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The Ankara Summit: NATO's overall resilience and the South

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The upcoming NATO Summit in Ankara is another crucial meeting for the Alliance and, beyond all tactical considerations, it must transform strategic ambition into practical initiatives to integrate military deterrence with civilian, industrial, and technological resilience. In light of recent crises (pandemic, war in Ukraine, attacks on underwater infrastructure, maritime disruptions), the ability to sustain military operations increasingly depends increasingly on the robustness of energy, supply chains, critical

infrastructure, and trusted technologies.

In fact, the new strategic environment combines conventional force, cyber operations, economic coercion, disinformation, and supply chain manipulation, whereby blurring the lines between military and non-military threats are blurred. The lessons learned from the three-year long Covid pandemic and the now four years and a half long war in Ukraine have fully revealed the vulnerabilities of global supply chains, while the Yemeni conflict and the Israeli-US attack against Iran have reinforced the lessons and shown how relatively inexpensive technologies and a skilful political manoeuvring can have significant strategic impacts. The actions carried out within the Bab el-Mandeb and the Hormuz straits have reconfirmed the effectiveness of “naval quarantine” operations (like the one carried out against Cuba in 1962) vis-à-vis the traditional naval blockade.

These lessons indicate that resilience as a strategic advantage because the ability to absorb shocks, restore critical systems, and maintain political cohesion is again an integral part of modern deterrence, as it was in other historical periods.

Moreover, the last two decades have shown the emergence of a Southern Strategic System. Much of NATO’s strategic thinking continues to distinguish between the Eastern Flank and the Southern Neighbourhood; while this distinction remains operationally useful, 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 (where it was just a NATO bastion in the Soviet dominated Black Sea) 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. Firstly, it has become a multidimensional strategic hub: geographic position (access to the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean), energy transit infrastructure, growing defence industry, and transport corridors linking Europe and Asia make Turkey a natural candidate to host and facilitate resilience initiatives. Secondly has become a strategic enabler, in addition to remaining a frontline ally, because political-economic initiatives have deeply modified the purely geographic factor into a new geopolitical reality through connectivity, energy diversification, industrial capacity and active regional diplomatic networks.

Therefore, the Allies should consider the possibility to adopt five initiatives that would give further impetus to NATO and make it more effective for the coming strategic challenges.

1. A Southern Strategic Resilience Initiative (SSRI)

This initiative complements two existing partnerships, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, in order to better cover and integrate the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, South Caucasus with adjacent regions into a common framework for maritime security, infrastructure protection and hybrid threat preparedness.

2. Black Sea Maritime Coordination Mechanism

Consequent to the SSRI, this coordination mechanisms has the objective of enhancing maritime awareness, strengthening mine countermeasures and putting in place an effective crisis prevention and coordination respecting the Montreux Convention. This mechanism is not aimed at improving military operations (fully implemented by existing NATO means) but has the objective of strengthening overall regional resilience.

3. Centre for Hybrid Resilience

Further developing the resilience aspect of the SSRI, this centre should be dedicated to AI, cyber resilience, disinformation, economic coercion, and intersectoral planning for complex hybrid scenarios. It would complement and network with existing Centres of Excellence, like the Cooperative Cyber Defence (CCD) CoE, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats and the Strategic Communications CoE.

4. NATO Energy and Critical Infrastructure Resilience Hub

A hub to coordinate public and private sectors in protecting pipelines, ports, underwater cables, power grids, and digital connectivity, with analysis, exercises, and best practices. Again, it will need to coordinate and synergize with the Maritime Security (MARSEC) CoE and the Energy Security CoE.

5. 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 and standardisation where appropriate, and improving surge manufacturing capacity during crises. Rather than replacing national industries, such a network would strengthen collective industrial resilience across the Alliance.

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 social 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.

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