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## EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHITTIN ATAMAN

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As the international system undergoes its most consequential structural transformation since the end of the Cold War, the institutions and alliances that defined the post-1945 order are being forced to confront their own limitations, contradictions, and accumulated vulnerabilities. NATO, the cornerstone of the Western collective security for more than seven decades, stands at perhaps the most demanding crossroads in its institutional history. The convergence of multiple crises, the war in Ukraine, the 2026 Iran conflict and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the Trump administration's transactional approach to alliance commitments, the accelerating rivalry between the U.S. and China, and the deepening fault lines between European strategic autonomy and trans-Atlantic solidarity, has pushed the alliance into a period of profound uncertainty.

The upcoming Ankara Summit, which will be held on July 7-8, will not merely be a routine gathering of the allied heads of state; it also represents a defining moment at which the political, strategic, and institutional direction of NATO for the coming decades must be determined. The Ankara Summit, which can be entitled as NATO's Ankara Moment, will be held at a critical period, a turning point for the future of the alliance.

The geopolitical context within which this summit convenes is marked by an unprecedented density of overlapping crises. The 2026 U.S.-Israeli military attacks against Iran have fundamentally altered the strategic calculus of the broader Middle East and beyond. Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted global energy flows and exposed the deep vulnerability of alliance members to extra-regional shocks. These developments have simultaneously revealed both NATO's institutional limitations and the divergences within the alliance over how to respond to crises that do not directly trigger Article 5 obli-

gations. While Washington has pursued a confrontational and deterrence-centered posture toward Iran, most European allies have prioritized diplomacy, energy security, and regional stability. This divergence reflects fundamentally different strategic cultures and threat perceptions that have accumulated over decades and now demand institutional attention.

At the same time, the trans-Atlantic relationship has entered a period of structural tension under the weight of the Trump administration's demands for burden-sharing, or what some analysts have already termed a "burden revolution." The expectation that European allies assume greater operational and financial responsibility for their own security is an operational reality. The gradual retrenchment of American strategic attention toward the Indo-Pacific theater has compelled European capitals to reconsider their defense architectures, industrial capacities, and threat assessments with a seriousness not seen since the early decades of the Cold War. Yet this European strategic awakening carries its own risks, particularly the danger that the EU's emerging defense architecture may develop in ways that structurally exclude non-EU NATO members, thereby undermining rather than reinforcing the alliance's principle of indivisible security.

Within this complex landscape, Türkiye's role has emerged as one of the most consequential and most debated questions of alliance politics. Ankara can no longer be adequately described as a southeastern flank state providing territorial depth. Its sustained operational contributions, its 360-degree security approach, its expanding defense-industrial ecosystem anchored by actors such as ASELSAN, TUSAŞ, Roketsan, and Baykar, and its demonstrated capacity for diplomatic intermediation across multiple theaters have repositioned Türkiye as a central, operationally indispensable ally. Yet this repositioning has not been fully reflected in the alliance's political and institutional frameworks. Correcting this imbalance and recognizing Türkiye not merely as a troop-contributing member but as a strategic enabler and hub-state whose value derives from positionality as much as capability is among the most pressing tasks facing the Ankara Summit.

When looked closely, Türkiye has some political expectations from the summit. Türkiye is striving to ensure that the Ankara Summit creates positive momentum for both the future of NATO and the future of Türkiye-Western relations. First of all, Türkiye expects that the summit will contribute to the strengthening defense and deterrence capacity of the alliance. Especially, it expects the allies to underline the reaffirmation of Article 5 of the NATO agreement.

Second, Türkiye wants the summit to contribute to the preservation of the unity of the alliance in an increasingly fragmented world, especially the relation-

ship between the trans-Atlantic members, the U.S., and the European states. The rising tensions and differing perspectives between different member states have created an identity crisis in the alliance. This identity crisis is the first of its kind in NATO's history. NATO experiences an identity crisis nowadays mainly because of the differing perspectives of trans-Atlantic allies, namely the U.S. and the EU member states. This crisis has reached a point where the U.S. asked its European allies to fight their own potential war with Russia.

Besides the U.S.-EU members crises, there is another ongoing division between the EU members and Türkiye. Among others, several European member states are determined to exclude Türkiye from the European security arrangements. It is interesting to note that Türkiye's exclusion from the future European security architecture will be self-defeating for Europe. Türkiye seeks to ensure that the principle of the indivisibility of NATO security remains operative. In other words, all alliance members must recognize that insecurity in one member state can generate insecurity across the alliance as a whole.

This does mean that all member states are identical. Preserving the unity of the alliance does not negate the reality that 32 NATO members may have different security concerns, priorities, threat perceptions and political challenges. Accordingly, states in different sub-regions may have common threat and security perceptions. However, above all else, NATO should remain at the heart of national security strategies of all member states.

Third, Türkiye wants the alliance to have accountability on defense investments. At the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague, Allies committed to investing 5 percent of GDP annually in core defense requirements and defense and security related expenditure by 2035. At least 3.5 percent of GDP is to be allocated to core defense requirements and the fulfillment of NATO Capability Targets, while the remaining 1.5 percent may be directed towards defense and security related investments, including critical infrastructure, resilience, civil preparedness, innovation, and the defense-industrial base. Engagement with defense industrial ecosystem and to become part of a resilient and innovative defense industrial ecosystem is important. Türkiye shares the concern over the preparedness and readiness of the alliance against both conventional and unconventional threats.

Fourth, Türkiye wants the alliance to accept a road map for the future direction of the alliance, since the alliance must adapt itself to the evolving global threats such as hybrid threats, new technologies including artificial intelligence, international terrorism, energy security, climate change, and forced migration. Furthermore, changes within the global system require NATO to adapt itself to the new global shifts. Differing Western perspectives and relations vis-à-vis China and Russia will be quite critical in near future, because different NATO

members may develop different relations with these two global powers. While acknowledging their differences, NATO members must understand that they need to develop a common approach to global threats and changes.

Fifth, consolidation of Türkiye-NATO relations is another expectation of Ankara. Türkiye, which is not only a benefactor, but also a significant contributor of the alliance, contributes to the alliance with its military power, its experience in the struggle against terrorism, and its geographical and strategic location. It is the second-largest military army and air force within the alliance. Many member states have begun to otherize Türkiye especially after the purchase of S-400 from the Russian Federation. This purchase was not welcomed by the many NATO members. However, this reaction overlooks Türkiye's prior efforts to procure an air and missile defense system from the United States and European countries. Those efforts did not produce a viable agreement. Facing an increasingly volatile regional security environment and the need to address missile threats emanating from its neighborhood, Türkiye ultimately sought to acquire an effective air and missile defense capability and purchased the S-400 system from Russia.

If approached with sufficient political resolve, the Ankara Summit can produce outcomes that extend beyond the management of immediate crises. For Türkiye, it offers an opportunity to consolidate its position as a strategically indispensable ally, to strengthen cooperation with its Western partners in the fields of deterrence, counterterrorism, defense innovation, and defense-industrial production, and to ensure that emerging European security arrangements remain compatible with the principle of indivisible allied security. For NATO as a whole, the summit may provide a platform to renew the trans-Atlantic bargain, reinforce Article 5 commitments, establish a more credible framework for burden-sharing and collective preparedness, and develop a common strategic vision for an era defined by simultaneous conventional, hybrid, technological, and geopolitical challenges. Whether the Ankara Summit becomes a genuine moment of strategic renewal will depend on the allies' capacity to translate shared concerns into durable political commitments and practical institutional reforms.

This issue of *Insight Turkey* brings together a rich body of scholarly and policy analyses that collectively illuminates the dimensions of this critical juncture. The commentaries and articles gathered here address NATO's strategic transformation from multiple angles, offering perspectives from allied governments, leading academics, and senior security analysts.

At the heart of this issue are contributions from senior political and defense leaders whose analyses illuminate the Ankara Summit's significance from the perspectives of Türkiye, Belgium, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

From Türkiye's official perspective, Turkish Defense Minister Yaşar Güler examines the fundamental shift in Türkiye's role within the alliance, arguing that the Ankara Summit must formally recognize Ankara's repositioning as a central and operationally indispensable partner. He also issues a pointed warning about the strategic damage that the EU's exclusionary approach to non-member allies such as Türkiye could inflict on Euro-Atlantic security as a whole.

Complementing this argument from a European Allied perspective, Belgian Defense Minister Theo Francken presents Belgium's perspective on the Ankara Summit, arguing that the agenda should center on defense-industrial integration, Europe's expanding security responsibilities, and a broadening of NATO's geographical attention. He identifies Türkiye's defense-industrial capacity as a strategic asset for the alliance and calls for a transcontinental model of joint production rather than an exclusionary "buy European" approach.

Extending these national perspectives to the parliamentary and alliance-wide level, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, head of the Turkish delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, offers a comprehensive assessment of NATO's evolving role in a multipolar world, highlighting the pressures generated by shifting trans-Atlantic dynamics, hybrid threats, and technological competition. He argues that Türkiye has become a strategic enabler providing the alliance with operational flexibility and geopolitical depth, and that the Ankara Summit represents a defining moment for both NATO and Türkiye.

While these policy interventions set out the principal strategic choices facing the alliance, the scholarly contributions that follow examine the deeper institutional, geopolitical, legal, and normative dynamics underlying those choices. They show that NATO's future will be shaped not only by summit-level political decisions, but also by its capacity to preserve institutional cohesion, adapt its deterrence posture, manage regional crises, and respond to the changing character of power and insecurity.

The first group of contributions addresses NATO's institutional cohesion, security culture, and capacity for strategic adaptation. Murat Aslan examines NATO's security culture through a systematic analytical framework, proposing a 10-parameter reference model to assess the depth and current vulnerabilities of the alliance's institutional cohesion. While concluding that NATO remains among the most institutionally mature security organizations in the international system, he identifies significant challenges, including divergent threat perceptions, eroding shared narratives, fragmentation in armament, and unprecedented strain on political will.

Building on the question of institutional preparedness, Antonia Calibasanu argues that NATO's primary challenge in 2026 is no longer deterring convention-

al aggression alone, but managing the gray zones that increasingly define its borderlands. She calls on the Ankara Summit to prioritize a coherent borderland strategy encompassing resilience, attribution, integrated air and maritime defense, and stronger mechanisms for responding to hybrid coercion below the threshold of armed conflict.

Focusing more directly on the political fractures shaping the alliance, Valeria Giannotta assesses the structural tensions and internal fractures of the alliance at a moment of profound international transformation. She highlights the Trump administration's transactional approach to alliance commitment, the tension between EU defense ambitions and NATO's indivisibility principle, and Türkiye's distinctive role as a strategic axis in NATO's reconfiguration. She concludes that political will and credible mechanisms of trust are indispensable to ensuring institutional continuity.

The implications of these internal divisions become particularly visible during acute regional crises. Erdiñç Özdemir and Adem Özer examine how the 2026 Iran crisis has reshaped NATO's internal cohesion dynamics. They argue that the Strait of Hormuz episode exposed the limitations of NATO's collective defense framework in addressing extra-regional crises, concluding that the alliance is evolving toward a more differentiated, multi-layered structure in which formal commitments coexist with varying degrees of political alignment and strategic prioritization.

At the level of deterrence doctrine, Abdullah Kabaođlu investigates the structural transformation of NATO's nuclear sharing framework, asking why the alliance yielded to Putin's nuclear blackmail at the outset of the Ukraine War despite its superior nuclear arsenal. He identifies three mutually reinforcing credibility gaps produced by post-Cold War enlargement and argues that Putin's nuclear gambit was a calculated exploitation of structural weaknesses rather than strategic recklessness.

Turning from deterrence to the material and positional foundations of alliance power, İnci Taşdemir and Bedia Tekin argue that NATO's emerging geo-economic security architecture necessitates a reinterpretation of Türkiye's role through a hub-state logic. Using the analytical tools of power pricing and power valuation, they examine four dimensions of Türkiye's contributions – routing, switching, buffering, and synchronizing – to demonstrate how Ankara generates alliance-relevant leverage through positionality rather than possession alone.

A second set of contributions turns to regional conflict, sovereignty, and the legal consequences of contemporary warfare. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, president of the Transitional Sovereignty Council of Sudan, argues that the war in Sudan should be understood not only as a humanitarian catastrophe but

also as an existential struggle over sovereignty, state survival, and institutional continuity. By examining the Rapid Support Forces' (RSF) militia character, the internationalization of the conflict, the atrocities in Darfur, and the wider regional security implications, he contends that lasting peace in Sudan requires the restoration of state authority, accountability for crimes, and the dismantling of parallel armed structures.

Examining a different but related dimension of contemporary conflict, Davut Akduman and Abdurrahman Akıncı advance the concept of multi-layered criminality to analyze the 2026 U.S.-Israeli attacks against Iran. They demonstrate how allegations of aggression, war crimes, and crimes against humanity can arise concurrently within a single factual matrix without collapsing their distinct legal thresholds, offering a rigorous contribution to the evolving debates in international criminal law.

The issue also broadens the discussion beyond NATO's immediate institutional agenda by examining the changing geopolitical and regional environments within which the alliance operates. The issue also includes several articles that address broader strategic and regional questions. Emirhan Kınataş and Kadir Üstün analyze the Trump administration's ideological reorientation of U.S. trade policy toward aggressive protectionism, tracing its implications for the rules-based international order and American strategic credibility.

At the level of regional conflict dynamics, Deniz Ülke Kaynak and Hadiye Yılmaz examine why the Syrian civil war evolved into a permanent conflict dynamic, applying Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict theory to analyze the structural factors, identity-based fragmentation, social exclusion, unmet human needs, and external intervention, that have sustained the violence beyond its domestic boundaries.

Likewise, Ali Hüseyinoğlu, Gönül Tezcan, and Bülent Sarper Ağır offer a comparative and multi-actor analysis of the Western Balkans in the post-Cold War era, examining how the great power rivalry among the United States, Russia, and China shapes regional stability, with particular attention to developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

The final group of articles addresses the normative and human dimensions of international order, revealing how culture, identity, historical violence, and governance shape security beyond the conventional military domain. Erman M. Demir and Serhat Kaymaş critically examine whether UNESCO's contemporary cultural policy framework, particularly its embrace of the creative economy, functions as a form of neoliberal governance, exploring the implications of this shift for Türkiye's cultural diplomacy and foreign policy positioning within the organization.

Finally, bringing questions of identity, violence, and reconciliation into sharp focus, Özer Aslan examines the 1994 Rwandan genocide through the interconnected dimensions of ethnic identity, colonial legacy, state violence, and human rights, demonstrating how colonial administrations racialized Hutu and Tutsi identities and created the conditions for long-term political conflict culminating in mass atrocity. The study concludes with reflections on the challenges of peace building and reconciliation and the importance of integrating security policies with a human rights-based approach.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue reflect a shared conviction: that the decisions made at and around the 2026 Ankara Summit will shape not only the future of NATO but the broader architecture of international security for years to come. Whether the alliance can successfully navigate the tensions between unity and differentiation, between trans-Atlantic solidarity and European autonomy, between institutional resilience and the need for strategic renewal, will depend on the political will of its members and their capacity to translate shared interests into coherent collective action. In other words, both change and continuity will go on in the alliance.

*Insight Turkey* is honored to contribute to this critical debate and hopes that the perspectives gathered here will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and all those invested in the future of international order. ■



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