



Source: NATO.

The Ankara and the Next Strategic Adaptation: Beyond the Eastern Flank

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Executive Summary

To translate strategic ambition into practical outcomes, the Ankara Summit could consider five mutually reinforcing initiatives, that would not redefine NATO's three core tasks but would reinforce it by ensuring that collective defence is supported by resilient societies, secure infrastructure, robust industrial capacity and trusted technological ecosystems. Namely:

1. Adopt a Southern Strategic Resilience Initiative bringing together the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, South Caucasus and adjacent regions within a more integrated framework for resilience, maritime security and critical infrastructure protection.
2. Establish a NATO Energy and Critical Infrastructure Resilience Hub to coordinate analysis, exercises, best practices and public-private cooperation on protecting energy systems, subsea infrastructure, ports, electricity networks and digital connectivity.
3. Create a Black Sea Maritime Coordination Mechanism focused on maritime domain awareness, mine

countermeasures, infrastructure security and crisis coordination, while fully respecting the legal framework of the Montreux Convention.

4. Launch a NATO Defence Industrial Resilience Network to strengthen surge production, improve supply-chain security, encourage interoperability among Allied defence industries and enhance long-term industrial preparedness.

5. Develop a NATO Centre for Strategic Resilience and Hybrid Security dedicated to emerging technologies, cyber resilience, artificial intelligence, disinformation, economic security and cross-sector crisis preparedness.

The forthcoming NATO Summit in Ankara comes at an inflection point for the Alliance.

Since the adoption of NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, the Euro-Atlantic security environment has continued to deteriorate. Russia's war against Ukraine has become a protracted conflict. Instability across the Middle East has intensified. Competition over critical technologies, energy systems, supply chains and maritime corridors has accelerated. Hybrid threats have become persistent rather than episodic.

Against this backdrop, the central question facing the Alliance is no longer simply how to reinforce deterrence on its eastern borders. It is how NATO should adapt to an international system in which military power, economic resilience, technological innovation, industrial capacity and strategic connectivity have become inseparable components of collective security.

The Ankara Summit therefore represents more than another meeting of Allied leaders. It provides an opportunity to redefine how NATO understands security in the twenty-first century and to begin translating that understanding into enduring institutional arrangements.

Whether Ankara ultimately joins the ranks of Prague, Wales and Madrid as a genuinely transformational summit will depend less on the language of its final communiqué than on the practical initiatives it launches and the strategic habits it creates.

1. Security Has Expanded Beyond Defence

For most of NATO's history, collective defence was understood primarily through military capability. The Alliance measured its strength by the readiness of its forces, the credibility of its nuclear deterrent, the interoperability of its armed services and its ability to reinforce vulnerable territories during times of crisis. These remain indispensable foundations of Allied security, yet they are no longer sufficient on their own.

The strategic environment confronting NATO today differs fundamentally from that of the Cold War and even from long the post-Cold War era of out of area operations. The distinction between military and non-military threats has become increasingly blurred. State competitors employ a continuum of instruments that range from conventional military force to cyber operations, economic coercion, disinformation campaigns, technological competition and the manipulation of supply chains. Strategic competition is now waged simultaneously across physical, digital, industrial and cognitive domains.

The experience of the past five years illustrates this transformation with unusual clarity. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of global production networks and the strategic consequences of excessive dependence on distant suppliers. Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that energy security and food security are inseparable from military security. Attacks against undersea cables and offshore energy infrastructure revealed that critical civilian assets have now become legitimate targets in geopolitical competition. Disruptions to maritime navigation in the Red Sea showed how relatively inexpensive technologies (drones, missiles and unmanned surface vessels) can impose disproportionate costs on the global economy.

Collectively, these developments suggest that resilience has become as important as deterrence.

The ability of an Ally to sustain military operations increasingly depends upon the resilience of civilian infrastructure, secure digital networks, reliable access to critical raw materials, diversified energy supplies, advanced manufacturing capacity and trusted technological ecosystems. Industrial mobilisation, once regarded as a wartime contingency, is once again becoming a central component of defence planning.

This evolution has profound implications for NATO.

The Alliance remains first and foremost a politico-military organisation. However, military effectiveness can no longer be separated from the wider economic and technological systems upon which armed forces depend. Artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, satellite communications, semiconductor production, cloud computing, autonomous systems and secure data infrastructure are becoming strategic assets every bit as important as aircraft, warships and armoured formations.

Likewise, access to critical minerals (including rare earth elements, lithium, cobalt, nickel and graphite), will increasingly influence defence production and technological competitiveness. Supply-chain resilience has therefore become an integral part of national and collective security.

The challenge facing NATO is not to expand its mandate indefinitely, but to recognise that the operating environment of modern armed forces extends far beyond the traditional battlefield. Defence ministries alone cannot deliver resilience. Governments, private industry, research institutions, energy companies, financial systems and technology firms all contribute to the Alliance's ability to withstand strategic shocks.

The concept of deterrence itself is therefore evolving. During the twentieth century, deterrence largely rested upon the capacity to impose unacceptable military costs on an adversary. In the twenty-first century, deterrence increasingly also depends upon demonstrating that Allied societies can continue functioning under sustained pressure; that they can absorb disruption, restore critical systems rapidly and maintain political cohesion despite prolonged crises.

This broader understanding of resilience should not be viewed as an alternative to military strength, but as its indispensable complement.

2. The Emergence of a Southern Strategic System

Much of NATO's strategic thinking continues to distinguish between the Eastern Flank and the Southern Flank. This distinction remains operationally useful, yet it increasingly obscures a more significant geopolitical reality. From the Black Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean, from the South Caucasus to the Gulf, and from Central Asia to the Red Sea, a single interconnected strategic system is emerging. Energy corridors, digital infrastructure, maritime routes, migration flows, defence supply chains and geopolitical rivalries increasingly overlap across this wider geography. Developments in one sub-region now generate immediate consequences across the others.

The war in Ukraine has illustrated this interdependence. Grain exports from the Black Sea affect food security in Africa and the Middle East. Energy flows across the Caspian basin influence European economic resilience. Instability in Syria, Iraq and the Eastern Mediterranean shapes migration pressures across Europe. Competition over transport corridors linking Europe with Asia increasingly intersects with strategic rivalry involving Russia, China and regional powers. This interconnected strategic space cannot be understood through compartmentalised regional approaches.

For NATO, this does not imply a shift of attention away from the Eastern Flank; rather, it requires recognising that the Alliance's eastern and southern dimensions are becoming strategically inseparable. Deterrence in the Black Sea is linked to maritime security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy resilience depends upon developments in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Hybrid threats increasingly traverse regional boundaries without regard for traditional geographic categories. Consequently, the Southern Flank should no longer be viewed primarily as a source of instability requiring crisis management. Instead, it should be understood as a strategic domain whose resilience is essential to the security of the entire Alliance.

Within this broader geography, Türkiye occupies a distinctive position. Its importance derives not only from its geography but from the multiple strategic systems that converge within its territory. NATO's southeastern defence, Black Sea access, energy diversification, transcontinental transport corridors, defence-industrial capabilities and regional diplomatic engagement intersect in ways unmatched elsewhere within the Alliance.

This reality suggests that Türkiye's strategic value is evolving from that of a frontline Ally to that of a multidimensional strategic hub. Recognising this evolution is not a matter of political symbolism. It reflects the changing character of Euro-Atlantic security itself.

3. Türkiye's Strategic Function: From Geography to Geostrategy

For decades, Türkiye has often been described as a bridge between East and West. While geographically accurate, the metaphor has become strategically inadequate. Bridges are passive: they connect two sides but rarely shape the direction or character of the movement across them. Türkiye's role within the evolving Euro-Atlantic security environment is considerably more complex. It increasingly acts not simply as a transit country, but as a strategic platform where multiple security, economic and technological systems intersect. This transformation reflects structural rather than political change.

The Black Sea has become central to European maritime security. The South Caucasus is emerging as a critical gateway for energy diversification and east-west connectivity. Central Asia is gaining strategic significance through its critical mineral resources, transport potential and growing geopolitical relevance. The Eastern Mediterranean remains a focal point for energy, migration and regional security. Few Allied countries occupy a position where all these dynamics converge simultaneously.

This convergence gives Türkiye strategic relevance extending well beyond territorial defence.

Its defence-industrial base has expanded significantly over the past decade, particularly in unmanned systems, naval platforms, electronic warfare, precision munitions and digital defence technologies. Its energy infrastructure—including pipelines, LNG terminals, storage facilities and electricity interconnections—has become increasingly important for European energy diversification. Major transport initiatives such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the Middle Corridor and expanding port infrastructure further reinforce Türkiye's role as a connector between Europe and Asia.

Equally important is its accumulated diplomatic experience across multiple theatres. Türkiye simultaneously engages with NATO Allies, Black Sea partners, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, the Gulf and the wider Middle East. While differences with some Allies have periodically complicated political relations, this broad regional engagement also provides the Alliance with strategic access and situational awareness across several interconnected theatres.

The implication is straightforward. NATO's long-term planning would benefit from viewing Türkiye not primarily through the lens of episodic political disagreements, but through the strategic functions it performs within the wider Euro-Atlantic system. This represents a shift from geography to geostrategy: from seeing Türkiye as a location to understanding it as a capability.

4. Resilience as NATO's Next Strategic Advantage

Throughout much of the post-Cold War period, efficiency became the organising principle of globalisation. Supply chains were designed to minimise costs. Production concentrated in the most competitive locations. Energy was sourced primarily according to price. Just-in-time logistics became the dominant business model across industries. Recent crises have exposed the strategic vulnerabilities of this approach.

The pandemic disrupted global manufacturing. Russia's invasion of Ukraine transformed energy into a geopolitical instrument. Instability in the Red Sea demonstrated the fragility of maritime trade routes. Competition over semiconductors and critical technologies revealed the geopolitical significance of industrial capacity. Increasing concerns over access to critical minerals have highlighted new dependencies that could shape future strategic competition. For NATO, these developments point towards an important conclusion. Future deterrence will depend not only on military capability, but on the resilience of the industrial, technological and economic systems that sustain military power. The ability to replenish ammunition rapidly, secure access to strategic raw materials, protect energy infrastructure, maintain digital connectivity and preserve industrial production during prolonged crises has become an essential component of collective defence.

Ukraine has demonstrated that modern warfare is not won solely through battlefield performance. It is equally a contest of production capacity, logistics, innovation and societal endurance. This observation has implications far beyond the current conflict.

Future crises may emerge simultaneously across multiple domains, combining cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, disruption of maritime routes, attacks on critical infrastructure and conventional military pressure. Such scenarios require an Alliance capable not only of military response but also of rapid economic and technological adaptation. Resilience should therefore become a core organising principle for NATO's next phase of strategic development.

This does not imply expanding NATO into an economic organisation. Rather, it recognises that military effectiveness increasingly depends upon civilian capabilities beyond the traditional remit of defence ministries. The Alliance's comparative advantage lies in its ability to coordinate standards, facilitate interoperability, encourage industrial cooperation and strengthen collective preparedness among Allies. The Ankara Summit offers an opportunity to accelerate this evolution.

Rather than focusing exclusively on force posture and defence spending, Allied leaders could also launch practical initiatives aimed at strengthening industrial resilience, protecting critical infrastructure, enhancing maritime domain awareness and improving coordination across emerging technology sectors. Such measures would complement rather than replace NATO's traditional deterrence posture. In many respects, resilience is becoming the twenty-first century equivalent of strategic depth. The stronger the resilience of Allied societies, economies and industries, the more credible NATO's military deterrence will become.

5. From Strategy to Implementation: An Ankara Agenda

Strategic concepts matter because they shape how alliances think. Institutions matter because they shape how alliances act. Since the adoption of NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, the Alliance has made important progress in strengthening deterrence, reinforcing its eastern flank and increasing defence spending. Yet implementation has inevitably been uneven. Many of the emerging challenges identified in the Strategic Concept (including resilience, technological competition, critical infrastructure protection and supply-chain security), remain dispersed across different institutions, national policies and sectoral initiatives. The Ankara Summit offers an opportunity not to redefine NATO's mission, but to strengthen its implementation. Rather than producing an increasingly comprehensive communiqué, Allied leaders could agree on a limited number of practical initiatives capable of generating long-term strategic value.

A Southern Resilience Initiative

The Alliance has invested considerable political attention and military resources in strengthening its eastern posture. A complementary Southern Resilience Initiative could recognise that the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and adjacent regions are becoming increasingly important to Europe's long-term security. Such an initiative would not duplicate existing NATO structures. Instead, it could improve coordination on maritime security, critical infrastructure protection, hybrid threats, energy resilience and crisis preparedness across the wider southern strategic space. Its emphasis should be resilience rather than permanent military expansion.

Strengthening Maritime Security in the Black Sea

The Black Sea has emerged as one of Europe's most strategically significant maritime theatres. Commercial shipping, grain exports, offshore energy infrastructure, undersea cables and military mobility all depend upon maintaining stability in this increasingly contested environment. Without challenging the legal framework established by the Montreux Convention, NATO could strengthen information sharing, maritime domain awareness, mine countermeasure cooperation, infrastructure protection and emergency coordination among Allies and partners. The objective should not be greater militarisation, but greater resilience.

A NATO Energy and Critical Infrastructure Resilience Hub

Energy systems have become strategic assets. Pipelines, LNG terminals, electricity interconnectors, offshore installations, ports, digital infrastructure and subsea cables increasingly represent critical vulnerabilities as well as critical capabilities. A dedicated NATO hub focusing on resilience, best practices, strategic assessment and public-private cooperation could strengthen Allied preparedness against both physical and hybrid threats. Given its geographic position, diversified energy infrastructure and experience as an energy transit country, Türkiye would be well placed to host such a capability.

A Defence Industrial Resilience Network

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that industrial capacity has returned to the centre of strategic competition. Future deterrence requires not only advanced military technologies but also sustained production, secure supply chains and interoperable industrial ecosystems. NATO could facilitate closer cooperation among Allied defence industries by promoting common standards, identifying production

bottlenecks, encouraging joint procurement where appropriate and improving surge manufacturing capacity during crises. Rather than replacing national industries, such a network would strengthen collective resilience across the Alliance.

A Centre for Hybrid Resilience

Hybrid threats have evolved beyond isolated cyber incidents. Today's challenges combine cyber operations, disinformation, economic coercion, attacks on critical infrastructure, technological espionage and attempts to undermine democratic institutions. An expanded Centre of Excellence dedicated to strategic resilience could support Allies through research, training, scenario development and lessons learned. Such a centre would complement NATO's existing structures while reflecting the increasingly integrated character of modern security challenges.

6. Towards NATO's Second Century

NATO approaches its second century in a fundamentally different strategic environment from the one in which it was created. Its first decades were defined primarily by territorial defence and nuclear deterrence. The post-Cold War era focused on crisis management and expeditionary operations. The coming decades are likely to be characterised by persistent strategic competition across military, technological, economic and societal domains. Success in this environment will require adaptation rather than transformation for its own sake. The Alliance's enduring strengths remain unchanged: political solidarity, collective defence, military interoperability and transatlantic cohesion. These foundations should not be diluted. Instead, they should be reinforced by a broader understanding of resilience.

Security today extends beyond armed forces. It includes secure energy systems, resilient supply chains, trusted technologies, robust industrial production, protected digital infrastructure, maritime connectivity and societies capable of withstanding sustained strategic pressure. This broader perspective should not be interpreted as mission creep. It reflects the reality that future conflicts will increasingly involve the interaction of military and civilian systems. The effectiveness of armed forces will depend as much on resilient economies and functioning infrastructure as on operational capability.

The Ankara Summit therefore presents an opportunity to consolidate this evolving understanding. Its success should not be judged solely by the language of its communiqué or the number of initiatives announced during two days of meetings. Its lasting significance will depend on whether it establishes new institutions, launches durable mechanisms for cooperation and encourages Allies to think about collective security in more integrated terms. History tends to remember summits not for their declarations

but for the strategic trajectories they initiate.

If Ankara helps embed resilience alongside deterrence, industrial capacity alongside military readiness and strategic connectivity alongside territorial defence, it may come to be seen as an important milestone in NATO's continuing adaptation to the demands of the twenty-first century. In that sense, the Summit's greatest legacy would not be to redefine the Alliance, but to help ensure that one of history's most successful security organisations remains fit for purpose in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

From Frontline Ally to Strategic Enabler

For much of NATO's history, Türkiye's contribution was measured primarily by geography. Situated at the Alliance's southeastern frontier, it served as a bulwark against Soviet expansion, controlled access to the Black Sea through the Turkish Straits and provided one of NATO's largest standing armed forces. Those contributions remain important. Yet they no longer capture the full extent of Türkiye's strategic relevance. The strategic environment has changed. Today, the value of Allies is increasingly determined not only by where they are located, but by the strategic functions they perform. Countries that can connect regions, diversify supply chains, strengthen industrial production, secure energy flows, protect critical infrastructure and accelerate technological innovation contribute to collective security in ways that were scarcely imagined when NATO was founded.

Viewed through this broader lens, Türkiye's role is evolving. Its significance lies not simply in being a frontline Ally but in acting as a strategic enabler for the Alliance—supporting resilience across multiple domains simultaneously. Geography provides the foundation; strategic capability determines the value added. Recognising this evolution does not require abandoning NATO's traditional priorities. On the contrary, strengthening resilience reinforces deterrence. Expanding industrial cooperation strengthens military readiness. Protecting energy and digital infrastructure enhances operational effectiveness. Diversifying transport corridors improves strategic mobility. These are mutually reinforcing objectives rather than competing agendas.

The Ankara Summit therefore arrives at a moment when NATO faces an important strategic choice. The Alliance can continue adapting incrementally to successive crises, or it can adopt a more integrated understanding of security that reflects the realities of contemporary geopolitical competition.

The latter approach does not imply creating new bureaucracies for their own sake or expanding NATO beyond its core mission of collective defence. Rather, it requires recognising that the foundations of

military power now extend deeply into civilian infrastructure, advanced technologies, industrial ecosystems and economic resilience. This is where Ankara can make a lasting contribution.

If Allied leaders succeed in launching practical mechanisms that strengthen resilience alongside deterrence, the Summit will be remembered not because of its location but because of its strategic consequences. The Alliance has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity for adaptation throughout its history. It adjusted to nuclear deterrence, navigated the end of the Cold War, expanded to include new democracies and responded to terrorism, cyber threats and renewed interstate conflict. The next phase of adaptation will require integrating military capability with technological innovation, industrial mobilisation and societal resilience.

That evolution has already begun. The question is whether Ankara will accelerate it. If the Summit succeeds in doing so, its legacy will extend well beyond the decisions taken in July 2026. It will demonstrate that NATO remains not simply an alliance that responds to strategic change, but one capable of anticipating it.

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