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NATO After the 2025 Summit: Strength, Doubt, and the Burden of Leadership

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NATO Hague Summit signalled renewed commitment to transatlantic security, with member states pledging historic increases in defence spending and a broader vision of resilience encompassing cyber, infrastructure, and societal domains. This shift signals more than adaptation; it suggests a serious intent to rearm NATO for a new era of strategic competition.

Yet beneath the surface, the challenges are more complex than the headline commitments suggest. The Alliance's ability to respond to hybrid threats and intensifying geopolitical competition is uneven, constrained by internal disagreements and shifting strategic expectations. NATO's adversaries are not seeking parity through conventional force. They are exploiting gaps across domains – cyber, economic, political, and cognitive – using tactics designed to undermine cohesion and delay response. While the Alliance's operational structures remain robust, its political coherence is fragile, and its strategic unity often proves difficult to sustain under pressure. What is

missing is not capacity, but bold leadership willing to articulate shared priorities, accept risk, and take responsibility for long-range decisions. Without coherence of vision and the willingness to act with conviction, NATO's deterrence posture risks becoming reactive rather than resilient.

This paper argues that NATO now stands at a pivotal crossroads. Increased spending is a necessary step, but not a sufficient one. The Alliance still lacks a unifying strategy capable of addressing the full spectrum of contemporary threats. To meet this moment, the Alliance must move beyond rhetorical unity and procedural adaptation. It must invest in strategic foresight, develop doctrine fit for 21st-century warfare, and ensure political decision-making can match the speed and ambiguity of modern threats. The Hague Summit may have set a new trajectory, but it is what follows – doctrine, strategy, and credible action – that will determine whether NATO remains a force capable of deterring not just war, but instability itself.

INTRODUCTION – NATO AFTER THE HAGUE SUMMIT

The NATO Hague Summit in June unfolded with deliberate symbolism, projecting unity at a moment of geopolitical volatility. Set against the backdrop of war in Europe, intensifying global rivalry, and deepening uncertainty over transatlantic cohesion, the Summit sought to send a clear message: NATO remains committed, capable, and prepared to meet a more contested strategic landscape. Central to that message was an unprecedented pledge – member states agreed to raise defence spending to 5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2035. Of this, 3.5% is allocated to traditional defence capabilities, while the remaining 1.5% targets broader security domains, including cyber resilience, infrastructure protection, and societal preparedness. It looks like a fundamental shift – NATO is not merely adapting but is rearming for a new strategic era.

However, the substance beneath the rhetoric reveals a more nuanced and challenging landscape. The pledges made in The Hague are only as consequential as the frameworks and cohesion that translate them into collective readiness. The challenge is not just whether NATO possesses the resources, but whether it can align them effectively across national priorities, operational plans, and strategic objectives. Without clarity of purpose, institutional flexibility, and cross-Alliance coherence, even historic levels of military spending risk becoming insufficient. Meanwhile, adversaries are not waiting. They are acting. They are refining asymmetric tools and strategies that target the very domains where NATO remains politically or conceptually divided.

Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine, now entering its fourth year, has made that gap clear. Moscow is not merely sustaining a military campaign; it is retooling its economy, rearming its forces, and preparing for an extended confrontation with the West. NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte underscored the scale of the imbalance, noting that "in terms of ammunition, Russia produces in three months what the whole of NATO produces in a year"¹. German defence leaders have assessed that Russia could pose a direct military threat to NATO territory within five to eight years.² Baltic and Nordic intelligence agencies have reached similar conclusions, warning that Russia is preparing for confrontation, not episodic escalation.³ These assessments reflect more than immediate danger, they point to a long-term strategic posture defined by tempo, depth, and psychological endurance.

These signals demand more than cautious reassurance – they require a fundamental reckoning. The Alliance today faces not only a military challenge, but a conceptual and political one. It must grapple with adversaries who exploit complexity and ambiguity across domains – digital, informational, economic, and cognitive. While NATO's operational architecture remains strong, its strategic alignment is uncertain. Coordination exists, but true unity – grounded in a shared interpretation of threats and readiness to act decisively under pressure – remains elusive. What

¹ NATO chief Mark Rutte warns Russia could use military force against alliance in five years | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/06/nato-chief-mark-rutte-warns-russia-could-use-military-force-against-alliance-five-years?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² "Russia May Be Ready to Attack NATO in 5-8 Years, German Official Says." Reuters, 18 Apr. 2024. [www.reuters.com, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-may-be-ready-attack-nato-5-8-years-german-official-says-2024-04-18/](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-may-be-ready-attack-nato-5-8-years-german-official-says-2024-04-18/).

³ BNS. "Russia Preparing for Long-Term Confrontation with NATO, Including Baltics – Intelligence." Lrt.Lt, 7 Mar. 2024. <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2216335/russia-preparing-for-long-term-confrontation-with-nato-including-baltics-intelligence>.

is missing is not institutional capacity, but the kind of leadership willing to define priorities, set thresholds, and take responsibility for long-term, potentially irreversible decisions.

For all the declarations issued in The Hague, core questions remain unresolved: Does NATO look more secure after the Summit, or simply more expensive? Is the Alliance designing a future-proof security architecture, or merely responding in form, but not yet in full strategic force? NATO's credibility in the coming decade will hinge not on funding alone, but on whether it can think ahead, decide fast, and act with the coherence required to meet adversaries who are not waiting to be deterred.

MATERIAL GAINS, STRATEGIC AMBIGUITIES

At the Hague Summit, NATO reaffirmed and accelerated its eastern deterrence posture with new multinational battlegroups deployed to reinforce its most vulnerable frontiers.⁴ Member states committed to significantly scaling up ammunition stockpiles – not only in quantity but through broader geographic dispersion – to ensure readiness under sustained operational pressure⁵. The Alliance also institutionalised long-term military assistance to Ukraine, embedding support mechanisms designed to endure beyond electoral cycles and national policy shifts.⁶

In a high-visibility moment, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte and U.S. President Donald Trump jointly reaffirmed the Alliance's collective defence principle, with the United States described as "totally committed" to Article 5.⁷ While the message aimed to reassure, the need for such a statement highlighted the fragility of political trust at the heart of transatlantic security.

These statements mark tangible progress, but they do not, on their own, resolve the deeper strategic questions confronting the Alliance. Behind the budget increases, stockpile targets, forward deployments, and institutional innovations lies a more ambiguous reality: What, precisely, is all this spending meant to achieve? Is NATO preparing for high-intensity warfighting, persistent hybrid competition, or long-term systemic rivalry? Can it realistically do all three? Without clear strategic prioritisation, there is a growing risk that the Alliance's renewed investments may outpace its strategic clarity.

Spending, while crucial, is not equal to strategy. Resource increases must be paired with clarity of purpose and operational coherence. Without a clear theory of change, an articulated logic that connects investment to strategic progress, budgets serve as signals of intent – but they cannot substitute for strategic coherence or political resolve.

There is a risk here: that NATO nations are investing primarily in conventional platforms – armoured vehicles, fighter jets, air defence systems – while leaving newer domains underfunded

⁴ The Hague Summit Declaration issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2025); NATO https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_236705.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Reuters. (2025, June 24). NATO's Rutte says he has no doubt Trump is committed to mutual defence pact. <https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-summit-live-updates-july-2025-2025-06-24/>

and under-integrated. The modern battlefield extends far beyond land, sea, and air. It includes satellites, algorithms, supply chains, data flows, semiconductors, personal information and human cognition. Deterrence in this century will be as much psychological and economic as it is kinetic and military.

The current wave of spending must therefore answer several strategic questions:

- Are NATO investments reinforcing collective industrial capacity – or fuelling fragmented national stockpiles?
- Is there a serious plan for resilience in the face of long-term gray zone pressure, including cyber disruption, infrastructure sabotage, and political interference?
- What level of interoperability and command coherence exists across new technologies, especially AI-enabled defence systems, autonomous platforms, and space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR)?
- Are member states aligning their defence procurement with forward-looking threat scenarios – or responding to the last war they observed?

If deterrence today is as much about capabilities and forward posture, then NATO must invest in areas it has historically under-prioritised: information ecosystems, digital sovereignty, energy security, logistics resilience, and anticipatory planning for cognitive and political warfare.

Without a clear concept for how to prevail, or at the least, sustain competitive advantage over time, the Alliance risks constructing an increasingly expensive deterrence architecture that projects strength on paper but lacks the operational adaptability and strategic relevance demanded by contemporary conflict environments. In short: Unless purpose and capability are aligned within a coherent strategy, the Alliance risks responding to next-generation threats through the lens of yesterday's logic.

KNOW YOUR OPPONENT: STRATEGIC BLINDNESS IN A TRANSPARENT WAR

NATO stands as the West's central security umbrella in navigating the strategic challenges posed by Russia and other challengers. Its intelligence architecture, institutional memory, and operational awareness are unmatched among international alliances. Yet despite these advantages, Russia has consistently acted while NATO was still deliberating. Russia's aggression in Georgia (2008), the annexation of Crimea (2014), and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 illustrate a persistent pattern: strategic surprise exploited by Moscow, and a reactive posture by the Alliance. Each case has exposed NATO's vulnerability to fast-moving disruption and its continued struggle to move from deterrence by presence to deterrence by anticipation.

The problem is not intelligence collection, but the persistent failure to convert early warning into decisive strategic alignment and readiness. Understanding an adversary is not about counting battalions or tracking radar signatures. It is about interpreting worldview, strategic culture, political and geopolitical logic. Russia does not operate by Western strategic norms. It does not seek

immediate parity, nor does it rely solely on escalation dominance. Instead, it operates through calibrated risk-taking, ambiguous coercion, and long-term ideological persistence.

Moscow's posture is shaped by a belief in permanent competition – one that blurs the boundaries between war and peace, civilian and military, information and ordnance. In this model, deterrence is psychological, influence is strategic, and conflict is not a crisis. It is the condition of modern geopolitics.

NATO's failure to anticipate Russian actions reveals a conceptual shortfall. The Alliance has become highly proficient in responding to threats but remains less effective in preempting them. It reinforces rather than reshapes. It reacts rather than anticipates.

Russia, by contrast, leverages what might be called strategic time asymmetry. It is willing to plan in decades, tolerate ambiguity, and accept tactical setbacks in pursuit of long-term systemic gain. NATO's strategic culture, shaped by electoral calendars and public fatigue, often struggles to match that patience.

The ammunition imbalance is telling. The fact that Russia can outproduce NATO is not merely a logistical problem, it indicates a deeper strategic gap. It exposes a fundamental imbalance between declared readiness and the strategic demands of sustained geopolitical confrontation. NATO is treating symptoms, responding to incursions, reinforcing deployments, countering narratives without confronting the strategic condition. The Alliance is building stronger defences around its perimeter, even as the roots of the threat lie beyond its borders and its cognitive and institutional core remains exposed.

A fundamental shift is needed – going from reaction to anticipation, from resilience to initiative, from "knowing the enemy" in a narrow sense to understanding the full-spectrum threat environment in which strategic adversaries thrive.

CONSENSUS AND CONTRADICTION: THE POLITICAL ARCHITECTURE OF DETERRENCE

Deterrence begins with credibility, and credibility begins with unity. Yet NATO's political cohesion, while routinely affirmed in communiqués and summit declarations, remains more brittle than its military architecture suggests.

The Alliance's military and operational cohesion (through joint exercises, interoperable command structures, shared planning, etc.) is formidable. But its political decision-making is uneven, contested, and at times fragile. Behind closed doors, threat perceptions diverge, national priorities compete, and definitions of security reflect differing geographies, histories, and domestic pressures.

This strategic asymmetry is not abstract, it has manifested repeatedly in practice:

- In **2008**, following Russia's aggression in Georgia, NATO failed to mount a coordinated response. While the United States delivered humanitarian and security assistance, efforts to signal presence through naval deployments encountered friction. Turkey, citing its obligations under the Montreux Convention, exercised legal caution regarding U.S. warship transits into the Black Sea. The episode highlighted how diverging interpretations of international frameworks – even among allies – can constrain NATO's operational agility in moments of urgency.⁸
- In **2014**, Russia's annexation of Crimea caught the Alliance politically flat-footed. NATO's reassurance measures emerged slowly, and in that strategic pause, Russia consolidated control. The chance to deter further escalation was lost.⁹
- In **2015**, Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 after repeated airspace violations. Though NATO offered political backing, it refrained from invoking stronger measures. The restrained response sparked domestic debate in Turkey about whether NATO solidarity would hold in ambiguous or escalatory scenarios.¹⁰
- In **2022**, ahead of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, NATO members differed in both their threat assessments and the timing of their reactions. While U.S. intelligence provided early warnings, some European capitals delayed escalation. The result was a strategic lag – one that enabled Moscow to seize the initiative and again upend the European security order.¹¹
- Even today, internal divergences persist. Countries such as **Hungary** and **Slovakia** have diluted language on Ukraine, resisted deeper integration, and challenged collective decision-making – introducing structural fault lines into the Alliance's political core.¹²

These cases reveal a consistent pattern: NATO is most decisive when threats are conventional, geographically clear, and unambiguously attributable. But the defining challenges of the 21st century – cyber intrusions, political interference, coercive diplomacy, and hybrid disruption – operate in ambiguous zones, across multiple domains, and under compressed timelines. In this context, political cohesion is no longer a given; it becomes a strategic variable.

This reflects the core challenge of modern deterrence: NATO possesses unmatched military capability, yet its ability to act decisively, at speed, and with political coherence remains uncertain. The Alliance is not a military bloc alone; it is a political organisation whose credibility depends on shared purpose and timely consensus. Military strength, no matter how advanced, cannot

⁸ Whitman, R. (2009). NATO, the EU and the Georgia crisis: The battle for credibility. In A. Bechev & S. Rynning (Eds.), *The European Union and Security after Georgia*. European Security, 18(3), 203–220.

⁹ Giles, K. (2015). Russia's 'new' tools for confronting the West: Continuity and innovation in Moscow's exercise of power. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2016/03/russias-new-tools-confronting-west-continuity-and-innovation-moscows-exercise-power>

¹⁰ Pifer, S. (2015, November 30). The NATO–Turkey–Russia triangle after the Su-24 shootdown. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-nato-turkey-russia-triangle-after-the-su-24-shootdown/>

¹¹ Sanger, D. E., & Barnes, J. E. (2022, February 25). U.S. and NATO had warnings, but misread Putin's intentions. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/25/us/politics/putin-russia-nato-intelligence.html>

¹² Brzozowski, A. (2023, May 15). Hungary, Slovakia block stronger NATO wording on Ukraine. Euractiv. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/hungary-slovakia-block-stronger-nato-wording-on-ukraine/>

substitute for political resolve. Without the ability to translate capability into credible, unified action, deterrence risks becoming performative rather than persuasive.

- Spending targets signal commitment, but cannot substitute for unity of will.
- Forward deployments create presence, but not always purpose.
- Summit declarations project resolve, but adversaries measure execution, not language.

A credible Alliance must do more than prepare – it must be able to decide. The next test of NATO's relevance may not be an invasion, but a crisis in the gray zone, where thresholds are blurred, timelines are compressed, and strategic ambiguity is the battlefield itself. In such a moment, the true currency of deterrence will be alignment under pressure, not just capability on paper.

STRATEGIC EXPOSURE: WHAT THE ADVERSARY SEES

Let's strip away declarations of unity, formal communiqués and official talking points. Viewed through the lens of a strategic competitor, NATO may not appear as an impenetrable front, but rather as an alliance challenged by internal stresses – ranging from political divergence and conceptual dissonance to institutional inertia.

Adversaries are no longer focused solely on achieving conventional military parity. Instead, they seek to reshape the strategic environment in which NATO operates, gradually eroding its cohesion, influence, and decision-making agility. Their aim, echoing Sun Tzu's maxim that "the greatest victory is that which requires no battle," is to gain strategic superiority not through war alone, but through a spectrum of coercive instruments. To that end, they operate persistently below the threshold of armed conflict with NATO, within so-called gray zones, and across societal seams that remain poorly defended. They exploit ambiguity, apply pressure, and control narratives – not as isolated acts, but as part of a systematic effort to challenge NATO's political will and societal resilience. In this contest, deterrence is no longer defined by force posture alone, but by the ability to shape perceptions, maintain initiative, and preserve coherence under pressure. The battlefield now includes elections, infrastructure, information systems, public trust, economic levers, and even collective memory itself. Their instruments of power are diverse, adaptive, and strategically integrated. The examples below represent only a partial list of tools employed against NATO and its members, tactics that span the spectrum of hybrid warfare and are constantly evolving:

- **Election interference:** The 2016 U.S. presidential election, along with attempted disinformation campaigns in France, Germany, and the Baltics, demonstrated how foreign actors use cyber intrusion, digital microtargeting, and influence operations to polarise societies, delegitimise institutions, and erode trust in democratic processes.¹³

¹³ Polyakova, A., & Meserole, C. (2019). Exporting digital authoritarianism: The Russian and Chinese models. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/exporting-digital-authoritarianism/>

- **Strategic corruption:** Russia has repeatedly used opaque financial channels to build leverage over political elites, fund sympathetic parties, and influence policy from within – a tactic evident in Ukraine, the Balkans, and parts of Central Europe. These networks blur the line between lobbying and subversion, creating internal gatekeepers to external interests.^{14 15}
- **Energy blackmail:** Europe's previous dependence on Russian gas gave the Kremlin a strategic lever – one it used in 2021–2022 to punish, divide, and coerce EU and NATO members. Energy interdependence became a weapon, limiting options and widening intra-Alliance tensions.¹⁶
- **Digital sabotage:** In early 2022, as Russian troops prepared to invade Ukraine, a massive cyberattack disrupted Viasat satellite communications used by European military and civilian users – crippling internet services and delaying operational coordination. Attacks on railways, airports, and navigation systems have also been documented across NATO territory.¹⁷
- **Narrative warfare:** Russian state media and aligned digital proxies have saturated online spaces with conspiracy theories, anti-NATO messaging, historical revisionism, and victimhood narratives – exploiting grievances and shaping discourse in ways that weaken public support for collective defence.¹⁸

These examples are illustrative, not exhaustive. These tactics form part of a broader strategy to bypass NATO's conventional strengths and exploit its vulnerabilities – dividing attention, deepening friction, and eroding the Alliance's authority from within.

Despite growing recognition of hybrid threats, NATO remains largely reactive, treating each incident as a discrete technical problem rather than symptoms of a coordinated strategic campaign. This fragmented posture reveals a critical gap between early warning and collective action:

- Following a wave of cyberattacks on Nordic energy grids and rail networks in 2024, NATO's response was limited to public condemnation and national-level forensic reviews, failing to demonstrate Alliance-wide deterrence or coordinated escalation.¹⁹
- The EstLink 2 undersea cable disruption between Estonia and Finland in late 2024 led to increased naval monitoring, but no unified NATO response plan for infrastructure protection was publicly advanced.²⁰

¹⁴ Gressel, G. (2021). Russia's manipulation of Ukrainian politics: The strategy of strategic corruption. European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/russias-manipulation-of-ukrainian-politics/>

¹⁵ Freedom House. (2022). Nations in Transit 2022: Dropping the democratic facade. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2022/dropping-democratic-facade>

¹⁶ Galeotti, M. (2017). Controlling chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe. European Council on Foreign Relations. https://ecfr.eu/publication/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe/

¹⁷ Hodgson, C. (2022, March 2). Russia blamed for massive cyberattack on Viasat satellite internet network. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/7a1ef85b-c7ad-438f-a2d0-91c7d84e57e3>

¹⁸ NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. (2020). COVID-19: Lessons for countering disinformation. <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/covid-19-lessons-for-countering-disinformation/71>

¹⁹ Reuters. (2024a, October 23). Finland warns of hostile activities by Russia, including cyberattacks and disinformation. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-warns-hostile-activities-by-russia-2024-10-23/>

²⁰ Reuters. (2024b, December 27). Estonia's navy to help protect Baltic Sea power cable after suspected sabotage. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/estonias-navy-protect-baltic-sea-power-cable-2024-12-27/>

- Civil aviation cyber concerns: In 2024, Poland and Romania raised alarms after networks linked to their national aviation authorities were targeted by suspected foreign cyber intrusions. The incidents triggered national investigations and highlighted NATO's lack of a unified framework to protect critical aviation infrastructure.²¹
- In the Baltics, hybrid sabotage involving rail system disruptions and localised energy outages have drawn domestic investigations and diplomatic warnings, but again, without a consolidated Alliance-level posture.²²

These responses represent tactical mitigation – not strategic deterrence. The Alliance lacks a unified mechanism to translate warning signs into coordinated strategy and firm policy. The result is a credibility gap: adversaries choose the domain, the intensity, and the timing, while NATO remains confined to the logic of crisis management.

This is not merely a procedural shortfall, it reflects a deeper strategic problem – the Alliance originally structured for industrial-age conflict, defined by borders and formal aggression, now operates in a hybrid security environment shaped by ambiguity, multi-domain disruption, and long-term coercion. Therefore, NATO may remain responsive and resilient, yet not fully aligned with the speed and complexity of today's evolving threat landscape, responding to symptoms while adversaries exploit structural vulnerabilities.

NATO must move beyond stabilisation and toward strategic shaping, redefining deterrence for an era where influence is contested long before force is applied. What is needed is not another round of declarations, but a paradigm shift:

- From incident response to coordinated threat management.
- From technical defence to strategic anticipation.
- From varied national strategies to a unified Alliance-wide resilience framework.

Because in the eyes of the adversary, NATO's strategic exposure is not defined by the size of its battalions – but by the distance between its military capabilities and political decision-making. Between its awareness of the threat and its ability to act with strategic coherence and urgency.

Until NATO views itself as its adversaries do, and critically reassesses not just its posture, but its strategic assumptions, it will remain vulnerable. Not because of insufficient capabilities, but because of an outdated framework for how influence, pressure, and power are projected in today's contested landscape.

²¹ Reuters. (2024, May 8). Poland says it was targeted by hacking attack by Russia-linked group APT28. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/cybersecurity/poland-says-it-was-targeted-by-hacking-attack-russia-linked-group-apt28-2024-05-08>

²² AP. (2024, November 15). Baltic states investigate possible Russian hybrid sabotage on rail lines, energy infrastructure. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/dcb29f0e126512811fac4b95d7662cac>

CONCLUSIONS

The stakes for NATO's future are rising, but its enduring strength begins with what it has always represented. NATO remains the most successful political-military alliance in modern history, not solely because of its military capabilities, but because of its nature. It is a community of equals, bound by trust, mutual obligation, and a belief that freedom and security are inseparable. Its endurance rests not only on force, but on legitimacy, on a mission rooted in common values and democratic principles.

The Warsaw Pact was militarily strong, but its authoritarian nature and lack of genuine shared values ensured its demise. Force can subjugate nations, but it cannot bind them together in lasting unity. The League of Nations, by contrast, had a noble mission but lacked both the power and institutional capability to enforce its principles. Values alone, without strength and structure, cannot uphold order. NATO has endured because it combines both: the force to deter, and the ideals that give that force legitimacy.

NATO was not created merely to withstand crises, it was built to prevent them, and to uphold a shared vision of peace through collective resolve. That founding principle is now under greater pressure than at any point since the Cold War. Today, the Alliance is challenged not just by new threats, but by the complexity of preserving unity, clarity, and purpose in an era of strategic ambiguity. The path ahead demands more than budgets or declarations. It requires political courage, strategic coherence, and leadership that accepts the weight of historical responsibility. The Alliance must move beyond procedural habit and reactive posture. It must act with the conviction that its founding mission still matters – and that its moral authority must be earned anew in every generation.

To secure its future, NATO must go beyond declarations of unity and increases in defence spending. It must confront not only the threats outside its borders, but the inertia and blind spots within. Five imperatives must guide its transformation:

Strategic coherence is not something NATO has consistently achieved. Too often, national interests, political cycles, and bureaucratic constraints have diluted Alliance unity. NATO's planning, investments, and political messaging remain fragmented, reducing deterrence and creating ambiguity where clarity is needed most. Without a shared and sustained vision, resources are wasted, and opportunities are lost.

Leadership with courage must be demonstrated – not just in rhetoric, but in action. NATO has too often delayed or diluted key decisions in the name of consensus. While unity is vital, it must not become an excuse for strategic hesitation. The Alliance must show the capacity to lead with clarity, assume risk when necessary, and accept responsibility for hard choices. Courage in leadership means setting direction, not simply managing process.

Boldness in decision-making remains the Alliance's weak point. NATO cannot afford to remain solely reactive or procedurally bound. It must regain the capacity to shape the strategic environment through timely, coordinated, and credible responses – grounded in both moral legitimacy and strategic foresight.

Strategic vision is perhaps the most neglected virtue. NATO has been slow to adapt to the realities of cognitive warfare, gray-zone aggression, and technological disruption. It has often treated innovation as an accessory rather than a core function. The Alliance must recover its intellectual edge – not to chase every trend, but to anticipate and shape the battlespace of the future.

Creative initiative has not been NATO's strongest feature in recent years – but it must be. For too long, the Alliance has defined success in terms of survival and adaptation. That is no longer enough. NATO must become a game-shaper, not a game-manager. It must lead – not follow – in shaping rules, technologies, alliances, and strategic narratives.

To remain relevant, NATO must not only defend the world it inherited but lead in building the one it wants to preserve.