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THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

No. 45/2025, 26 JUNE 2024 © PISM

SPOTLIGHT

NATO Summit in The Hague —Will the Alliance Maintain Its Credibility?

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At the NATO summit in The Hague, the allies approved a decision to increase defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2035, of which 3.5% is to be spent on equipment and armaments and 1.5% on defence-related investments such as infrastructure. This is intended to facilitate the rapid strengthening of the European pillar of the Alliance, ensure credible deterrence and defence capabilities, and maintain support for Ukraine. Other issues were omitted from the plan in order to reduce the risk of tensions between U.S. President Donald Trump and American allies.

What is the significance of the decision to increase spending to 5%?

The agreement to raise defence spending indicates that most countries recognise that there is a strategic threat to Europe and acknowledge that the U.S. will have an increasingly limited ability to support its European allies in the event of a conflict with Russia. Without giving up its attempts to completely subjugate Ukraine, Russia is strengthening its military potential and threatening NATO with escalation. The United States, on the other hand, is focusing on the threat from China, which will lead to less interest in European security and possibly also to the withdrawal of some American troops from Europe. There is therefore a risk that, if the U.S. becomes involved in another region, such as the Indo-Pacific, it will not be able to provide significant conventional support to its allies, at which point Russia will decide to test NATO's credibility. Since Trump demanded an increase in spending to 5% there is a higher chance of him not making decisions related to an uncoordinated reduction in support for the Alliance, which could encourage Russia to act aggressively. The 5% goal is ambitious, but it has been divided into two categories to make it more realistic: 3.5% is to be spent on military equipment and armaments, and 1.5% on defence-related investments such as infrastructure. If European countries were to achieve average spending of just 3% of GDP, this

would provide at least an additional \$50 billion per year for investment. Within a few years to a decade, this would enable a significant strengthening of Europe's military capabilities, reduce the dependence on the U.S., and ensure credible deterrence and defence capabilities. The second category includes, among other things, spending on support for Ukraine, which will increase the chances of it being maintained at its current level.

What other decisions were made?

A group of 12 allies (including Poland) signed an agreement on critical raw materials for defence materiel to facilitate their joint acquisition, storage, transportation and management of stockpiles. Another group of countries financing the development of the Multi Role Tanker Transport (MRTT) decided to buy two additional aircraft, increasing their number from 10 to 12. Although this is not a significant increase in capacity, it is one of the areas in which European allies remain too heavily dependent on the U.S. A decision was also made to deploy a NATO battlegroup to Finland, which joined the Alliance in 2023. Similar battlegroups have already been deployed in other countries on the Eastern Flank in recent years to strengthen deterrence and defence capabilities. This is therefore a step towards Finland's full integration into the Alliance. Also, two previously adopted strategies have been published, which are intended to facilitate faster investment in capacity

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development and reduce dependence on the U.S. The first concerns the use of commercial satellites for the Alliance's needs. The second is intended to facilitate the implementation of new technologies and weapon systems by spreading the costs and risks associated with their testing.

Has NATO changed its approach to Ukraine?

The U.S. approach to the war in Ukraine and the tense relations between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky were a significant problem for the summit organisers. At previous summits, the Alliance declared its unequivocal support for Ukraine and reinforced political messages regarding Ukraine's future membership in NATO, even though there is no consensus on this issue within the Alliance. However, the Trump administration sent signals that it opposed Zelensky's presence at the summit. It was therefore decided not to organise a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council format with the participation of the leaders. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian president was invited and attended an informal dinner hosted by the king of the Netherlands, gave a speech in the Dutch parliament, and participated in a meeting with the E5 states (France, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Italy). A brief meeting between Trump and Zelensky was also arranged, which increases the chances of an improvement in relations. The exceptionally short final summit declaration included an assurance of support for Ukraine, although there was no reference to its membership aspirations. Thus, at least the appearance of support for Ukraine was maintained, while the U.S. engagement in the country's security remains effectively limited. However, it was not possible to develop and adopt a framework for a strategy towards Russia. The allies assigned this task to the Alliance at the previous

summit in Washington, but Trump's return to the White House and his attempt to reduce tensions in U.S.-Russia relations made it impossible to implement.

What was the significance of the meeting of the NATO-IP4 (NATO, Australia, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand)?

Contrary to the original plans, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru, and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung did not come to The Hague. The main reason was the lack of a planned NATO-IP4 session with all leaders participating. Instead, a meeting was held between the Prime Minister of New Zealand and ministers from the three other countries with the NATO Secretary General.

This weakens the political significance of the NATO-IP4 format, which was created in 2022. It also reduces the political weight of the message about the growing interdependence of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions in terms of security, contained in NATO's 2022 Madrid Strategy. The weakening of the political dimension of this kind of cooperation is all the more significant given that NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte visited Japan in April this year. The absence of the three IP4 leaders reflects the lack of U.S. leadership, which under the Biden administration manifested itself in efforts to intensify dialogue and cooperation between U.S. allies in Asia and Europe. The NATO-IP4 dialogue will continue for now at a lower level, such as between foreign ministers (since 2020) and defence ministers (since 2024). Instead of NATO-IP4, bilateral formats of cooperation between Asian countries and the Alliance within the Individually Tailored Partnership Programme may gain in importance.