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Trump Rejects New Russia Sanctions at NATO Summit Filled With Big Spending and Big Emotions

By Charlie Hancock

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U.S. President Donald Trump, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the NATO leaders' meeting on July 8. **NATO**

ANKARA – NATO's annual leaders' meetings have become exercises in pleasing U.S. President Donald Trump, or at least to buy time for the alliance's European members and Canada to prepare for a world in which Washington is no longer the cornerstone of their security.

Watching the final press conferences at this year's summit in the Turkish capital, one would think it was mission accomplished — and then some.

The alliance reaffirmed its commitment to the Article 5 collective defense mechanism, amid fears that the U.S. may not intervene to defend members against a Russian attack.

Following the meeting, Secretary General Mark Rutte and Trump both gushed to the press

about the unity shown at the meeting of 32 assembled leaders.

And in a speech straight out of a campaign rally, the U.S. president rambled about how much love the rest of NATO showed him and his country, boasted of being No. 1 on TikTok and warned about the dangers of communism, joking that he'd be a better communist than Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin.

Rutte was appointed Secretary General in large part due to his reputation as a Trump whisperer. Thus, the summit agenda seemed set up to speak the language Trump knows best — money — to show that the alliance was taking seriously Washington's demands that they not rely on American military might for all of their defense.

Trump didn't make it easy for him. The U.S. president reiterated his demand that Denmark allow Washington to take over Greenland, saying he was "not happy" with NATO for backing Denmark's refusal to hand it over. He took aim at member states for not doing enough to support Washington's war against Iran and ordered an end to trade with Spain over Madrid's low defense spending.

Related article: Russia's War on Ukraine Isn't at a Stalemate. That Encourages Escalation.

Upon arrival in Ankara, Trump said he only came to the summit because it was being hosted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, with whom he shares a similar strongman worldview.

The price of trying to convince the U.S. president: billions of dollars in new equipment.

The keynote announcements at the summit's Defense Industrial Forum included a plan to purchase up to five Triton reconnaissance drones, two transport and tanker aircraft, and up as many as 10 GlobalEye early warning and control aircraft which a promotional video claimed could detect enemy aircraft and incoming missiles from as far as 650 kilometers (400 miles) away.

A NATO official later put the cost of these acquisitions at $50 billion, but not all prices have been set. Micael Johansson, CEO of the Swedish Saab engineering firm behind the GlobalEye, later told reporters that no contract for ordering the systems had even been signed yet.

On top of that comes a commitment to spend $40 billion on counter-drone defenses, $26 billion in missile defense and $1.6 billion in new strike capabilities. Members also announced new mechanisms to make defense spending more efficient.

Notably, while U.S. defense heavyweights like Lockheed Martin and Palantir landed new deals, many of the headline acquisitions came from European companies like Saab and Germany's Rheinmetall.

While arms deals are important for maintaining ties with Washington, which produces some equipment that other countries cannot currently match, the deals at this summit reflect concern among non-U.S. members about the need for strategic autonomy from Washington, an ally that has placed restrictions on what countries can do with weapons it manufactured to avoid escalation with Russia.

Embed:

> I got straight into things at NATO in Ankara by asking Secretary General Mark Rutte for @MoscowTimes about Finland and Lithuania's recent votes to lift their prohibitions on hosting nuclear weapons on their territories.
> pic.twitter.com/QXb4z7tiFD
>
> — Charlie Hancock (@Hancock2001) July 6, 2026

Ukraine's accession to NATO is not a realistic prospect in the immediate future, with multiple member states opposing it at least while it continues to fight off Russia's invasion. But Zelensky renewed his calls for his country to be allowed to join, arguing it was a natural member because of the technical and tactical innovations it has made since 2022.

On the first day of the summit, Ukraine signed new deals with Estonia, the Netherlands and Denmark to share its cutting edge expertise in drone warfare in return for royalties, military hardware and investments.

But Zelensky also used the summit to appeal for more air defense deliveries, especially Patriot missiles that are essential for intercepting hypersonic ballistic missiles. Ukraine failed to intercept any ballistic missiles in a deadly overnight Russian attack on Monday, on the eve of the two-day summit.

Alongside the big-ticket purchases, NATO committed to deliver $70 billion in aid to Ukraine by the end of 2026, and to match or exceed that amount the following year.

Kyiv has looked to Europe to source air defense weaponry that is less reliant on American manufacturing timetables and weapons stocks being purposed for conflicts in the Middle East.

In late May, Ukraine struck a deal with Sweden for Kyiv to receive 16 donated Gripen fighter jets and purchase an additional 20 newer models to be delivered in the coming years. Ukraine hopes that these aircraft will bolster its air defenses by forcing Russian aircraft to move too far into Russian airspace to fire glide bombs.

Asked whether Sweden, which manufactures Gripens, would allow Ukraine to shoot Russian jets with the aircraft, Swedish Defense Minister Pål Jonson told The Moscow Times, "Ukraine has the right to defend itself inside and outside its territory, according to international law, of course."

Speaking alongside Zelensky after the main meeting on Wednesday, Trump floated the possibility of granting Ukraine a license to produce its own Patriot interceptors.

"One of the things we're going to be talking about is, we're going to give a license to you to make Patriots," he said. "That's pretty cool, right?"

He added that the companies that produce Patriot missiles, Lockheed Martin and RTX

Corporation, had not been informed about such a move.

Trump's tone toward Ukraine has become more complimentary in recent weeks as Kyiv staged dramatic drone attacks against Russian cities and oil refineries, praising Zelensky's leadership and Ukraine's fighting.

So far this year, Trump has shifted his attention from the war in Ukraine to the war in the Middle East, but he has expressed frustration with President Vladimir Putin's lack of will to find a resolution to his four-year invasion.

"I just think they're going to make a deal," Trump told reporters on the sidelines of the summit. "I sometimes think that if you have two kids in a park and they don't like each other and they start fighting, sometimes you have to let them fight and let them see that fighting is tough."

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio then said he thought that Ukraine's deep strike campaign could open a window of opportunity for finding an end to the war.

Embed:

> Trump: The Ukraine deal has been in the works for a long time. Both sides know what it is.
>
> Sometimes you have two kids in a park who don't like each other and start fighting. Sometimes you have to let them fight.
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> 2/ pic.twitter.com/9oCVuzEvkf
>
> — Tymofiy Mylovanov (@Mylovanov) July 8, 2026

Beyond Russia's current war in Ukraine, the NATO leaders' meeting also came amid warnings from European intelligence agencies that Russia could try to test the alliance's resolve within the next few years.

Speaking to reporters, a senior NATO official said that he did not expect an imminent attack in the short term despite Russia's "reckless" recent behavior, saying that Moscow lacks the military capacity and would be concerned about NATO's response.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that it was too early to tell whether Ukraine's airstrikes against Crimea — an important logistics hub for Russia's frontline effort — were having an effect on the battlefield, where positional warfare is likely to continue.

Although the final declaration was explicit that Russia posed a long-term threat to Euro-Atlantic stability, Trump rejected the possibility of imposing further sanctions on Russia to pressure the Kremlin into ending the war.

“We have a lot of pressure on President Putin. I don’t think he’s thrilled with what’s happening. There’s a lot of pressure for President Putin to get it done,” he said.

If last year’s summit was about getting member states to commit to spend 5% of GDP on defense and resilience — or find a less expensive way to reach the alliance’s capability goals — this year was about taking stock of the progress that had been made.

Related article: Negotiations Are Not Ending the Ukraine War – They Are Extending It

Figures released by NATO say that five states are expected to meet their core 3.5% of GDP on defense requirements this year, and 17 to spend 1.5% of GDP on defense and security related investments.

But increasing spending in these areas is controversial in western European countries like Britain, whose publics feel less threatened by Russia compared to their eastern counterparts and are unwilling to cut social programs and loosen up overstretched budgets to fund defense.

Armies take time to recruit and train, and aircraft take years to build. Experts say that U.S. capabilities will be needed to fill that gap for years while Europe and Canada rearm. Rutte told The Moscow Times the day before the summit that “The U.S. nuclear umbrella is the ultimate guarantor of our freedom and security.”

Trump’s criticisms of European countries and Canada for not spending enough on defense are unlikely to go away by next year.

That is, if NATO leaders will meet next year at all. Rutte told reporters that the next leaders' summit will take place in Albania, but that no date had been set.

The Balkan country is expected to spend just 2.21% of GDP on defense by the end of this year and is currently embroiled by protests over a deal between Trump’s son-in-law and daughter and the Albanian government over the planned transformation of a lagoon and entire Adriatic island into exclusive luxury resorts.

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