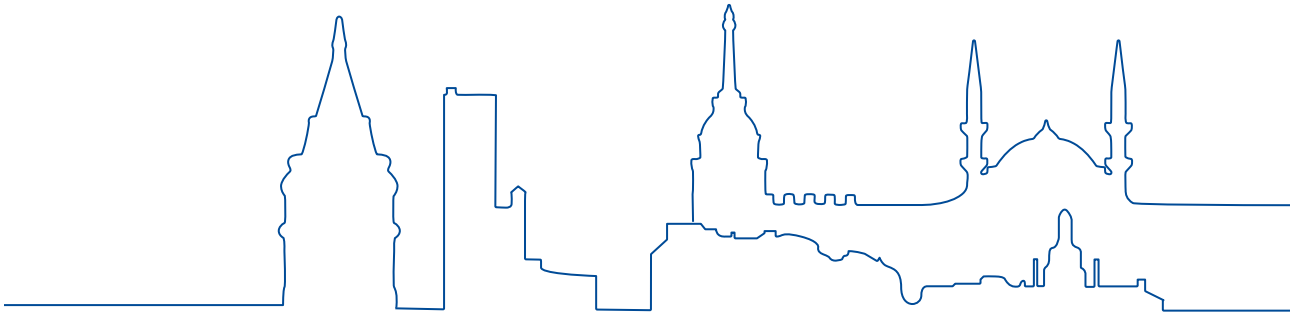


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ASSESSING ANKARA: WHAT'S NEXT FOR NATO?

Megan Gisclon, IPC Managing Editor and Researcher

NATO's Ankara Summit can be viewed as a resounding success—at least for now. The Alliance walked away from the summit in one piece, recommitting to Article 5, pledging EUR 70 billion in support for Ukraine in 2026 and in 2027, and announcing USD 50 billion in new defense agreements at NATO's Defense Industry Forum.[1]

Before the summit, analysts and commentators alike noted that NATO leaders were hoping for a "dull" event—focused on outcomes rather than rhetoric.[2] Similarly, in interviews that I held with experts and former officials on IPC's "NATO in Türkiye" podcast prior to the summit, we discussed that the Alliance needed to focus on business as usual, despite the disruptions inherent to the Trump administration.[3] In addition to demonstrating unity, the Alliance needed to remain focused on building upon the 5% spending commitment made at the 2025 Hague Summit, among other core tasks.

Ultimately, despite much diplomatic fanfare in the Turkish capital and U.S. President Donald Trump's outbursts over Greenland and Spain, sober predictions for the summit panned out. Allies can breathe easier knowing that the Alliance can move forward with its mission to create a stronger Europe within a stronger NATO—a NATO 3.0.

However, while the summit can be billed as a major win for NATO, the real, actionable policy decisions that will push the Alliance into the future are yet to play out. Getting the Allies to not just spend 5% of GDP on defense by 2035 but to spend it wisely is still a major task ahead.

This commentary examines a few takeaways from the summit—a renewed focus on NATO's southern neighborhood, a new chapter for Ukraine, and NATO's new defense and innovation policies—to help decipher the initial direction of the transatlantic security order after the Ankara Summit.

NATO–ICI Meeting and Renewed Focus on NATO's South

As the war in Iran was at the forefront of everyone's mind going into the summit—including President Trump, who used a good portion of his press conferences with both NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to lambast Tehran—the participation of the foreign ministers from the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) was a novel feature of the Ankara Summit. Born at the Istanbul Summit in 2004, the ICI is a partnership framework between NATO and four Gulf states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The framework offers ICI countries an opportunity to increase security cooperation with NATO under the principle of non-imposition,

i.e., every ICI partner chooses from a menu of practical activities to establish their own cooperative framework.[4]

During their meeting—the first NATO-ICI meeting to take place on the sidelines of any NATO summit—NATO Allies and ICI partners agreed to a number of flagship projects in the areas of maritime security, countering uncrewed aerial systems, defense against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats, and countering terrorism.[5] The details of this meeting were released several days after the summit, demonstrating that this was, of course, not the focus of the summit. However, the fact that the meeting not only took place but yielded tangible results sent an important political message.

As the spotlight on NATO partners in recent summits has focused on its Indo-Pacific partners amid Western efforts to contain China (language on which was controversially left out of the summit declaration), NATO's meeting with ICI partners signals an important geographical shift in where it sees increased threats to the Alliance's security. Although member states' views on and responses to the U.S. decision to attack Iran on February 28 have been a major source of tension among Allies, this meeting, coupled with paragraph 5 of the Ankara Summit Declaration specifically calling for preventing Iran's nuclear ambitions and protecting freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, shows prioritized engagement with the Gulf and renewed importance for NATO's southern neighborhood.

Capitalizing on Ukrainian Advances

As President Trump has said time and time again, he "likes winners."[6] Therefore, it is no surprise that Ukraine's recent success on the battlefield has precipitated much goodwill from President Trump as seen in his bilateral meeting with President Zelensky on the sidelines of the summit.

It was, however, a major surprise when Trump announced that he was ready to license U.S.-made Patriot interceptor missiles to be manufactured in Ukraine. The announcement was certainly welcome news in Kyiv, which has long requested additional air defense systems and has been suffering increased air attacks from Moscow in recent weeks.

Such an agreement also sets an interesting precedent for licensing advanced U.S. equipment to Ukraine in an era in which Europe seeks to narrow its capabilities gap with the United States and produce more defense equipment on the continent. While Ukraine's production of Patriot air defense systems is a positive step in filling this gap, the possibility of such an agreement also raises the question of whether such production in Ukraine under war conditions would be possible and if similar licenses may be doled out in the future to European member states.[7]

Further of note for Ukraine is that all Allies agreed in paragraph 4 of the Ankara Summit Declaration that Ukraine is no longer just a security recipient but also a security contributor. Analysts and politicians began to identify this shift many months back, signaling the beginning of an important shift in the war.[8] Now, all 32 Allies have formally recognized and jointly agreed that Ukrainian defense is defined by not only Western aid but also Ukraine's proven capacity to innovate on the battlefield. This is a major takeaway for Kyiv.

"NATO Delivers" in its Defense Industry Forum

Prior to the summit, NATO's Defense Industry Forum (NDIF) was set up for success. Perhaps just as much as the summit itself, NATO promoted NDIF as a key pillar for showing how the Alliance was ready to deliver on its 5% pledge and showcase further European and Canadian defense spending. Allied defense companies had reportedly withheld announcing billions of dollars of defense agreements over the past weeks in order to announce them in Ankara[9] and ultimately show that "NATO delivers," as the Secretary General declared almost as an official slogan for the summit.[10] Rutte also announced NATO's Front Door for Industry,[11] a unified platform for companies to access NATO's procurement opportunities and innovation challenges, and NATO's

Drone Edge,[12] which will invest USD 40 billion in counter-drone capabilities over the next five years, establish an Allied counter-drone marketplace, and commit to increased training in this field.

As outlined in the summit declaration, the Alliance agreed to USD 50 billion in new defense procurements in Ankara. Among the most high-profile deals to take place—many of which prioritized investments in European over U.S. hardware and technology—are NATO's procurement of ten Swedish-made SAAB GlobalEye surveillance aircraft and the joint procurement of the Airbus A400M military aircraft to increase the Alliance's strategic airlift capabilities.[13] Several multinational deals at NDIF, including the multinational project to acquire the A400M, included Türkiye.[14]

Such programs are a direct response to what NATO needs to do next to make the Alliance stronger, though producing these capabilities faster and to scale remains an obstacle. On the sidelines of the summit, I heard experts, politicians, and retired officials alike express fears that despite increased Allied spending, NATO's existing years-long procurement structures are moving too slowly in a world in which military technologies are made obsolete within weeks or months. Legacy hardware and components are still crucial investments in defense and deterrence. However, more needs to be done to increase innovation amid an era of constantly changing threats, technology, and battlefield conditions. This is already playing out in Ukraine, where soldiers must adapt to rapid-fire technology changes every day on the battlefield, and even within NATO, where the United States has depleted almost half of its Patriot stockpile within months of its war with Iran. Although NATO's new programs such as its Front Door for Industry aim to increase the clarity of demand signals from governments, still the question remains as to how quickly these demand signals can be translated into ready capabilities.

Furthermore, as European member states begin to invest more in defense, Allied nations need to be more wary of democratic signals from voters. As a larger share of governments' budgets will be allocated to defense in the coming years, Allied governments need to begin to engage in clear, strategic communication on why investing in these capabilities matters. As we have already seen debates over defense investments play a part in the downfall of the Keir Starmer government in the UK,[15] Europe can no longer hit the snooze button on this conversation without risking further societal instability.

Ankara's Strategic Success

While the Ankara Summit was a strategic success for all Allies, the host nation, Türkiye, received special praise in the final point of the Ankara Summit Declaration. Türkiye's hospitality was also applauded by President Trump, who was met on the runway and escorted arm-in-arm by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.[16]

Although roadblocks throughout Ankara clogged the streets in the days around the summit, the Trump-Erdoğan meeting on the sidelines gave renewed hope for the removal of several proverbial roadblocks in U.S.-Türkiye relations. While bilateral relations are largely outside the purview of NATO itself, the potential to finally remove the Russian-made S-400 surface-to-air missile system from Türkiye—a system that is not interoperable by NATO standards and has caused a major political headache for Ankara within the Alliance—and end Congressionally-imposed CAATSA sanctions on Ankara is beneficial for all Allies. Improving relations between the two largest NATO armies and two key defense markets can only strengthen the Alliance, especially if that means Türkiye is able to protect Allied territory through its reintegration into the F-35 program.

As the six-point Ankara Summit Declaration is short on the details of how NATO will better adapt to the current security climate in its 360-degree purview, many questions remain on the Alliance's next steps, including the time and location of the next summit. While we may or may not see another summit in 2027, the Ankara Summit has at least kept the Alliance on track for the near future, committed to Article 5 and 5%. The rest (and maybe the best?) is yet to come for NATO 3.0.

Notes

1 See NATO, "The Ankara Summit Declaration," July 8, 2026, https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2026/07/08/the-ankara-summit-declaration.

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10 NATO, "Secretary General on the Ankara Summit: NATO delivers," July 8, 2026, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/07/08/secretary-general-on-the-ankara-summit-nato-delivers.

11 NATO, "NATO's Front Door for Industry," accessed July 10, 2026, https://www.nato.int/en/work-with-us/business-and-project-opportunities.

12 NATO, "NATO Allies invest 40 billion dollars in counter-drone capabilities and drone training," July 7, 2026, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/07/07/nato-allies-invest-40-billion-dollars-in-counter-drone-capabilities-and-drone-training.

13 See Tim Martin and Elisabeth Gosselin-Malo, "From GlobalEye to Triton, first wave of NATO Summit deals bet big on aerial capabilities," *Breaking Defense*, July 7, 2026, https://breakingdefense.com/2026/07/from-globaleye-to-triton-first-wave-of-nato-summit-deals-bet-big-on-aerial-capabilities/.

14 For a good rundown of the deals in which Türkiye was involved, see Emily Rice Johnson, "Can't Say Na-To A Deal," Economy Issue #106, *Turkey Recap*, July 10, 2026, https://www.turkeyrecap.com/p/cant-say-na-to-a-deal.

15 Paul Seddon, "Why did Keir Starmer resign and what could happen next?" *BBC News*, June 22, 2026, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0qyllvpkw8o.

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