

## ARGUMENT

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# A New NATO Deal for America

Here is how Europe can meet the Trump administration's expectations on defense.

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By *Hans Binnendijk*, and *Alexander Vershbow*

As U.S. President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office again, European nations are scrambling to address his threats to withdraw support for the NATO alliance unless Europe spends significantly more on defense. To that end, more than 60 senior trans-Atlantic defense leaders—including the authors of this article—have outlined a new NATO deal for the United States. The proposed [Atlantic Charter 2025](#) prepared under the auspices of the Alphen Group aligns with Trump's contention that European defense contributions are wholly inadequate to meet the continent's current and future needs.

The charter, which was formally presented to senior NATO officials in Brussels last week and is now being circulated informally to European governments and the incoming Trump team, offers a detailed prescription for how European nations might meet the incoming administration's likely expectations on defense. It proposes ways to significantly accelerate Europe's ability to execute defense plans already developed for the alliance recently by the supreme allied commander Europe. This would go a long way toward reducing NATO's current excessive dependence on the U.S. military.

The deal inherent in the proposed charter is that in exchange for a significant European defense buildup, the United States would continue to deploy troops in Europe at about the current level. But with this European buildup, U.S. reserve forces that were once earmarked for a conflict in Europe would be able, if necessary, to shift their attention more to Asia. If both sides of the Atlantic agree, it could represent an early win for the Trump administration while sustaining U.S. commitments to NATO.

The proposed charter addresses three converging challenges. The first is the belligerent behavior that Russia displays not only in Ukraine but increasingly toward members of the alliance. The second is the growing challenge from China, most evident in its military expansion, aggressive behavior toward its neighbors, and "no limits" partnership with Russia.

The third challenge is the United States' growing global defense responsibilities and justified desire to redistribute defense burdens more evenly.

Under these circumstances, the charter asks what specifically Europeans should do to create a new defense contract with the United States. The public debate has focused, superficially, on top-line numbers, such as whether European nations should spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defense, which most of them now do, or some higher number. More critically, what Europeans still need is a clearer understanding of what their minimum defense capabilities need to be so that they can execute their portion of the already agreed-on defense plans for Europe.

The proposed charter answers this question in detail. At the broadest level, it assesses that to meet Europe's minimum capability requirements, the European allies on their own must by 2030 collectively provide at least half of all the capabilities designated for NATO's defense in Europe. It further suggests that this share should rise to two-thirds by 2035. Growing European defenses to meet these minimum requirements would dictate defense spending at a level well above 3 percent of GDP.

What capabilities, specifically, will Europeans be expected to contribute and why? The proposed charter suggests the creation of two European shield corps forward-deployed in Poland and Romania, backed up by four reserve European war-fighting corps. The two shield corps, together with NATO's enhanced forward presence units and U.S. front-line support, should be strong enough to hold back any initial Russian assault on NATO's eastern flank.

The four new reserve corps would be used to quickly transform the current Allied Reaction Force into an Allied Heavy Mobile Force, a high-end first-responder force capable of a conventional deep strike. This force would be available to immediately reinforce the two shield corps to drive back any invasion force.

In addition, Europe will need to produce more so-called enablers, such as strategic airlift, air-to-air refueling, and operational intelligence. Europe today relies much too heavily on the United States' enablers.

In exchange for this increased European level of commitment, the United States would agree to permanently station fully ready units in Europe, including the U.S. Army's V Corps, the Third Air Force, and the U.S. Navy's 6th Fleet, along with Marine Corps and special operations forces units.

New command and control mechanisms and interoperability procedures would be established to ensure smooth military operations. They would be complemented by renewed

focus on so-called multidomain operations, including cyberdefense, integrated air and missile defenses, and efforts to remove impediments to military mobility.

NATO's nuclear deterrence also needs to be strengthened in response to the Kremlin's continued nuclear threats and increased Russian deployment of shorter-range nuclear forces, including in Belarus. The charter recommends ways to accomplish this, including broader nuclear-sharing arrangements and greater nuclear cooperation between Britain and France. Given Russian behavior, the NATO-Russia Founding Act should be set aside for now, and its prohibitions should not inhibit these and other deterrence enhancements.

Given the economic and political problems faced by many European countries, the charter suggests a way to finance defense requirements that cannot be met by immediate increases in national defense budgets. It endorses creating a defense, security, and resilience bank, which has been under study by the NATO International Staff since 2019. The bank's loans and loan guarantees would be underwritten by the creditworthiness of NATO member nations. Loans and loan guarantees would be made to NATO members and their defense industries to implement the ambitious defense plans outlined above.

The proposals in the charter are far-reaching and expensive for Europe, where some allies are still falling short of the current 2 percent spending goal. Politics in Germany and France, Europe's two largest economies, are in turmoil. Spain and Italy fall way short of the goal. European GDP growth averaging less than 1 percent in 2024 will make it difficult for many countries to increase defense spending without deep cuts elsewhere. But the combination of Trump's verbal threats, Russia's continuing aggression, China's military buildup, and the prospect of a new bank to help with financing all provide reasons to believe that Europe can do much better in the years to come. Prospects will be even better if European publics understand exactly what defense capabilities they need to produce, and that is what the Atlantic Charter 2025 seeks to provide.

Following the necessary trans-Atlantic negotiations once Trump is sworn in next week, the upcoming June NATO Summit in The Hague would be the right place for alliance leaders to implement the ideas contained in Atlantic Charter 2025. At the summit, European leaders could cement their bonds with the new Trump administration by committing to rapidly building their capabilities, raising their defense outlays as required to meet these goals, and creating a new defense, security, and resilience bank to help finance their efforts.

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