

## NATO's New Defense Pledge Faces Internal Strains, Experts Warn

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Despite ambitious pledges at its recent summit in The Hague, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) continues to face deep internal divisions that threaten its long-term cohesion. While member nations committed to boosting defense spending to 5 percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2029, defense analysts caution that money alone won't fix the alliance's strategic fractures.

Under the new Trilateral Security Cooperation Framework (TSCF), the defense target includes 3.5 percent for core defense and 1.5 percent to support allied aid to Ukraine. On paper, the move represents a strong signal of unity and resolve. But in practice, experts warn that NATO's ability to act collectively is being undermined by divergent national priorities, uneven burden-sharing, and political instability in several member states.

Mark Rutte, NATO's new Secretary-General and former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, has called for Europe to step up its defense role as the United States increasingly shifts focus toward the Indo-Pacific. He has emphasized the need for European nations to rely less on Washington and do more to support their security.

Yet this vision faces stiff challenges. While countries like Poland and the Baltic states have increased their defense budgets and troop readiness, others remain reluctant to meet even the previous 2 percent GDP threshold. Domestic politics, economic constraints, and competing national interests continue to hamper consensus on key issues, from military procurement to how to confront hybrid threats such as cyberattacks and disinformation.

Florence Gaub, who heads crisis scenario research at the NATO Defense College in Rome, said the alliance is working on identifying "weak signals" of conflict to give members more time to prepare. But she acknowledged that early warnings are only useful if members act in a coordinated fashion, which remains far from guaranteed.

Concerns also linger over the United States' long-term commitment to NATO. While Vice President J.D. Vance and Secretary of State Marco

Rubio have offered reassurance, many European officials recall former President Trump's criticisms of Article 5, NATO's collective defense clause, and his insistence that allies carry more of the financial load.

From a center-to-right perspective, these concerns highlight the urgent need for NATO to move beyond symbolic commitments. Greater spending must be matched with clear accountability and strategic unity. Without a firm, enforceable framework to hold members to their obligations, the alliance risks becoming a hollow institution, more a diplomatic forum than a credible deterrent in an increasingly unstable world.