NATO after Ankara – Europe should take on the burden of its own security

Published on 11/08/2026

In 1949, at the time of its creation, the first Secretary General of NATO Lord Ismay said that the alliance was created to "keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in." Today, considering the **threats from Russian President Putin** to Europe and in light of **American disengagement policies**, this phrase remains relevant.

In reality, today Washington does not want to leave the Alliance, but wants to change its **internal dynamics**. Already with Bush junior in 2006, Washington had "invited" European allies to dedicate at least **2% of the budget to defense**. The goal was to rebalance the **burden sharing**, or the financial responsibilities between the United States and other allies. This line was then reiterated by subsequent administrations and, in fact, Trump simply gave it a sharp acceleration. However, with the **Summit in The Hague in 2025**, Washington put in writing that the rebalancing concerns not only defense spending but also deployable forces, capabilities, infrastructures, and contributions to NATO missions. The main concern of the United States is that **European allies take on a greater share of defense**, rather than

disproportionately relying on American resources.

The birth of “NATO 3.0” and the risks of transition

With the NATO Summit last July in Ankara, the Trump administration gave a strong push to the process started in The Hague last year. So much so that at the end of the Summit, the Secretary General of the Alliance Rutte announced the birth of **“NATO 3.0”**. In reality, the concept is vague, but fundamentally the American intention is to move from **burden sharing to burden shifting**, that is, from sharing to **transferring the burdens**. Thus, from a more balanced distribution of responsibilities between Europe and the United States, it is moving to the assumption by European NATO members of the **primary responsibility in conventional defense and deterrence**. This implies a **significant reduction of the American military contribution** to NATO's defense plans for Europe, in order to reassign resources to the Western Hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, the United States is reviewing its forces stationed in Europe, a process that could lead to a reduction of its military presence on the continent.

This is undoubtedly a very delicate step. If Washington reduces its role too much or too quickly, the alliance would come out fragmented and with a **greatly weakened deterrence**. In fact, the United States provides **critical strategic capabilities** (nuclear deterrence, intelligence, air transport, missile defense) that Europe possesses to a limited extent. Moreover, acting as *primus inter pares*, Washington ensures **cohesion and speed** in the complex decision-making process of the Alliance. A too rapid transition could cause a weakening of the **transatlantic strategic link** and the risk of a **“decoupling”**, that is, the development of two parallel and potentially autonomous “defense ecosystems.”

The reasons for the persistence of the transatlantic link

American disengagement has raised many discussions, but it should be noted that Washington is very unlikely to leave European defense to itself.

First of all, NATO **“institutionalizes” American leadership** in Europe. Moreover, the United States maintains a **network of military bases** essential for projection towards the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe, while benefiting from cooperation with European intelligence and armed forces. Finally, Europe represents a **primary market for the**

export of American-made armaments.

In conclusion, the shift from burden sharing to shifting is a delicate phase, but NATO remains a **marriage destined to last** for mutual conveniences. For Europe, the United States provides credible **nuclear deterrence** and strategic capabilities; for the United States, NATO is an essential tool of **political and military influence**. For all members, it remains the **guarantee of collective security** in a historical period full of threats.