



### Major Takeaways from the NATO Summit in Washington D.C.

This week's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit memorialized the 75th anniversary of the intergovernmental military alliance. U.S. President Biden welcomed world leaders to Melon Auditorium in Washington D.C. beginning on Tuesday evening – the same venue where the treaty was signed back in April of 1949. The summit was aimed at instilling confidence amongst the allies during a time of both domestic uncertainty in the United States and significant global challenges. Biden has been under intense scrutiny following his poor recent debate performance against former U.S. President Trump. The incumbent president has spent the last few weeks fending off concerns regarding his age, cognitive capability, and a growing number of calls for a replacement Democratic party nominee. Many world leaders are uneasy regarding the possibility of another Trump presidency and what it may mean for the alliance moving forward.

Various observers viewed the summit as an opportunity for President Biden to try and prove his mental fitness for a potential second term in office. Furthermore, the global stage gave him the platform to promote his internationalist approach to world issues. NATO allies entered the week prepared to discuss a daunting agenda of topics. The summit entailed a plethora of issues including support for Ukraine, defense spending, and China. The alliance also faced disunity among its own members. Hungary and Turkey, both friendly with Russia, have delayed Finland and Sweden's recent bids to join the organization. Additionally, Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary has strong ties to Russia and has frequently blocked aid from the European Union to Ukraine, heightening tensions within the military alliance. Canada has also faced backlash for not meeting the defense spending requirement, despite being one of the richer members, and U.S. Congress has openly expressed its indignation to Canada on the matter.

There are several key takeaways from this week's summit. NATO leaders collectively confirmed Ukraine's future membership in NATO. Yet, no specific timeline has been set for Ukraine's "irreversible" membership. Several NATO members have signed long-term security agreements with Ukraine since the war started. The alliance committed to long-term support for Ukraine through the summit declaration that was issued on Wednesday. The U.S. confirmed that F-16 fighter jets will be sent to Ukraine, along with an additional supply of air defense equipment. The continued supply of military technology to Ukraine comes at a time when some U.S. Senate Republicans have criticized Biden for what they deem to be a "delayed response to Ukrainian needs." Countering Russian advancements and threats was a hot topic of debate as well. Biden has called on all alliance members to increase their industrial production to match Russia's significant military manufacturing. Plans for a cyber defense center were also announced, in the hopes of deterring increasing hacking threats against alliance members. The cyber defense mandate entails the sharing of threat intelligence on private infrastructure amongst members. For their part, Russian hackers have even admitted to targeting NATO websites and entities in the past. President Biden's ability to function effectively during an unscripted event such as this was a major focus of the summit too. Biden had a couple of gaffs during his Wednesday night speech at the White House, but seemed attentive and present in the midst of other world leaders' remarks. Reporters asked the president questions about his viability as the Democratic nominee and what a second Trump term would do to the alliance. Biden underscored the importance of the alliance in combatting global threats, particularly in an increasingly interconnected world.

The summit this week also took place amidst looming uncertainty regarding the future of the alliance. Former President Trump has been skeptical of U.S. membership, and has not stated clearly what the United States' role in NATO would be should he be elected for a second term this November. Trump has referred to the alliance as "obsolete," and thus various NATO members are weary of their ability to potentially counter Russian aggression without the support of the U.S. if Trump is elected. The former president has consistently conveyed his discontent with defense spending in NATO, and he has stated that he would refuse to defend nations that do not contribute at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product to their own defense. The rise of far-right populism in Europe also poses a challenge to the future of the organization, especially in countries such as Hungary and France, who have been substantial parts of the foundation for trying to maintain security and stability in the aftermath of World War II. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer made his first appearance at the summit following his Labour Party's recent general election victory in the United Kingdom. Starmer has expressed his support for NATO and Ukraine, but the rise of far-right parties across the European continent could possibly diminish the strength of the alliance. The potential return of Donald Trump to the Oval Office, coupled with the increased presence of far-right politics in Europe, could halt future support for Ukraine.

Despite some internal concerns, the organization can be viewed as stronger than at any time before in its history. NATO has added two members since Russia's invasion of Ukraine back in 2022, and the inclusion of both Finland and Sweden's highly-suited militaries solidifies NATO's 32-member roster. According to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, 23 of the 32 member countries will achieve or exceed the 2 percent defense spending threshold this calendar year – a notable increase from just 6 members meeting this requirement back in 2021. Overall, the European allies of NATO have also increased defense spending in an effort to counter impending threats from the Putin regime in Russia.