RENMUN X

Throwing It Back

March 1st & 2nd, 2025

Chair Report 1
NATO

Strengthening NATO's European pillar in light of recent developments and sustained threats

Andrew Zeng

Chair Introduction

Greetings, Delegates!

We are your chairs Andrew and Yvaine, a Y13 from WIS and a Y12 from KGV respectively, and we are incredibly excited to be chairing you all in NATO at the tenth iteration of RENMUN.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or NATO for short, is a political and military alliance comprising of 32 member states. Originally established in 1949 to counter the Soviet influence in Europe following the end of World War II, NATO's purpose now extends beyond collective defence and into counter-terrorism and broader efforts to extend security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic region. Since 1949, NATO's membership has grown from 12 to 32 countries, with the most recent additions being Sweden and Finland. NATO maintains an open door policy with regards to its enlargement.

Delegates are expected to prepare a mandatory 90 second opening speech and an optional (but highly recommended) GSL speech of 60 seconds. Opening speeches, GSL speeches, research and any other material must be printed out before the conference, as electronic devices will only be permitted to write resolutions and submit amendments during the conference. As always, the use of artificial intelligence is not allowed and may bar delegates from receiving awards. Position papers are welcome but not mandatory. If delegates wish to submit any position papers, please email them to us by the 27th of February. Finally, note that this chair report is by no means wholly exhaustive, and delegates are highly encouraged to conduct their own research beyond the scope of this chair report.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us. We hope that you all are looking forward to what will undoubtedly be a memorable and enjoyable weekend of debate. Best of luck in all your preparations, and see you all in March!

Kind regards,

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Topic Introduction

With the war in Ukraine raging on and the inauguration of American President Donald Trump looming closer, now is a more important time than ever to examine the current state of NATO. Whilst Russian aggression continues to threaten European security and interests, a second Trump term brings fresh uncertainties, and threatens a return to the threats and tensions which marked the trans-Atlantic relationship in his first term.

For too long, Europe has outsourced its defence to America, leaving it dangerously unprepared to defend itself in the event that the US becomes too thinly stretched across multiple theatres or if it withdraws from its commitments. Whilst President Trump's invitations to Russia to "do whatever the hell they want" to NATO members who "don't pay up" (referring to the 2% GDP defence spending target) and his first actions in office—withdrawing from the Paris climate agreements, threatening to leave the WHO, and clashing with Denmark over Greenland—signal a more unpredictable, isolationist, and transactional America, a full withdrawal from it's European defence commitments seems unlikely.

Despite this, as America continues to shift its focus and resources to the Indo-Pacific, Europe must be ready to defend itself. German and Danish defence ministers have renewed their threat assessments, warning that Russia could rearm faster than expected and attack NATO within 5 years.

Previous attempts to strengthen NATO's European pillar post-Cold War largely failed as a result of complacency, a lack of political willpower, and US resistance. Now, with threats and global tensions at their highest since the end of the Cold War, NATO must work to make itself stronger and more resilient in order to safeguard its interests and regional stability.

Key Terms

Term	Definition
Collective defence	A multilateral security arrangement between states in which an attack on one ally is considered as an attack against all allies. This principle is enshrined in Article 5 of NATO, which requires allies to provide any form of assistance they deem necessary to respond to a situation.
Transatlantic security	The coordinated strategies, measures, and

	alliances between American and European nations to safeguard their mutual interests and to ensure regional peace and stability. This includes and is not limited to collective security arrangements, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism measures.
Burden sharing	The distribution of defence and security responsibilities among member states of NATO. In other words, ensuring that all member states contribute their fair share of resources—financial, military, intelligence, logistical, and more—towards the shared goal of Transatlantic security.
European pillar	Refers to the defence capabilities of European member states of NATO, and their role in sharing the responsibilities of collective defence and maintaining Transatlantic security.
Defence expenditure	Defined by NATO as payments made by the national government specifically to meet the needs of its armed forces, those of Allies, or of the Alliance.
NATO's 2% Target	A guideline for member states to allocate at least 2% of GDP towards defence expenditure, which was set in 2014 in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and broader instability in the Middle East.
Defence procurement	The process of equipping a military with the tools and equipment necessary to carry out its duties. This includes and is not limited to planning, assessing requirements, budgeting, research and development, and manufacturing.

Background Information

Historically, transatlantic security has been built on two pillars: US power and European power. Since its inception, NATO has primarily depended on the American pillar, with Europe dependent on US security guarantees throughout the cold war.

Following Soviet dissolution, NATO's 1991 strategic concept and the 1992 Maastricht Treaty both pointed to a desire to expand Europe's role within the alliance. In reality, with the Soviet threat waning by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Europe let down its guard. By 1995, 5 years after the Soviet collapse, average defence spending among European member nations fell from over 3% of GDP to 1.5% as they embraced the "peace dividend".

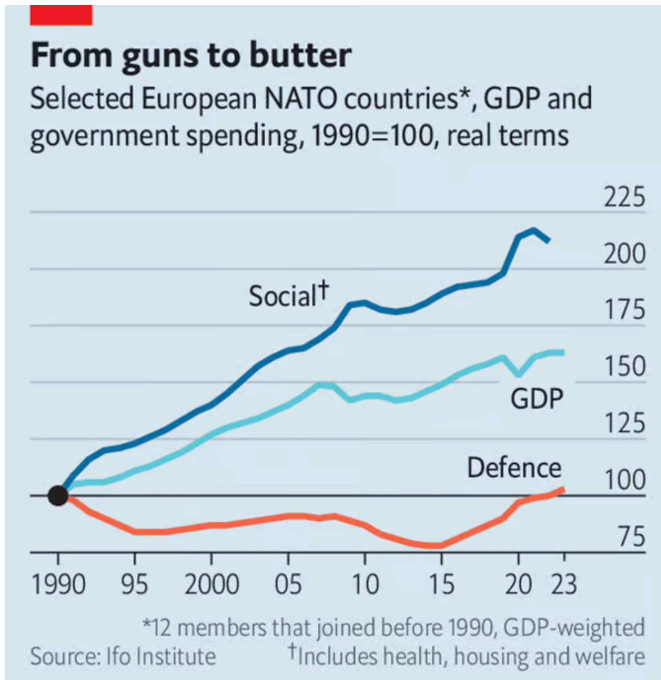

Figure 1: Average defence spending as a percentage of GDP among European member countries of NATO, over time. Source: The Economist

The Balkan wars of the 1990s exposed the extent of the decline in European forces' combat readiness brought on by the years of underinvestment, with American forces doing the majority of the fighting. This wake-up call provided a second opportunity to strengthen NATO's European pillar. The 1998 Saint-Malo declaration promised a shared European defence strategy for the first time, and was meant to pave the way for an EU army of 60,000 troops. However, despite frustration with Europe's lack of combat readiness, the US resisted such efforts, seeming more concerned that a stronger and more autonomous Europe would undermine US authority in NATO. Days after the declaration was announced, then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright outlined the new US position, which opposed EU policies that duplicated NATO's resources or decoupled European defence from NATO. The US made it clear that it would continue to maintain its central role in European security, and as a result, such efforts fell out of favour and the EU's subsequent efforts to strengthen its military capabilities yielded limited results. The crucial decision to effectively box out the EU from the equation would go on to have large consequences for European defence integration as a whole.

For the most part, this arrangement served both parties quite well. With its security guaranteed by the military might of the US, Europe was free to divert military spending to fund its social and welfare programs, as well as a wide range of other investments. Moreover, by locking European countries into an alliance, NATO removed the tensions that once plagued the continent, and paved the way for the economic and political integration of Europe. In return, the US could rely on consistent European support on the international stage as it pursued its interests around the world. The European coalitions assembled for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as broader alignment in de-risking and strategic decoupling with respect to China are just two such examples.

Now, with the ever present threat from Russia, the growing threat from China, and Trump's second term threatening to turn America into a more isolationist and unreliable ally, Europe's decision to outsource its defence to the US appears increasingly flawed. Should the United States be stretched too thinly across different theatres or withdraw from its role at the forefront of NATO, Europe would be dangerously unprepared, unequipped, and unable to fend for itself.

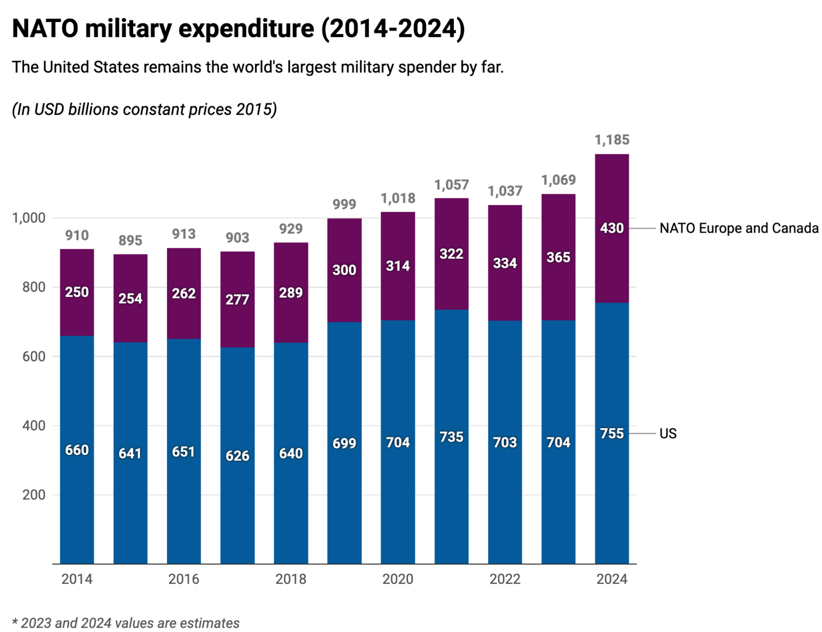

Figure 2: Breakdown of NATO military expenditure. Source: Al Jazeera

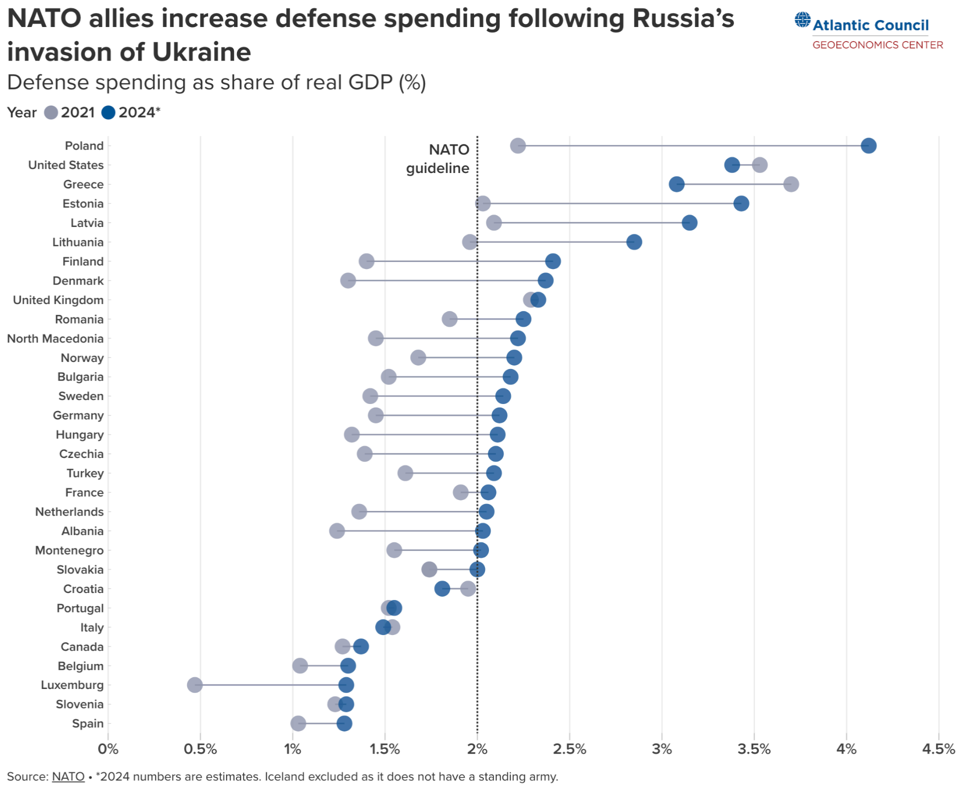

Figure 3: Defence spending as a percentage of real GDP for all NATO member states. Source: Atlantic Council

In recent years, the US contribution to NATO's total defence expenditure has hovered around 70% (It is important to note that this figure refers to Washington's total defence spending, not its contribution to NATO's annual budget—misleading claims have been made in the past that the US contributes 70% of NATO's annual budget), reflecting Europe's lack of defence spending. In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, defence spending among European member states shot up, increasing Europe's share of total defence expenditure. Finally, a decade after it was set, a record 23 out of 32 NATO countries are meeting the alliance's 2% defence spending target, up from just six in 2021. Many European member states even exceed that target, with Poland at 4% and the Baltic states at around 3%.

Despite this, in most cases, 2% may not be enough. Without America, NATO would have little military edge over Russia. Europe lacks many key tools and capabilities, including airlift capabilities, air-to-air refueling, high-altitude air defense, space assets, and operational intelligence, which have primarily been supplied by the US. Additionally, this year, Russia is set to increase its defence spending to 6.3% of GDP, up 25% from last year to the highest level since the Cold War.

Furthermore, according to calculations from the Ifo Institute, a think-tank, NATO's EU member states have accumulated underinvestment in equipment of €550bn (4% of the bloc's GDP) since 1991. On top of that, Europe has depleted much of its own inventory of weapons and ammunition by giving so much to Ukraine. Most recently, President Trump declared that NATO member countries should spend 5% of GDP on defence, which would be politically and economically impossible for almost all members. Ongoing discussions among European defence ministers have seen figures ranging from 2.5–3.5% being floated.

Beyond weak investment in defence, Europe also suffers from shocking inefficiencies stemming from poor coordination in procurement and defence production. In the period between 2016 and 2020, collaborative defence procurement among EU countries dropped from 21% of total procurement to 11%. Consequently, costs are higher as a result of missing out on economies of scale, and resources are unnecessarily duplicated in research and development and production.

The strong European support to Ukraine has proven that Europe is capable of delivering on big promises when there is sufficient political appetite and public support, giving hope that such an ambitious project is possible.

Potential Clashes

Higher defence spending vs competing priorities, fiscal responsibility

Higher defence spending is seen as the main means of strengthening Europe's defence capabilities, but with public finances tight and defence spending not politically popular in some countries, funding Europe's military expansion will prove challenging both politically and economically. EU countries already have among the highest tax rates in the world, and raising them to fund increased defence spending would prove unpopular. Diverting funds from healthcare and welfare would also be deeply unpopular. A third way would be to increase borrowing. Whilst this would not create large problems for low-debt countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, it would be extremely problematic for debt-ridden nations such as Italy, and Spain that spend more on interest payments than on defence. For certain countries that do not view the potential dangers of overreliance on America with enough seriousness, the political and economic costs of increasing their fighting capabilities will be more than sufficient to put an end to such efforts.

Greater defence integration and cooperation

Many of NATO's 30 European member states all favour different equipment, designing and manufacturing ammunition and weapons systems independently of each other. Such a fragmented defence procurement system drives up costs and leads to a far from optimal use of scarce resources. As of 2018, the US had 30 different weapons systems, whereas the EU had 178—six times as many weapons systems. Whilst the US only operates one main battle tank, EU member states operate 14 different systems and variations (although around half are based on the Leopard family). This leads to an unnecessary duplication of resources in research and development and production, higher costs as a result of missing out on economies of scale, and worse interoperability with allies—all for an inferior model.

Like most major industries, the defence industry is a national one. As such, national interests—protecting employment and advancing national champions—lead to governments favouring domestic arms manufacturers, despite the obvious disadvantages for NATO as a whole. Member states could be reluctant to cede control over procurement decisions which directly affect their security.

Beyond that, Europe also lacks proper defence integration. Combined, the EU and the UK have a military force of nearly 2 million troops, but it is one that varies in readiness and capabilities, and one that would struggle to coalesce into a unified fighting force without the capabilities and material support of the US. However, efforts to achieve greater defence integration will invariably bring up debates over national sovereignty and the federalisation of the European Union.

In order to strengthen Europe's military capabilities, member states must reel in their vested national and industrial interests, and accept the tradeoffs that come with it—greater integration will, to varying degrees, inevitably come at the cost of national sovereignty. It will be the job of NATO to determine the degree of integration that is acceptable, and work with the EU and other non-EU states to achieve this.

The roles of NATO and the EU

In achieving this aim, the cooperation of these two institutions will be crucial. The EU is able to wield financial and industrial clout on a scale that NATO cannot. Likewise, only NATO, backed by the promise of Article 5, can organise allies around the defence of Europe. The involvement of non-EU members of NATO—the UK, Norway, Turkey, Albania, Iceland, and North Macedonia—further complicates things.

It is important that member states assign roles and responsibilities between the two institutions in a way that does not threaten to divide the alliance in two or in a way that transfers NATO's responsibility for collective defence to the EU. Poor coordination between the two institutions could damage coordination and overall progress on strengthening NATO's European pillar.

A less dependable, more isolationist America

Beyond military strength and readiness, effective cooperation and coordination is key to having a strong alliance. A second Trump term brings a more transactional, unpredictable, and unreliable America, which could weaken trust and cooperation within the alliance. This would seriously undermine NATO's efforts to promote peace and stability in Europe and beyond, worrying allies and emboldening rivals.

Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Involvement with the Issue
United States	As the "key pillar" of NATO, the US wields a large influence over the key decisions that are taken. Whilst previous administrations have supported the "bargain" of bearing the burden of European defence, the current Trump administration has been vocal in its demands for Europe to begin bearing its fair share of the burden. The current administration's isolationist, transactional, and often unpredictable approach to foreign policy in some ways simplifies the endeavour of strengthening European defence, whilst also creating fresh uncertainties and complexities to navigate.
Germany	As Europe's largest economy, Germany holds large sway within the EU. In recent years, Germany has increased its defence spending, crossing the 2% mark following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Recently, the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs proposed an increase in defence spending to 3.5% of GDP in the coming years by reforming Germany's debt brake or by creating special funds. However, Chancellor Scholz criticised the proposal, questioning its economic feasibility.
France	French President Emmanuel Macron has long been a proponent of "strategic autonomy" for Europe—in other words, independence from the United States in strategic matters. France has also long advocated for Europe to develop its own defence mechanisms which complement NATO's objectives, and to enhance defence cooperation. Now, with heightened threats, such a vision seems more relevant than

	ever.
Poland	Bordering Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, Poland is one of the nations that would be most at threat in the event of conflict between Russia and NATO. As such, Poland leads NATO on defence spending, with expenditure expected to hit 4.7% of GDP this year. The Polish government has touted the idea of the EU establishing a “rearmament bank” to raise money for increased defence spending.
Canada	Canada has long been a reliable ally of NATO. In the face of a less dependable US, Canada could step up to ensure Transatlantic security. However, Canada is still yet to meet NATO’s 2% target, and is only projected to do so by 2032. In defence, Canada has voiced its concerns over the fiscal implications of doubling defence spending by 2032 if it is to meet the 2% target.

Possible Solutions

Delegates should note that this list is by no means exhaustive, and only serves to provide examples of actions that could be taken. Delegates are encouraged to come up with solutions that draw on their research beyond the scope of the chair report and keep in line with their country’s stance.

Looking Beyond 2%

As more and more allies exceed the 2% spending target, it may be time to re-evaluate our focus on what has been at the forefront of the debate around strengthening Europe’s military capabilities. Focusing on military inputs risks neglecting military requirements and the tangible ways in which they are contributing to collective defence and deterrence. To begin with, member states have the broad freedom to determine what is within the scope of the 2% target, as it relates to total spending on defence. For example, pension payouts and purchases of military equipment both count towards this sum. Whilst the target also included a second target that by 2024, 20% of defence spending should go towards frontline capabilities, much flexibility still persists.

Moreover, the target also overlooks the deeper issues that lie at the heart of European defence. Europe may be spending more on defence, but it is cooperating less. Over the past two decades, European defence cooperation has fallen short of hopes and expectations or even declined, despite the long list of flagship initiatives and bodies created to facilitate it. In order to truly deliver on the great promises of joint European defence, member states must reframe the debate and public messaging around it to address the inefficiency, fragmentation, and vested interests that have plagued it for so long.

Joint procurement programs and equipment standardisation

Through standardising and jointly procuring equipment and weapons systems, European members of NATO will achieve economies of scale and greater interoperability of their forces, increasing efficiency and combat capabilities whilst reducing cost. Partnerships between defence industries across member states can be explored for the development of next-generation tanks, fighter jets, and weapons systems. It will be up to NATO to determine the level of defence integration, which can range from straightforward and relatively uncontentious, i.e. addressing munitions shortfalls, all the way to much deeper structural reforms.

Increased high-level coordination on defence policy and defence projects

Increased high-level coordination on defence policy among European members of NATO would ensure cohesion in the unlikely event of the US withdrawing from its responsibilities. An arrangement similar to the ten-nation “Eurogroup” which informally coordinated European allies’ efforts to strengthen their common defence during the Cold War could be explored. This could also come in the form of an increased number of joint defence projects, such as the European Sky Shield (a German-led initiative to jointly develop air defences) or the Joint Expeditionary Force (a British-led alliance of 11 countries that patrols northern seas). Increased coordination helps to make European militaries more interoperable, and increases overall military readiness and capability. Similarly to the last, this would be an example of a lower level of defence integration that has a greater emphasis on collaboration.

Increasing defence spending through borrowing and EU funding

Whilst the much needed reforms to European defence will go a long way to increasing military capabilities, one thing is unavoidable—increased defence spending. Given just how vulnerable Europe would be in the increasingly likely event of large power conflict, the argument could be made that ordinary fiscal considerations should be overruled in favour of guaranteeing Europe’s security. Another source of funding could come from the EU. Some have suggested the bloc should establish a defence fund similar to the Covid-19 recovery fund, following the rationale of EU spending in return for mutual benefit in times of crisis. Currently, there already exists a European Defence Fund. However, it only has a budget of €8bn, making it insignificant in contributing towards the heavy investment required. For reference, the pandemic recovery fund had a budget of €750bn.

Past Actions

1991: Collapse of the Soviet Union	With the immediate threat of the Soviet Union removed, European member states begin to reduce their defence spending, embracing the "peace dividend".
1992: Formation of the European Union	The Maastricht Treaty is signed, establishing the European Union. The treaty includes language about Europe assuming new defence responsibilities to strengthen the European pillar of NATO.
1992–1999: NATO intervention in the Balkan Wars	Decay in European forces' fighting capabilities is revealed, US forces do the majority of the fighting.
1998: Saint-Malo declaration	France and the United Kingdom sign the Saint-Malo declaration, promising a shared European defence strategy and laying the groundwork for an EU military force of 60,000 troops.
2003: Berlin Plus arrangements are adopted	Provides a basis for NATO-EU cooperation in crisis management by allowing EU access to NATO's collective assets and capabilities for EU-led operations.
2004: Creation of the European Defence Agency (EDA)	Supports European defence cooperation by providing a forum to develop joint defence capabilities.
2014: NATO's 2% target is set	A guideline is set for member states to allocate at least 2% of GDP towards defence expenditure, in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and broader instability in the Middle East. Another target is set for a minimum of 20% of defence spending going towards frontline capabilities, equipment, and research and development.
2017: Launch of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)	A treaty-based framework that allows participating member states to jointly plan, develop, and invest in collaborative

	capability development.
2020: Creation of the European Defence Fund (EDF)	The European Defence Fund is created, aiming to invest in efforts to boost military capabilities and joint research and development projects across EU member states.
2024–2025: New uncertainties, new defence spending targets	New defence spending targets ranging from 2.5–3.5% (and 5% from Trump) are floated.

Guiding Questions

Starting questions

- ➔ Does your country currently meet the 2% spending target?
- ➔ How important is defence relative to other spending priorities (i.e. healthcare, welfare)?
  - ◆ How exposed is your country to the threat from Russia?
  - ◆ Is defence spending unpopular in your country?
- ➔ How urgent is the threat to Europe? Has NATO's response been proportionate?
  - ◆ How high is Europe on Washington's list of priorities? To what extent would resources be diverted away from Europe to the Indo-Pacific?
- ➔ Does the urgent nature of the threat overrule considerations of fiscal responsibility?
  - ◆ Would this circumstance warrant running budget deficits and increasing government debt?
- ➔ Is the 2% target sufficient?

Further questions

- ➔ How can NATO and the EU coordinate their efforts to strengthen European defence cooperation? Could the presence of two institutions complicate such efforts?
- ➔ What obstacles are there to increased defence cooperation and integration across Europe?
  - ◆ <u>To what extent should concessions be made over national control and sovereignty to achieve this end?</u>
- ➔ <u>To what extent should European defence be integrated?</u>
- ➔ Would a stronger and more independent Europe threaten alliance cohesion and create tensions between Europe and the US?
- ➔ What lessons can be taken from previous attempts to strengthen the European pillar?

➔ Beyond adequate investment and combat readiness, how can Europe make itself more resilient in the face of a less dependable America?

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