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Forging a Common Shield: Strengthening NATO–EU Cooperation for Europe's Defence

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Abstract
The article argues that NATO–EU cooperation is indispensable for European and transatlantic security, especially since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Current developments in the US (the new National Security Strategy 2025) also underscores the essentiality of deepening these institutional links. While NATO still supplies hard power and collective defence, the EU adds economic, political, and civilian instruments; together they have built a layered framework for a solid Western response to hostile Russian actions and the US "decoupling" from Europe. Case studies from the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Ukraine demonstrate how integrating military and civilian tools yields more comprehensive results. Looking ahead, the author calls for tighter synchronization of NATO and EU defence planning, the rapid expansion of Europe's defence industrial base, faster modernization, and joint procurement, as well as preparations for dramatic shifts in U.S. policy—underpinned by higher, sustained European defence investment and streamlined EU funding mechanisms.

Keywords: NATO; European Union; Defence; United States; Ukraine

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Introduction

Close and synergic cooperation between NATO and the European Union plays a key role in preserving transatlantic security, particularly in the face of complex and evolving threats both organizations face, specifically after the Russian unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. While NATO remains a military alliance focused on collective defence, and the EU - a political-economic union, both structures increasingly complement each other's efforts in security, crisis management, and resilience building, even if it has not been planned or, sometimes, intentional. Most importantly, their partnership became crucial after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, which exposed multiple vulnerabilities of Europe, starting from the renewed possibility of military aggression, through hybrid warfare, cyberattacks, FIMI (Foreign Interference and Manipulation), and the like.

The legal and strategic framework for NATO-EU cooperation has been established regularly and is based on several key documents. The 2002 Joint Declaration established the NATO-EU Strategic Partnership and introduced the "Berlin Plus" arrangements, granting the EU access to NATO assets for crisis operations[1]. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007 clearly subordinates the EU to NATO for the mission of collective defence[2] (as mentioned earlier in the French-UK Saint-Malo Declaration of 1998[3]). The 2016 [4]and 2018 Joint Declarations [5]expanded cooperation to hybrid threats, cyber defence, and counterterrorism, marking a deepening of strategic coordination. The EU Global Strategy (2016)[6] recognised NATO as the cornerstone of European defence, while NATO's 2023 Strategic Concept[7] reaffirmed the importance of EU-NATO interoperability. Earlier, in January 2023, NATO's Secretary General, together with the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, signed the third Joint Declaration on EU–

[1] The "European Union-NATO Declaration on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)" and the "Berlin Plus" arrangements, at: Cooperation with NATO | EUR-Lex, (accessed November 17, 2025).
[2] *Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community* (OJ C 306, 17 December 2007). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12007L%2FTXT, (accessed November 17, 2025).
[3] *Franco–British St. Malo Declaration* (3 and 4 December 1998), at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/franco_british_st_malo_declaration_3_and_4_december_1998-en-316a6db2-ff40-47da-a7bb-951f60048624.html?, (accessed November 17, 2025).
[4] *Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 08 July 2016, at: Joint declaration | NATO Media advisory, (accessed November 17, 2025).
[5] *Joint declaration on EU-NATO cooperation* (Brussels). 10 July 2018, at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm, (accessed November 17, 2025).
[6] *Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe – _A global strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy*. (accessed November 17, 2025). https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3eaae2cf-9ac5-11e6-868c-01aa75ed71a1?, (accessed November 17, 2025).
[7] *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* (Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the Madrid Summit). https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2023/03/03/nato-2022-strategic-concept, (accessed November 17, 2025).

NATO Cooperation, aimed at deepening and broadening the partnership between the two organizations.[8]

Furthermore, despite recurring calls for "EU strategic autonomy," both organizations have learned to function as complementary rather than competing actors. NATO still provides "hard power", collective defence mechanisms, defence planning, and military infrastructure. The EU, in turn, contributes more to economic, political, and civilian crisis management tools. Initiatives such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) and the European Peace Facility strengthen European defence capacities in ways that simultaneously reinforce NATO's operational effectiveness.

The Balkans and Afghanistan - testbeds for cooperation

The NATO-EU partnership has already been tested several times, starting with long-term cooperation in the Balkans (still pending) and most recently during the Afghanistan mission, where both actors operated under different mandates but pursued a common goal of stabilizing the country. The Balkans in the late 1990s represented a crucible of post-Cold War instability. Emerging from the brutal conflicts that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the region was fractured by ethnic tensions, weak governance, and shattered economies. It was here that the nascent strategic partnership between NATO and the European Union was forged and tested, establishing a model of complementary action that would become a cornerstone of their cooperation. Their joint mission was not merely to end violence, but to build a durable peace. This task required both the hard power of a military alliance and the soft power of a political and economic union. Over the years, the cooperation evolved into a clear, though sometimes overlapping, division of labor. NATO emerged in the Balkans as the security guarantor. NATO's role was foundational and initially singular: to provide hard security and create a stable environment necessary for long-term political and economic development. This began with the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, mandated to enforce the military aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Later, the 1999 bombing campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Operation Allied Force) and the subsequent deployment of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) were decisive in halting ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. NATO's presence deterred a return to large-scale violence, demilitarized non-state actors, and built trust with local security forces through training and partnership programs.

The EU acted in the Balkans as the agent of transformation: the European Union's role was to transform the post-conflict environment with multifaceted and long-term tools encompassing political and economic reform (through the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), the EU offered the powerful incentive of eventual membership, conditioning aid and closer ties on concrete reforms in democracy, rule of law, and market economies), civilian crisis management: (the EU launched its first-ever civilian crisis management mission (EUPM) in Bosnia in 2003, taking over from the UN International Police Task Force and it was a landmark moment, demonstrating the EU's growing capacity to deploy non-military expertise in policing, judiciary, and customs and crucially with financial assistance: massive inflows of EU aid through

[8] *Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* at: EU-NATO declaration_EN.pdf (accessed November 17, 2023).

instruments like CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation) funded reconstruction, institution-building, and economic development. The pinnacle of this operational cooperation was the launch of the EU military operation EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004. This mission was conducted under the "Berlin Plus" framework, a set of agreements that allows the EU to access NATO's planning capabilities and collective assets for operations where the Alliance is not engaged. EUFOR Althea took over from SFOR, seamlessly continuing the peace stabilization mission but under an EU flag. This demonstrated a successful handover from a NATO-led to an EU-led operation, with NATO providing support and guaranteeing access to its planning and command structures. It became the prime example of how the two organizations could work in concert, with NATO providing the enabling framework and the EU taking the lead on the ground, blending military stability with a broader political strategy aimed at European integration[9].

The complementary efforts of NATO and the EU were instrumental in stabilizing the Balkans. NATO's military interventions halted active conflicts, and its enduring presence prevented a return to violence, even if we don't find the situation ideal. This created the essential security space for the EU's transformative work to take root. The EU's promise of membership provided a powerful, positive political horizon that helped channel nationalist energies into constructive state-building. Reforms driven by the EU accession process gradually strengthened institutions, fostered regional economic cooperation, and improved governance. While challenges remain, the region has been largely pacified and is irreversibly anchored to the Euro-Atlantic community, with several countries now members of both NATO and the EU.
In Afghanistan, NATO led the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and later the Resolute Support Mission, with a focus on military security and training Afghan forces. The EU focused on civilian and institutional development, including the EUPOL Afghanistan mission (2007–2016), which aimed to establish an accountable police service. Together, despite some practical difficulties, they demonstrated that combining NATO's military assets with the EU's civil and developmental instruments can yield comprehensive results in complex crisis zones. Beyond EUPOL, the EU invested significantly in areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and women's rights, all of which were considered vital for Afghanistan's long-term stability[10].

Winning in Ukraine – now or never

More than three years ago, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has, however, become the most significant test of NATO-EU cooperation to date. Both organizations mobilized unprecedented political, military, and financial support for the legitimate government in Kiev. The EU adopted multiple sanctions packages relatively swiftly, curtailed energy imports from Russia, and approved a more than 17 billion Euro aid package within the European Peace Facility[11]. It also launched the EUMAM mission to train Ukrainian troops (with

[9] See for example: L. Gardner, *EU security in the Western Balkans*, at: EU security in the Western Balkans - European Security & Defence, (accessed November 17), 2025.
[10] See: ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm (accessed October 20, 2025). European Union and Afghanistan, at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/afghanistan/european-union-and-afghanistan_en?s=234, (accessed October 20, 2025).
[11] European Peace Facility – For Ukraine, but not only | Think Tank | Parlament Europejski (accessed October 20, 2025).

Poland hosting the Combined Arms Training Command and Germany hosting the Special Training Command), as well as the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM), with plans to expand its mission on Ukrainian territory. There are also discussions about using frozen Russian assets (around €140 billion) for reconstruction and to purchase military equipment. The invitation for Ukraine to begin EU accession talks has also symbolized a strong political commitment to its European future. Only lately, EU energy ministers approved a proposal to phase out Russian oil and gas imports to the European Union by January 2028 (announced by the Council of the EU on October 20). Under the plan, new Russian gas contracts would end in January 2026, short-term contracts in June 2026, and long-term contracts by January 2028. The proposal aims to reduce Kremlin revenues used to fund the war in Ukraine. Russia currently supplies 12% of EU gas, down from 45% before 2022, with Hungary, France, and Belgium still importing Russian gas (flexibilities were included for landlocked countries, such as Hungary and Slovakia)[12].

NATO, for its part, intensified political and military backing for Ukraine. The Alliance reaffirmed its support by establishing the NATO-Ukraine Council, thereby transforming earlier partnership frameworks. The Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) evolved into a multi-year support program designed to rebuild Ukraine's defence sector and ensure interoperability with NATO. As early as 2022, the Ramstein Process was convened (a series of meetings of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG), at the U.S. Air Base in Ramstein, Germany). The group, initiated by the United States and including over 50 countries, coordinates international military support for Ukraine in response to Russia's invasion. These meetings serve as a key platform for aligning defence strategies, sharing intelligence, and coordinating the delivery of weapons, ammunition, and training (with most of this process organized in Poland). They have enabled faster and more coordinated assistance, including advanced systems like HIMARS, Leopard tanks, and air defence equipment through capabilities coalitions. The Ramstein Process is vital because it demonstrates long-term, unified Western commitment to Ukraine's defence, strengthens NATO–partner cooperation, and helps ensure that Ukraine receives consistent military and logistical aid to resist Russian aggression. Over nearly three years, the more than 50 participating countries have pledged over $145 billion in military assistance. The 25th session (January 2025) marked a new phase, with the approval of roadmaps for the development of Ukraine's Defence Forces through 2027. It also featured new aid commitments—$500 million from the U.S., significant drone support from the U.K. and Norway, and further air defence systems from Germany[13].

Furthermore, the establishment of the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine mission (NSATU) institutionalized the coordination of training and equipment delivery[14]. Despite political differences among allies and the change in the White House (with extremely harsh rhetoric coming from the president and his inner circle), the Alliance maintained remarkable cohesion in condemning Russian aggression and providing assistance to Ukraine. In the Hague (2025), notably for Ukraine, the final declaration stated that Allies' support for

[12] European Commission, Roadmap to fully end EU dependency on Russian Energy, at: Roadmap to fully end EU dependency on Russian energy - European Commission, May 6, 2025, (accessed November 18, 2025).
[13] A snapshot of 'Ramstein' in figures: 25 meetings and over $145 billion in aid to Ukraine https://mod.gov.ua/en/news/a-snapshot-of-ramstein-in-figures-25-meetings-and-over-145-billion-in-aid-to-ukraine, (accessed November 13, 2025).
[14] See: NSATU, https://shape.nato.int/nsatu (accessed November 13, 2025).

Ukraine's defence and defence industry may be counted towards their defence spending commitments (5% altogether), as Ukraine's security contributes to Alliance security. The fact that support to Ukraine is formally recognized as part of the Allies' defence expenditure signals ongoing backing[15]. The summit also reinforced the need for stronger defence-industrial cooperation, faster delivery of capabilities (e.g., artillery, drones, air defence), and strengthening the Alliance's Eastern flank — all of which are relevant for Ukraine's support ecosystem. Lastly, over half of NATO members have also pledged to support the alliance's Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) initiative to buy US weapons for Ukraine[16].

Strategic Outlook and Recommendations

Regardless of the war's outcome, Russia will remain a persistent threat to transatlantic security. Intelligence assessments, including those, for example, from Germany and Estonia, indicate Russia's intention to expand its military presence near NATO's Eastern Flank. At the same time, hybrid and cyberattacks remain constant (with the latest Russian drone flights over Denmark and Poland, which ended in shooting them down in Poland).

This context underscores the need for even deeper NATO-EU coordination in defence planning, armament production and acquisition, and strategic communication. This will require:

1. Strengthening defence capabilities and industrial base of both organizations, which is already taking place, but the pace should be much faster. NATO's Defence Planning Process and the EU's Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) must remain tightly synchronized. European nations have increased defence spending—EU members allocated € 360.24 billion in 2024, with record investments in equipment—but production capacity and supply chains remain limited mainly due to long-term neglect. Germany's Zeitenwende policy and similar initiatives in other countries indicate positive momentum, yet Europe still lags the U.S. (but also China!) in R&D, innovation and disruptive technologies. Both NATO and the EU must therefore focus on expanding their defence industrial base, as reaffirmed by NATO's 2024 Industrial Capacity Expansion Pledge[17]. Noteworthy, the Alliance as such does not possess its own financial resources. It is the EU that is mandated to collect funds from the European countries and allocate them for defence investments. The EU has also had a limited competence here, as the EU defence programs managed by the European Commission represent a tiny part of the total of defence spending and the Member States remain in charge. Therefore, to change this picture only recently, the EU approved the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) program - a €150 billion initiative aimed at strengthening European defence capabilities[18]. It provides long-term, low-interest loans with maturities up to 45 years and a 10-year grace period. Funds are aimed at accelerating procurement of critical defence equipment, supporting joint projects among EU member states, and enhancing overall EU security (Poland is set to receive the largest share, approximately €43.7 billion). The

[15] See: Hague Summit Declaration, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_236705.htm (accessed November 13, 2025).
[16] *What is PURL and which allies are funding U.S. weapons supplies for Ukraine?*, October 20, 2025, at: https://english.nv.ua/nation/purl-initiative-created-to-speed-delivery-of-u-s-weapons-to-ukraine-with-nato-partners-support-50554053.html (accessed November 13, 2025).
[17] NATO Industrial Capacity Expansion Pledge, 10 July 2024, at: NATO Industrial Capacity Expansion Pledge | NATO Official text, (accessed November 18, 2025).
[18] See: Regulation - EU - 2025/1106 - EN - EUR-Lex, (accessed November 18, 2025).

Commission has also proposed (without these conditions) that Member States can borrow more money for themselves outside the Stability Pact rules (650 billion). First disbursements are expected in early 2026. Still, there are many unnecessary bureaucratic requirements (the percentage of components coming from the EU countries, the necessity of having two contractors for equipment purchases, and the like) which may slow down the whole process. The European countries need to hamper Russian aggression first and then think about strengthening European wing in the transatlantic defence industry.

2. Accelerate modernization and joint procurement.

The Versailles (2022) and subsequent EU defence summits endorsed the need to enhance autonomy through modernization, joint procurement, and the replacement of obsolete equipment. Programs such as EDIRPA and ASAP aimed to subsidize ammunition production and stimulate cooperation within the defence industry, but implementation delays persist. As of October 2025, EU states had delivered around just 1,6 million artillery rounds to Ukraine (80% of what was promised). Although it is not the worst result overall, speeding up procurement and standardizing logistics are crucial to achieving credible deterrence.

3. Prepare for tectonic shifts in the U.S. security policy.

The outcome of the 2024 U.S. election and the new National Security Strategy (2025) which challenges Europe a lot may reshape transatlantic dynamics for a long period of time[19]. Trump administration may reduce U.S. involvement in European security as it already happened in Romania[20], pressuring NATO allies and the EU to assume greater responsibility (although the first announcements were much more vocal than actual decisions). Both institutions must be ready to showcase tangible progress in defence spending (meaning implementing honestly 5% of GDP on defence pledge agreed in the Hague) and capability development to sustain political legitimacy and deterrence credibility. This level of investment will enhance NATO's operational capabilities, increase readiness, and improve its ability to respond rapidly to threats. It will also reinforce the credibility of Article 5 and will strengthen deterrence across Europe, especially in Central and Eastern member states that face the greatest security risks. Higher European defence spending will send a positive signals to the US administration that Europe has stronger commitment to collective security, wants to improve transatlantic relations and will reduce the (accurate) perception that Europe relies too heavily on the United States. Especially in the Eastern Flank the EU may play an important role in strengthening deterrence with the further development of the Military Mobility project (which is facing financial and administrative constraints) and lately announced by Ursula von der Layen "Drone Wall" and Eastern Flank Watch - a multi-domain system integrating air defence, surveillance, electronic warfare, and maritime security to monitor and respond to threats from Russia / Belarus[21].

[19] National Security Strategy 2025, The White House, at: 2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf, (accessed December 2025).
[20] L. Ilie, US to withdraw some troops from NATO's eastern flank, Romania says, October 29, 2025, US to withdraw some troops from NATO's eastern flank, Romania says | Reuters, (accessed November 17, 2023).
[21] The EU "Drone Wall" is a planned multi-layered air-defence system designed to protect Europe's eastern border from hostile drones. It will combine radar, radio-frequency and acoustic sensors to detect and track drones, and it will include systems that can jam or intercept them. The project aims to link the defences of multiple EU countries into one shared network, providing real-time situational awareness. Initial detection capability is expected around 2026, with full operation planned for 2027. Estimated cost is several billion euros.

For the EU, this represents a possible shift towards greater strategic autonomy — EU members will be better equipped to engage in joint defence projects and assume a larger role within NATO. Common investments and coordinated planning in the EU will boost interoperability, joint procurement, and the resilience of the European defence industrial base. Increased defence budgets will allow for greater investment in emerging technologies —like advanced drones, UAVs swarms, quantum computing (for cryptography as possible implementation), next-generation batteries and the like but also EU-wide cyber and intelligence capacities, mobility infrastructure, and intelligence systems. Also, pooling the resources like ammunition (small arms, artillery shells, tank rounds), joint development/modernization of armored vehicles by EU states (European MBTP project) should be specifically EU initiative[22].

A stronger European defence industry reduces dependency on external suppliers (not only from the US), strengthens strategic autonomy, and enhances cost efficiency through economies of scale and collaborative procurement. The growth of the defence sector can also stimulate employment and innovation, supporting broader economic stability across the EU[23]. For the EU, enhanced national defence capabilities will also translate into stronger collective resilience and a greater capacity to act as a global security provider.

It is worth noting that there are also many potential challenges. Achieving 5% of GDP in defence spending is an ambitious target — some countries see it as unrealistic under current economic conditions. Both NATO and the EU must work on public acceptance of such spending levels and will depend on demonstrating clear strategic and economic benefits for European societies. Effectiveness will ultimately rely not only on the size of budgets, but on how wisely the funds are invested in modern capabilities and cooperation.

4. Explore new funding mechanisms.

To meet its defence goals Europe should consider innovative defence financing, such as a voluntary EU/NATO Defence Citizens Trust Fund. Even modest contributions—e.g., EUR 100 per employed citizen—could yield around EUR 20 billion annually for defence investments. If voluntary measures fail, a small "defence solidarity tax" could provide predictable funding at least for some procurement programs. Such a mechanism would not only diversify defence financing but also strengthen the sense of shared responsibility among European citizens for collective security. The fund could prioritize joint EU–NATO projects, such as air defence

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Moreover, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland are proposing to use EU funding to build a "defence line" ("Eastern Shield) along their borders with Russia and Belarus. See: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland are proposing to use EU funding to build a "defence line" along their borders with Russia and Belarus. Euronews, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/09/26/eu-launches-drone-wall-to-detect-and-destroy? (accessed November 17, 2025).

[22] Planned joint fighter will be rather scrapped according to latest info.

[23] See for example: A defence splurge will slow Europe's deindustrialisation. But probably not reverse it, Economist, June 25, 2025, at: A defence splurge will slow Europe's deindustrialisation, (accessed November 17), 2025. Also: Will higher defence spending boost the European economy?, Financial Times, November 5, 2025, at: https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=1caef0dd7b63550b7de61f8b129ac2d14d7e317cd51d5a887a56dc88f2575da5JmltdHM9MTc2MzQyNDAwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=060d6f0e-912f-6181-09eb-7c44905c6078&psq=Economist+July+defence+spending+will+boost+european+economies&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZnQuY29tL2NvbnRlbnQvZWM5OWI4ZjAtMGI5Ni00YzdhLWJlYTItYjdiMjFhZTM3MjBl, (accessed November 17, 2025).

systems, ammunition stockpiles, drones or critical infrastructure protection. Transparent management and clear communication about the fund's impact would help build public trust and legitimacy. Additionally, pooling contributions at the European level could reduce duplication of spending and improve the efficiency of procurement. Ultimately, this approach would complement national defence budgets, making Europe's collective deterrence posture both more sustainable and resilient.

5. Enhance military mobility and logistical readiness.

The EU's Military Mobility initiative, launched in 2017, remains underfunded and bureaucratically constrained. The full implementation of the initiative would enable rapid troops and equipment movement across Europe—a decisive factor for credible deterrence. Greater NATO-EU coordination in this domain (which is lacking due to different priorities, differences in planning cycles) is essential for effective collective defence. Conceived as Europe's "military Schengen," the progress has been slow due to fragmented national regulations, infrastructure gaps, limited financing, lack of cross-border coordination between multiple national agencies and the like. Upgrading transport networks—bridges, railways, and roads—to withstand heavy military equipment remains a strategic necessity rather than a mere logistical improvement. Enhanced coordination between the EU's funding instruments and NATO's operational planning would eliminate redundancies and accelerate deployment timelines. Moreover, integrating civilian and military infrastructure planning could generate dual-use benefits, strengthening both defence readiness and economic connectivity. Without full implementation, Europe risks having well-equipped forces that cannot be moved swiftly enough in a crisis, undermining the credibility of both NATO's deterrence and the EU's security ambitions.

6. Countering disinformation and hybrid threats.

Both organizations have made notable progress in countering fake news and hostile narratives through initiatives like Stratcom unit created already in 2015 in EEAS, EUvsDisinfo website and NATO's Public Diplomacy Division. However, their budgets and staffing remain insufficient. Russia's offensive information warfare (supported by many governmental and non-governmental organizations with robust funds from the Kremlin) far exceeds Western capacities. A joint "offensive strategic communication" doctrine backed by decent budget could help NATO and the EU seize the initiative in the information domain. Developing such a doctrine would require closer integration of intelligence, cyber, and communication efforts across both organizations. Instead of only reacting to disinformation, NATO and the EU could proactively shape narratives that reinforce democratic resilience and public confidence. This approach should combine real-time monitoring of information threats with rapid, coordinated messaging supported by trusted media and civil society actors. Investing in multilingual digital platforms and AI-driven analysis tools would enhance the ability to detect and neutralize hostile content before it spreads. Ultimately, an assertive and unified communication strategy would transform information defence into a form of strategic deterrence, signaling that disinformation campaigns will meet swift, coordinated, and credible responses.

Conclusion

The NATO-EU relationship has matured into a strategic partnership capable of addressing a broad range of 21st-century threats. Their coordinated response to Russia's war in Ukraine demonstrates an unprecedented level of solidarity and operational synergy. While challenges remain—industrial limitations, divergent political priorities, and dependence on U.S. capabilities—the foundations of a truly European defence identity are emerging. Strengthening NATO-EU cooperation in defence production, modernization, and hybrid resilience will be vital to ensuring long-term stability in the transatlantic area.

Expanding joint research and development programs could accelerate the deployment of next-generation capabilities, from advanced air defence to cyber tools. Enhanced interoperability and standardized training across EU and NATO forces would maximize operational effectiveness and reduce duplication. Greater investment in strategic infrastructure, including the Military Mobility initiative, would ensure rapid deployment in any crisis, reinforcing deterrence. Coordinated efforts to counter disinformation and hybrid threats would protect democratic resilience and secure the information environment.

Ultimately, a stronger, more integrated NATO-EU partnership would signal to potential adversaries that Europe and North America stand united, capable, and prepared.
Taking all of the above into consideration, next EU-NATO Declaration (hopefully coming soon as the threats evolve rapidly) should commit to sustaining of sanctions on Russia and its proxies (China, North Korea, Iran) as a priority. Then, joint strategic infrastructure plan should be conceived with a common, prioritized map of military mobility corridors (land, sea, rail) that are explicitly aligned with NATO operational reinforcement routes together with energy supply chains which are also too scarce. Agreeing to a binding infrastructure upgrade timetable, co-financed by EU and NATO (or via EU instruments), for bridges, railways, roads, and logistics hubs on those corridors should be one of the most important pledges. A mobility readiness fund jointly managed, should be introduced to finance surge in infrastructure, permits, and transport bottlenecks (for example, for exercises or sudden reinforcement needs). Moreover, regular large-scale EU–NATO exercises explicitly focused on military mobility across EU territory, integrating civilian transport authorities, rail companies, road agencies, and customs should be planned and announced.
Considering the plethora of hybrid attacks (drones, sabotage in the railways) both organisations should formalize enhanced intelligence sharing on strategic infrastructure risks to jointly map and monitor dual-use infrastructure risks. Moreover, contingency planning based on these assessments (alternate routes, rapid repair capabilities, redundancy) should be also introduced.

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