoring sanctions and supplying dual-use commodities. The 2024 Washington Summit recognized that “The deepening strategic partnership between Russia and the PRC and

their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut and reshape the rules-based international order are a cause for profound concern” (NATO 2024h). North Korea has dispatched troops and acquired advanced technology in exchange, posing a danger to both NATO and Indo-Pacific security. The convergence of these challenges has compelled NATO to implement a more holistic and global security strategy, strengthening partnerships with Indo-Pacific countries and expanding its conceptual framework regarding contemporary concerns, such as hybrid warfare, technology disruption, and climate security (Allison 2025). To this end, we can expect all of NATO’s Indo-Pacific partners to attend the Summit, as it has been the case in the recent past.

## Key Summit Expectations

### *Defence Spending and Burden-Sharing: Canada’s Position*

Defence expenditure is anticipated to be a highly contentious topic at the 2025 Summit, with mounting pressure on all allies to adopt a new defence investment pledge, above and beyond the previously agreed upon 2% of GDP. Considering the U.S. Administration’s pressure on allies to allocate 5% of their GDP to Defence budgets, we can expect the new target to land around the 3-3.5% mark, with additional specifications on dual-use infrastructure and technology (Sharp 2025). The Trump administration will also put pressure on allies for these new defence investments to translate into contracts for American defence companies. Canada and European allies may have other plans in mind, however, especially as uncertainty builds with regards to the American commitment to NATO. While transatlantic burden-sharing is a recurring topic of discussion for NATO, the way Trump is revisiting the issue has created doubts about the viability of U.S. security assurances in Europe. The European Union’s ReArm initiative, which promises up to €800 billion in defence spending by 2030 could upend patterns of defence procurement and acquisition within NATO.

A “rapid deterioration of the geopolitical context and rising tensions,” according to the European Commission, led by Russia’s continuing conflict against Ukraine and wider strategic rivalry, prompted the creation of the ReArm Europe Plan. Aiming to guarantee “Europe has a strong and sufficient European defence posture by 2030 at the latest,” the strategy is detailed in the March 19, 2025, Joint White Paper on European military - Readiness 2030. “Support for Ukraine is the immediate and most pressing task for European defence,” the European Commission states categorically, describing the country as “the frontline of European defence” opposing Russian aggression (European Commission 2025a, 2). In doing so, the EU has acknowledged that transatlantic agreements can no longer be relied upon alone to provide European security. There are three main components to the ReArm plan. First, a €150 billion SAFE fund for joint procurement (European Commission 2025b). Second, the European Union’s budgetary constraints would be eased, allowing for additional defence spending of up to 1.5% of GDP (Casert 2025). Third, the defence sector in Europe will be given more access to public and private financing (European Commission 2025c). While Canada is in a bit of a double bind, when it comes to American pressure exercised in both NATO and NORAD, it would do well to position itself to be a partner of choice as the EU rolls out ReArm investments. Prime Minister Carney’s June 9, 2025 statement alludes to the need for self-sufficiency in defence, as an implication of the deteriorating relationship with the United States: “Canada requires these capabilities to uphold and assert its sovereignty and ensure our defence never becomes dependent on others again” (Carney 2025).

Indeed, Canada’s stance on defence spending has been changing and is increasingly backed up by favourable public opinion. The most recent EKOS survey from April 2025 indicates that 72% of Canadians perceive the nation’s defence expenditure as insufficient, marking an eight-point rise from the 64% reported in March 2024 (EKOS Politics 2025). A March 2025 Nanos Research survey illustrates the extent of this support, revealing that 69% of Canadians favor increasing defence spending to achieve the

NATO objective of 2% of GDP (Nanos Research 2025). Since 2015, Canada has ranked among the top five NATO allies for absolute increases in defence expenditure, yet is in the bottom tier when it comes to defence spending as a share of GDP (Prime Minister of Canada 2024). At the July 2024 NATO Washington Summit, former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and then Defence Minister Bill Blair formally announced that “Canada expects to spend two percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence by 2032” but this was too little too late (National Defence 2024d). With Prime Minister Mark Carney’s expedited pledge, aiming to achieve the NATO benchmark by 2026, Canada is still only playing catch up to a promise it made in 2014. Much of this money is for longstanding procurement projects, as detailed in the 2017 defence policy Strong, Secure, Engaged (\$60 billion for 15 Canadian Surface Combatants, \$4.98 billion for six Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships, \$19 billion for 88 F-35A fighter jets, \$3.6 billion for 16 CC-330 Husky tanker aircraft etc.) and the 2024 updated defence policy statement Our North, Strong and Free (\$2.67 billion for Arctic operational hubs in Iqaluit, Yellowknife, and Inuvik; \$1.4 billion to equip AOPS vessels with threat detection sensors; and \$60 billion for 12 conventionally-powered submarines to supplant the Victoria-class fleet) (National Defence 2024c; Pugliese 2023; Brewster 2025; National Defence 2025e; Lamberink 2025; Public Services and Procurement Canada 2024; National Defence 2024a; Eom 2024). These investments will enhance Canada’s defence posture in the Arctic as the Alliance develops a more cohesive High North Defence strategy following the accession of Finland and Sweden. By bolstering NATO’s Arctic capabilities, while taking into account Indigenous rights and environmental considerations, Canada may influence a crucial aspect of alliance policy, which is central to its national priorities.

During the Hague Summit, allies will expect even more by way of concrete commitments on defence investments and burden-sharing. Attempts to highlight military contributions to ongoing missions as a way to compensate for underinvestment in defence will not land well. Moreover, for Canada’s engagement in Latvia to be sustained, defence spending to replenish stocks



in the short term and boost its military personnel capacity in the medium term, will be essential. The most substantial contribution of Canada to NATO's eastern flank is its leadership of the Multinational Brigade Latvia (MNB-L) under Operation REASSURANCE. The brigade under this operation is committed to expanding from approximately 1,000 to 2,200 soldiers, thereby strengthening NATO's forward presence in the Baltic region (National Defence 2025c). Yet, there are still obstacles such as force generation shortfalls, equipment gaps, and logistical limitations (National Defence 2025a). In that context, it would be wise for Canada to link how its new defence investments will further bolster its ability to continue to lead the brigade in Latvia, participate in air policing missions, and develop its Arctic presence as an extension of protecting the Northern Flank (National Defence 2025c). The recent decision to purchase Switchblade loitering munitions highlights Canada's overarching commitment to modernize its operational capabilities in accordance with alliance standards (Canadian Defence Review 2025).

#### *Russia-Ukraine Conflict and NATO's Eastern Flank*

NATO's deterrence posture and Canada's role on the eastern flank have adapted with the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, which will continue to be a central focus of the 2025 Summit. The Alliance's ongoing support for Ukraine has been underscored by recent NATO meetings, as allies committed over 20 billion euros in security assistance to Ukraine in the first three months of 2025 (Sarajevo Times 2025). The Summit will address both immediate support for Ukraine and longer-term concerns about its relationship with NATO, though the language about Ukraine's membership from the previous Summit will prove more contentious this year. Indeed, the Washington Summit declaration specifically said that "the future of Ukraine is in NATO" and described its path to Ukraine's membership in NATO as "irreversible" (NATO 2024h). This path seems increasingly littered with obstacles.

Canada, for its part, has maintained its political commitment to Ukraine since the full-scale invasion

began in 2022, backed up by the provision of military and economic aid. In February 2025, then Defence Minister Bill Blair declared that Canada would provide Ukraine with additional F-16 flight simulators to facilitate pilot training and skill maintenance (Litnarovych 2025). This donation contributes to Ukraine's expanding air Defence capabilities by supplementing previous donations of simulators and Instrument Landing Systems for F-16s. Canada has also provided military training through Operation UNIFIER, a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) mission launched in 2015, to train Ukrainian security forces. As of 2024, the CAF had trained more than 44,000 Ukrainian security personnel (National Defence 2025d). Recent rotations, such as the January 2024 transition to Joint Task Force-Ukraine Rotation 17 trained 2,914 recruits in critical areas such as drone warfare and air defence integration (Daniel 2024). Joint Operation UNIFIER's emphasis on NATO-standardized tactics has significantly enhanced Ukraine's defensive capabilities, while CAF members advise Ukrainian instructors to build self-sustaining training pipelines (Ava-Pointon 2018; National Defence 2025d).

#### *Indo-Pacific Partnerships: Canada's Bridging Role*

As security challenges in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions become more interconnected, NATO's relationships with Indo-Pacific partners - Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea - have become steadily more significant. The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept openly acknowledges that "developments in the Indo-Pacific can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security," highlighting the systemic concerns presented by authoritarian coordination across regions (NATO 2022, 11). Through a range of institutionalized mechanisms, NATO has strengthened its collaboration with partners all over the world and prioritizing Indo-Pacific countries, to promote cyber defence, maritime security, and counter-disinformation collaboration (NATO 2024d; 2024f). Indo-Pacific leaders have participated in NATO summits and foreign ministerial talks on hybrid threats, defence industrial resilience, and Arctic security since 2022. Chiefs of Defence from these

countries attend NATO Military Committee meetings to coordinate planning and operations (NATO 2024f). Defence industrial-technological partnerships will also be crucial. NATO has encouraged artillery standardization with South Korea, counter-drone system development with Australia, and researching with Japanese scientists on a semiconductor-based sensing system to identify explosive chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) (Choi and Herskovitz 2024; Hendry 2024; NATO 2024e). These examples reflect NATO's global shift and the growing strategic relevance of Indo-Pacific partners.

Canada's distinctive position as both a North Atlantic and Pacific nation enables it to serve as a bridge between NATO and Indo-Pacific partners. In 2022, the Canadian government presented its Indo-Pacific Strategy, which included a commitment of \$492.9 million over the course of five years to fortify its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region and to enhance the involvement of the Canadian Armed Forces in regional military exercises (Global Affairs Canada 2022). This strategy is consistent with NATO's increasing emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region and establishes a framework for Canada's relations with significant partners in the region.

Canada prioritizes the significance of a rules-based international order, freedom of navigation, and collaborative responses to shared threats in its Indo-Pacific security strategy (Global Affairs Canada 2025). Canada has identified China as a strategic competitor and source of concern, particularly in relation to its military expansion and support for Russia, in accordance with NATO's priorities (Markiewicz 2024). Simultaneously, Canada has substantial economic connections with China and other Indo-Pacific countries, necessitating delicate balancing obligations like to those encountered by several European allies (Leblond et al. 2025). This common challenge could transform Canada into an important player and mediator between European NATO allies and Indo-Pacific partners, yet Canada probably does not have the means or diplomatic bandwidth to achieve this at present. At the very least, Canada is expected to

the means or diplomatic bandwidth to achieve this at present. At the very least, Canada is expected to promote enhanced institutional ties between NATO and Indo-Pacific countries, through improved information exchange, collaborative exercises, military industry partnerships, and synchronized responses to shared threats like as cyberattacks and disinformation.

Canada can also claim a leadership role on certain topics. The NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence (CCASCOE) in Montréal, which Canada established in 2023 and NATO formally accredited in May 2024, is a case in point (Allied Command Transformation 2024). With 12 NATO countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, contributing people and finance, Canada has pledged \$40.4 million over five years to oversee the Centre (National Defence 2025b). NATO CCASCOE is emerging as a center for climate security research by publishing a quarterly journal and co-hosting The Montreal Climate Security Summit annually to influence NATO's approach to climate-induced security challenges, while the CCASCOE Fellowship Program is encouraging a new group of climate security specialists and research vital for NATO's strategic evolution (NATO Climate Change & Security Centre of Excellence 2024; 2025). Despite this progress, the current U.S. administration's opposition toward "green" policies - illustrated by Trump's environmental and energy Executive Orders to withdraw the U.S. from UN climate agreements and abolish the Pentagon's climate initiatives - will have reverberations in the NATO context too. This continuing uncertainty may limit comprehensive transatlantic cooperation on climate-security goals, thereby limiting CCASCOE's capacity to influence NATO's strategic response. (Shah 2025; Britzky 2025; Jenks and Dewey 2025). Canada must engage in meticulous diplomacy to maintain support for CCASCOE and ensure climate security remains a priority on the Alliance's strategic agenda. Similarly, Canada has been a champion of Women, Peace and Security at NATO, guided by its feminist foreign policy. As Trump's support for WPS is uncertain (his Defense Secretary has been openly hostile), it is worth recalling that he signed the WPS Act into law during his first term in 2017. The agenda



is bound to have a lower profile than it had during the Biden administration, which means Canada will need to look to the Nordic countries or elsewhere for cooperation on WPS in the NATO context.

### *Strengthening Unity and Defence Capabilities*

As it is becoming clear, preserving and displaying NATO cohesion at the Hague Summit will be more challenging than it was during the Washington Summit. The political landscape has already shifted dramatically, but this is not only due to the election of Donald Trump. According to researchers at the RAND Corporation, “the biggest land mine for NATO is the future of European politics—the potential for extremist parties and rising ideological cleavages to shake the alliance’s unity and political foundations” (RAND 2024). Recent events have intensified apprehensions over transatlantic cooperation, as several European leaders contemplate contingency preparation for a possible “post-American NATO” future (O’Brien and Stringer 2024).

The Hague Summit must adeptly navigate through these complex political realities while reaffirming NATO’s core obligations to collective defence and transatlantic unity. Secretary General Rutte will draw insights from his predecessor Jens Stoltenberg’s efficient damage control during Trump’s first presidency, wherein Stoltenberg prioritized managing the perceptions and expectations of the mercurial president, trying to persuade him that NATO was not ‘obsolete’ (Liptak and Merica 2017). Similar to Stoltenberg, who emphasized progress in burden-sharing and achieved unprecedented gains in defence expenditure while preserving diplomatic relations, Rutte must balance direct communication with a steadfast defence of alliance values, while defending the alliance’s relevance and responding to any challenges about Article 5 commitments (NATO 2019; 2025).

Where NATO will have the United States’ attention is on increasing the collective defence industrial capacity. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for NATO due to heightened demand for military

equipment, strained supply networks, and technical rivalry. Success on this front will require overcoming bureaucratic obstacles, synchronizing national innovation initiatives, and establishing ethical frameworks for nascent technology. NATO has built a steady track record so far, which it will need to accelerate. For example, NATO established the Defence Industrial Production Board in 2023 to facilitate the coordination of production indicators and collaborative planning across Allies (NATO 2024b). The 2024 Defence-Critical Supply Chain Security Roadmap delineates further actions such as strategic stockpiling and material substitution (NATO 2024c). The Hague Summit offers a chance to push for more tangible actions in these areas.

### *Challenges and Opportunities for Canada at the Summit*

With a growing list of responsibilities in the Arctic, Eastern Europe, and the Indo-Pacific, Canada is under increasing pressure to meet alliance standards while also addressing domestic capability deficiencies and military personnel gaps. Geopolitical uncertainty caused by Russia’s actions in Ukraine, China’s rising strategic assertiveness, and new climate and cyber dangers necessitate a flexible and adaptable alliance. These demands come at a time when Canada is being asked to take a more active role within NATO. Canada’s geographic reach, historical commitment to multilateralism, and participation in North American and transatlantic security frameworks place it in a unique position to help define NATO’s developing global posture.

Yet Canadian military resources are limited, necessitating meticulous prioritizing and improved efficiency. The Canadian Armed Forces persist in encountering recruiting difficulties and equipment deficiencies that hinder the execution of their varied commitments. With 13,000 personnel deficits and more than 50% of military equipment classified as “unavailable and unserviceable,” the Canadian Armed Forces face significant recruiting and equipment issues that directly impact operational readiness and therefore, Canada’s ability to respond efficiently to a NATO crisis (Sauvé 2025; Brewster 2024; DND 2025).

The fundamental challenge for Canada will be managing future alterations in U.S. policies on NATO and European security. Recent apprehensions over the dependability of U.S. security assurances have initiated dialogues about a “post-American NATO,” wherein European members and Canada would be required to assume increased responsibility for their own defence (Cunningham 2025). The existing U.S. stance is supportive of NATO; but any future alterations necessitate careful contingency preparation. The profound integration of Canada with the United States via NORAD and other bilateral defence agreements complicates this task, necessitating that Canadian security planning considers both NATO obligations and North American defence needs. A potential strategy involves using integrated approaches that align continental and alliance objectives. The \$38.6 billion NORAD modernization investment illustrates this strategy, since enhanced Arctic surveillance and defence capabilities directly strengthen NATO's northern flank while safeguarding North American airspace (National Defence 2022). Canada can further leverage its distinctive geographic location by increasing NATO Arctic exercises and training activities to strengthen both Canadian sovereignty and alliance interoperability (Sacks 2025). This integrated approach enables Canada to overcome the evident contradiction between continental and alliance commitments by viewing them as complementary rather than conflicting goals.

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