

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

Featuring *Bradley Bowman, Sinan Ciddi, and Cameron McMillan*

Moderated by *Joe Dougherty*

JOE DOUGHERTY: Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us for today's media call as FDD experts preview next week's NATO Summit in Ankara. My name is Joe Dougherty. I'm Senior Director of Communications here at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. We've got a lot to go over today, so we're going to get right to it.

We've got three tremendous experts today to preview the upcoming summit. We have Bradley Bowman, the Senior Director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, specializing in US foreign and defense policy and strategy. Bradley served as a national security advisor to members of the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, as well as an active duty US Army officer, Black Hawk pilot, and assistant professor at West Point.

Sinan Ciddi is Director of FDD's Turkey program and is an FDD Senior Fellow focusing on Turkish domestic policies and politics, Turkey's foreign policy, and regional security issues. Sinan is an associate professor of national security studies at Marine Corps University and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service.

And Cameron McMillan is Senior Research Analyst with FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, where he focuses on US military readiness, posture, operations, defense production, and security operations, as well as Middle Eastern and European security. Cameron served as a US Army Field Artillery officer in the Massachusetts National Guard, deploying to Iraq in 2021 as a C-RAM (counter rocket, artillery, mortar) battle captain.

Today's conversation is on the record. We will have time for Q&A after each panelist's opening remarks, and we will provide a transcript and a recording, audio and video, after the call is completed.

Let's get right to it. Brad, over to you, and thank you for getting us started.

BRADLEY BOWMAN: Great, Joe. Thank you very much, and thanks to my impressive colleagues, Sinan and Cam, it's a real honor to be here with them. And thanks for those of you tuning in. We know you're busy. We want to make this worth your while. So let me kind of set the scene if I can, make a few comments specific to the geostrategic environment, the summit, and what might transpire, and then turn it over to my colleagues so they can dive into their parts.

So I think anyone who kind of looks at the US military experience in the Red Sea a couple years back with the Houthis and the military operations against Iran earlier this year, and if you look at it objectively and seriously, I think you kind of come away with two conclusions: One is that the United States has the most impressive combat power or military in the world, one, and two, there are serious limits to American military power and what we can accomplish with the military, and I think you have to hold both of those ideas in your head at the same time, and that our arsenals were not quite as robust as we thought. And as many of us have been saying for a while, including in our Arsenal of Democracy monograph, our defense production capacity is severely lacking. So I think that review of US military operations in the Red Sea and also against Iran more recently should impress us with the bravery, competence, and professionalism of our service members, but also maybe suggest a little bit of humility.

And when I look at what our adversaries are doing... And I've been leading here at FDD a two-year research project on how China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are cooperating, and I've been teaming up with my great partners, Admiral Montgomery and Elaine Dezenski, and we're looking at that in the economic, financial, cyber, technology, and military domains... it really confirms what the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said about a year ago now, that we're seeing unprecedented cooperation among our axis of aggressors adversaries: China, Russia, Iran, North Korea. They clearly understand the value of partners, and their cooperation is making each of them stronger than they would be otherwise in their ongoing prospective spheres of aggression.



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So if you accept the truth of what I just said there, kind of geostrategic framing, it would be a great paradox, I would say it would be very unfortunate, downright unwise for at this moment, when our adversaries are working together in unprecedented ways, for us to take our allies for granted. And I would say we are blessed with our allies. We have arguably one of the best alliances in human history that has been fundamentally successful since its creation in 1949 on Constitution Avenue here in Washington in achieving its core mission, that is, deterring aggression, conventional military aggression, against alliance members.

And so we have this summit coming up, and it's important to promote unity and solidify the strength of that alliance because we need NATO to be very effective at its core responsibility, and that is deterring aggression in the transatlantic region, particularly in Eastern Europe, primarily against the Russians. And so it is not charity; it is a wise investment to empower them, the alliance, which we're a core part of, so that we don't confront additional aggression, like in the Baltics in the next few years, like Crimea-style invasion, for example, in the Baltics. And I would make that same argument with our other allies and partners who are on the frontiers of freedom around the edges of the Eurasian land mass, namely Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan, and South Korea. So helping to make them strong and secure, helping them to be able to carry more of the burden is not a nice to have, it's not a charity thing; it's a wise investment that makes Americans more secure. So that's how I approach this.

And just a little bit of quick context for those who are old enough to remember, let's remember that on 9/11, Americans were attacked, not Europeans, yet they invoked Article V. Many of them deployed to Afghanistan. More than a thousand of our NATO allies were killed there and never returned home to their families, and some of them stayed with us to the very last days. And so where I come from, that's called a friend. That's called a very good friend. And where I come from, you don't disrespect a friend like that. You show them gratitude and you treat them with respect, and you don't do things like we did with Greenland.

So let me talk quickly about US force posture in Europe, and my colleague, Cam, here in a minute is going to dig into more detail. But one of the big, grand strategic debates right now is what we do or don't do with US military posture on the European continent. The administration's argument is that we need to do less in Europe so we can do more in the Pacific. There's a fundamental strategic insight to that. Strategy is the coordination of ends and means, you can't do everything; you have to make tough choices. But there's a paradox here, or something we have to balance. We have to make sure that we don't reduce US military posture on the European continent so quickly or prematurely or excessively that our European partners are not prepared to stand up so that we avoid a deterrence gap that invites aggression, understanding that we need to do more in the Pacific. Patriotic Americans disagree about how to get that balance right, but that's absolutely the balance. That's why it's so important that our NATO allies step up.

And as the secretary general has been saying, including at his speech at the Atlantic Council and his speech awhile back at the Reagan Institute, this is about burden sharing and defense spending. A few quick comments on burden sharing and defense spending, a couple other things, then I'll move to conclude. Let's be honest, for too long, a lot of our NATO allies were not carrying their fair share of the security burden. They were not meeting their defense spending commitments. But the bottom line is we're seeing massive progress on that front. Look at some of the statistics that the secretary general is citing. We're talking roughly a \$200 billion increase in the last year or two. We have all allies at 2%. And let's remember, at the Hague Summit last year in June of 2025, all of NATO member countries agreed to reach this 5%. Remember, that's the 3.5% of GDP on core defense spending and 1.5% on defense-related elements, critical infrastructure, networks, civilian prepared resilience. I would just say sorry, Spain, that doesn't include expenditures on soccer jerseys, or football, as you call them. But so 5% there.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

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And I would say this summit that we have next week here in Ankara, it's going to be show-me-the-money time. It's going to be, "Hey, you committed in the Hague Summit to 'submit plans showing credible incremental path to reach this goal'," namely the 3.5% of GDP goal. This is where we're going to see if people are putting their money where their mouth is or whether they're putting their budgets and their allocations where the political commitments are. Now, this isn't gotcha or sniping at allies. I don't do that. That's not my nature. This matters. Here's why it matters, because if NATO allies don't spend the necessary amounts on defense, they will not have the military capability and capacity required to defend themselves, to fulfill their responsibilities within the alliance, to carry more of the burden on the European continent, so we can focus more finite resources elsewhere and deter aggression both in Europe and the Pacific. So holy cow, that's really important, and that's why it's going to be important for them to show us that they're stepping up.

A few last comments here. Another major focus at the upcoming summit in addition to burden sharing and defense spending and holding people accountable to their commitments, allies, is defense industry cooperation. I flicked at this earlier. Putin's February 24th, 2022 invasion and then, again, the war against Iran, revealed once again that America's arsenal is not as deep as we'd like and our defense production capacity is not what it was, for example, in the 1940s. And so the way we're going to get after this is some of the measures that the Trump administration's taking, which are laudable, but Congress needs to follow up and make sure they're implemented effectively and quickly, but it's also cooperating with allies. So we want as much defense production capacity in Europe as possible, selfishly from an American perspective. Yeah, we're economic competitors, but there's something more important than that economic cooperation. We are so deficient on our numbers of munitions, so deficient on capacity and air defense interceptors, and almost everywhere you look, we need all the defense production we can get, and we're going to do that more effectively and avoid unhelpful redundancy if we're cooperating. So I think that's really important.

And then Iran, Ukraine, then I'm done. One of the reasons why the Trump administration is upset with Europe these days, generally speaking, is that there's a frustration that many of our European allies did not do more in the war against Iran. Let me just say that as good of a thing it is for American interests to have severely degraded Iranian military power and defense industrial base, I would respectfully say this administration didn't make the case the way it should have to the American people and to Congress and to our European allies before the conflict started, and so when it happened, they felt like, "Well, you didn't even give us a heads-up. You didn't talk to us," so there were some hurt feelings there. But the anomalies where we had a few instances where we couldn't use US military bases to do what we wanted to do, those were few and far between and fleeting. And if you see what the secretary general said in the last few days, we had 4,000 to 5,000 US military aircraft taking off from American bases in Europe to support Epic Fury. Okay? So this reinforces the point that American military posture in Europe is not charity to ungrateful, free-riding Europeans. It serves American interest, it deters aggression, and it facilitates power projection to the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle East, and the Arctic.

Lastly, Ukraine, and Cam's going to hit this hard. One of the big things here from the summit is going to be a focus on Ukraine. And here, again, we see the Europeans stepping up, contributing more to Ukraine security than we are, which is positive and good, but let's remember, America has a core interest in the outcome in Ukraine. If we're not willing to support Ukraine with modest help and modest investments, then why would the Chinese Communist Party think that we're going to send thousands of Americans to fight and some of them die and not return home to deter aggression against Taiwan? So what we do or don't do with respect to Ukraine is going to affect perceptions in Beijing and potentially affect whether they launch what could be the worst war of the 21st century.

I'll stop there and turn it over to Sinan, if that's all right. Thanks.

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SINAN CIDDİ: Thanks, Brad. Lots to jump in on here. And the way I would jump into this based on your comments and your framing of it, which is pretty holistic and pretty comprehensive, I would say one of the things to watch out for, and I'm sure many of you are following news items on this, is to suggest that in addition to the problems that NATO has in projecting itself in terms of its defense capabilities, its defense industrial base, particularly in the side of US allies, but also in the US's own production of capabilities is an additional potential problem that we've tried to highlight for some time, which is from the perspective of a one-member state, the host this time... This is the first time that Turkey has hosted the NATO Summit since 2004. And the way to probably think about that is is do we have a fox in their henhouse?

And whilst Turkey has projected itself consistently on the last few years under Erdogan as a country which has increased its spending limits in NATO, that it does have a significant defense industrial base, it is a major contributor of arms, weapons, and defense articles to members of the organization. The Turks have just built and delivered their first warship to the Romanian Navy, but in addition, the Turks have right now, 50 other warships being built in their shipyards, which is, I think, if I'm not mistaken, more than the combined ability of shipbuilding in all of the European Union. In addition to that, we also have heard extensive reporting about how capable Turkey's drone industry is, that it has supplied key weapons in the Ukraine conflict to Ukraine in terms of drones. Those weapons were tested in theaters like the Nagorno-Karabakh War, but they were also deployed inside of Libya. And Turkey's message to the upcoming summit is, "Hey, guys, look, Turkey's the most formidable, most capable NATO power which puts its money where its mouth is," in quite a stark contrast to all of its other members.

And the reason why we are essentially, I think, questioning Turkey's bonafides as a stalwart and model NATO member is because Turkey does have problematic relationships in other theaters, which potentially, in our estimation really do significant damage to the collective security interests of the transatlantic alliance. Sure, it's spending this money, it has all these capabilities, but the question essentially is, to what extent is Turkey interested in deploying these capabilities towards NATO's collective defense? In my estimation and some of the research that we've done, I would say it's not.

Turkey's actual pursuit is strategic autonomy, to acquire enough capabilities and defense capabilities in terms of technological transfer from the United States primarily, but also perhaps additionally from the European Union so that it can become completely independent of Western sources to continue building its defense capabilities. Specifically, Turkey, as we know, is in line to develop its own fifth-generation fighter aircraft, the KAAN. It has several prototypes in operation. It has made some test flights. We don't quite know the capabilities of this craft, whether it can be called stealth, but what we do know is that it's desperately in need of engines for these planes. It's trying to produce its own domestic engines for them, but until they can perfect that technology, they're going after and wanting to purchase U.S. engines, the General Electric F110 engines, and the Trump administration recently signaled last week that it was willing to make \$700 million worth of sales to Turkey against existing objections and legislation in Congress, which prevents the transfer of these engines to Turkey. That's one.

But Turkey also would like to purchase the F-35, or be brought back into the F-35 program, from which it was removed back in 2019, specifically because it acquired and still maintains Russian defensive equipment in the form of S400 missile defense system, which saw the first Trump administration kicking Turkey out of NATO, not out NATO, out of the F-35 program and imposing sanctions on Turkey's defense industries from being able to procure this. So in stark contrast to its message of we're a model defense partner and ally of NATO, so you should bring us back into the F-35, sell us engines so we can provide more capable equipment to NATO countries, I think there are several compelling arguments that we are trying to make and in a recent piece that Brad, I, and Cam put together and just published in *Breaking Defense*, I believe yesterday, but also we've had previous pieces on this before, there are problematic relationships there.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

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First of all, Turkey's the only member of a NATO country that openly supports, provides material support for, and champions a terrorist entity in the form of Hamas inside of NATO. We know many countries inside of NATO don't get on well with Israel, our U.S. ally. Different countries have different approaches and different problems that they underline, but no country inside of NATO explicitly provides open support for Hamas as an entity and champions them as a resistance movement or what Erdogan sometimes calls as a liberation movement. Turkey's the only country inside of NATO that has applied for membership of entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS.

Turkey is the only member country inside of NATO which openly threatens other NATO members, specifically Greece in contested spaces in the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea. We have just seen legislation tabled in the Turkish parliament that suggests that Turkey is interested in potentially claiming as many as 152 islands and islets, which would then give the Turkish military a pretext to militarily advance on these islands and try to uphold sovereign claims which don't actually exist. But Turkey's escalatory and military belligerence towards Israel is also being documented, not since just October 7 or the Iran war, but Erdogan's relationship to breaking or taking a very negative disposition towards Israel goes back all the way that I've traced at least as early as 2008.

And in addition to that, if you do peek at our piece in Breaking Defense that Brad and Cam really took the lead on, you will see that there's an additional cause that we should highlight and we've put forward to U.S. lawmakers and the administration that in addition to all of those sort of threatening behaviors, there is also a concern that Turkey's telecommunications infrastructure, particularly in the 5G space, it may be starting to become too compromised by Chinese partnerships, Chinese ownerships, and Chinese penetration with companies such as Huawei, but just not limited to that, having a significant stake which presents a risk to the F-35 stealth capabilities being tracked and compromised.

So in any case, what we will see at the summit and what the Turks will try to do is use this opportunity of the summit to really exact the F-35s and the F110s out of the administration. And the only thing that really stands in the way against Erdogan's wishes is essentially the United States Congress. I gave a testimony yesterday before the Tom Lantos Commission in the House of Representatives, whereby we argued significantly against this.

Existing counter sanctions should prevent Turkey by law acquiring or being brought back into the F-35 program as well as provision 1245 of the National Defense Authorization Act, which prevents Turkey being able to acquire sensitive U.S. defense articles as long as they continue to maintain the Russian missile S-400 system on their soil. They've made no commitment to remove that in any shape or form, so I'll be watching for that. Anyway, Brad, if there are any things that you would like to add to my exceedingly long monologue, please do so. Apologies.

BRADLEY BOWMAN: No. It was great, Sinan. I think mine was longer, so kudos to you. And I think you covered it quite well. My bottom line summary would be the F-35 is America's arguably most advanced fighter jet. We and our key allies and partners, including in Europe, are going to be flying it for decades to come. There's sensitive technologies associated with the F-35. If any one of our axis of aggressors adversaries get their hands on that, we can expect them in light of the research we've done over the last two years to share it with the other three, thereby endangering American security, American pilots, and the pilots of our allies and partners. Anyone who knows anything about the co-location and regular operation of S-400s next to an F-35 understands that is not a fanciful concern. And just take a moment and pause and consider what Sinan said.

Do we want a leader, Erdogan, who praised Hamas after the worst single day slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, thinks that's just fine and praises Hamas, to have America's best fighter jet? Is it too much to ask to not acquire an air defense system from the leading threat to the NATO alliance and not be led by a leader who thinks Hamas is just wonderful and who's not in a bear hug with China on bringing more the better 5G systems, which have repeatedly been a tool for espionage and cyber concerns? So that would be my summary of the great points you make. Unless you have anything else Sinan, I'll turn it over to Cam. Cam, over to you.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

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CAMERON MCMILLAN: Thanks, Brad. Good to be with you and Sinan and Joe as well. So I'll try to hit three points as briefly as I can starting with U.S. force posture cuts that have happened in the months preceding the summit, what I think's driving those and why I think they're a mistake. And then finally an update on Ukraine. So starting with the force posture cuts, the bottom line is basically the Trump administration has eroded American combat power in Europe in the preceding months through a series of steps. And I fear that it could get worse with Secretary Hegseth's announcement about a further review of U.S. military posture on the continent.

And how this relates to the summit directly, I think that it will probably give the president actually less leverage as he heads into this summit with the basic principle that the less skin you have in the game, the less people are going to listen to you, right? So looking at where we are militarily, I think it might be helpful to define terms. So the U.S. Army has these things called brigade combat teams, which I'm sure many of you are familiar with, BCTs, and they're basically the primary combined arms formation with which the U.S. Army fights large scale ground combat operations.

So the U.S. has generally maintained at least four in Europe since the 2022 invasion. We have 2nd Cavalry Regiment, which is a Stryker Brigade Combat Team, SBCT. We have an Armored Brigade Combat Team rotational deployment through Poland. We had an Infantry Brigade Combat Team, IBCT, rotational deployment through Romania. Then we had the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which is forward stationed in Italy. So we had started with four. The Trump administration ended the Romania brigade deployment last fall, so we came down to three. And then last month, as I'm sure many of you saw, there was a flurry of reporting about potential cuts to either 2nd Cav in Germany or the rotational brigade in Poland.

And we actually saw the Pentagon halted the deployment of what was basically the replacement brigade, the next up in that armored brigade rotation in Poland. And it appears that that's not fully resolved and serious concerns for me and I know some of my colleagues as well about gaps in that Armored Brigade Combat Team in Poland currently in a pretty uncertain path forward. So if I were a defense reporter, that's probably what I'd be asking the Pentagon about. You guys made an announcement after these flurry of reports, you guys being the administration, the Pentagon, saying that we have decided to go down from four to three brigade combat teams in Europe.

Well, we already did that last fall. So what is it with this flurry of reports and what is the status of the Poland Armored Brigade Combat Team? And I know Congress is also trying to get answers to those questions as well. The next big cut that we saw came outside of these BCTs in something called the Long-Range Fires Battalion or an LRFB, that was attached to the 2nd Multi-Domain Task Force, MDTF, which is basically these multi-domain units that the Army has stood up in different theaters. And the 2nd MDTF is for Europe. Well, this Long-Range Fires Battalion had long been planned to be deployed to join the rest of the 2nd MDTF in Germany. And it provides really essential long range strike capabilities that frankly the NATO alliance is overwhelmingly dependent on the United States for.

So the administration also canceled that deployment amid the feud between the president and other heads of states in Europe over Iran. So the bottom line there is a significant reduction mostly pointed at U.S. Army Europe, but there's been reporting in the past weeks I believe from the New York Times about potential air and naval cuts as well. And what I think are driving these cuts is to be frank, I don't think they're surprising if you read the administration's national defense strategy. And the key line for me is that they said or their kind of consistent message is that Europe needs to take primary responsibility for conventional defense in Europe with more limited but "critical U.S. support."

And I see two issues with that logic with some of these cuts. So the first being if we asked why? Brad touched on that really well, why is a stark strategic reality of we have to refocus more resources to the Pacific? That's obvious. That's a kind of general consensus, frankly, among many policymakers and a bipartisan consensus, but those critical elements, while some of these cuts impact those critical elements, the Long-Range Fires Battalion is one. If that New York Times reporting turns out to be true that things like air refueling tankers will be pulled out of Europe, that's a really big critical requirement.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

Featuring Bradley Bowman, Sinan Ciddi, and Cameron McMillan

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

These are capabilities or enablers that the Europeans really depend on the United States for and going to have difficulty replicating in the near to medium term. And then the second side of this is, like Brad said, we got to put more stuff to the Pacific, but if we look at some of these Army units specifically, outside of Korea, which I doubt they're going there, they have very limited value in Pacific scenarios involving China. I mean, if you think of an Armored Brigade Combat Team, this is a combat formation that is literally designed basically to fight the Russian army in Europe and to deter the Russians from making a move on the Baltics or Poland or making a move towards Kaliningrad.

So unless we plan on having a bunch of Abrams tanks swim to Taiwan in a Taiwan contingency, it has much more value in Europe. And so we kind of hit the critical and the Pacific and why I think there's some flaws in that logic.

To touch on Ukraine briefly, I think the bottom line is I share the bottom line analysis of many of my colleagues is that Ukraine's not losing and I don't expect that to change anytime soon. In fact, I think they've regained the initiative in some areas, especially with their long-range strike campaign against Russian energy, which will continue, I expect to do damage to Russia's warmaking abilities and the ability to sustain its economy.

But also their mid-range strike campaign against Russian logistics networks, not just things like ammo dumps or supply depots, but really important ground lines of communication, things like rail bridges and increasingly command and control and drone command and control specifically. Meanwhile, we see from Putin and the Kremlin, what I think we've basically been seeing for years now, which is Putin remains committed to its maximalist demands. And frankly, in terms of what can we expect out of the administration at the NATO summit, I do not believe that we can expect much until there is a fundamental shift in how the administration views the war in Ukraine.

If the administration believes falsely that Putin is interested in peace, we're going nowhere and I think we'll continue to go nowhere because he is not interested in peace, he is interested in war and so far we have had fruitless negotiation after fruitless negotiation, applying pressure on Kyiv and not applying pressure on the Kremlin. So in my opinion, Putin understands American steel in the hands of Ukrainian fighters. And if the administration can finally accept that fundamental reality, my hope would be that they would resume direct military aid at the very least increase PURL orders, work with European ally to increase PURL orders to get Ukraine the weapons it needs and basically say to the Kremlin, "Hey, if you guys want to talk, we're here, but we're done playing this game."

So I think the administration is going to enter the NATO summit with a lot of demands out of the Europeans. I don't think that's new from the president, but I think a lot of their reductions both in support for Ukraine and U.S. military force posture on the continent really probably counter logically to the administration actually weaken their leverage and what they can expect to get out of the Europeans and their goals for the summit. And that's it for me. I want to hand it back to you, Joe. Thank you.

JOE DOUGHERTY: Cam, Sinan and Brad, thank you for the excellent analysis. We're going to open it up to a Q&A now. We've got Missy already in the queue. Missy Ryan at the Atlantic, we'll get to you in a moment. To ask your question, you can use the chat feature or you can use the Q&A feature and we will call on you to ask your question or you can type it in and I will ask it for you. Missy Ryan, over to you. Thanks for joining us today.

MISSY RYAN: Hi, thank you guys. So I just wanted to follow up on I think what Cam was talking about and I think maybe you too, Brad, but what do you guys know about the NATO 3.0 review or it seems like there's several components. It's like a force posture review but also a review of allies. What do you guys hear is the process and where that is, where that stands? And then relatedly, what are you hearing from allies about that? How nervous are they? What are they trying to do to deal with that?

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

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BRADLEY BOWMAN: I can start, Cam, then Cam, you can fill in whatever you want. Missy, like you, I'm looking for details. I was at the embassy of a key European ally yesterday and you may have seen that the secretary general talked about this NATO 3.0 at length in his Atlantic Council interview a little bit, but it was all a little bit vague. It's about Europe stepping up. It's about America burden shifting, but retaining, as Cam was saying, consistent with the National Defense Strategy, key capabilities there that are particularly hard for the Europeans to replace in the short to medium term. It's interesting that evidently it kind of started with Bridge Colby's formulation and then was picked up by NATO and kind of echoed. And this is all kind of happening in the context of this six-month review, this posture review that Cam touched on and that we touch on in a forthcoming piece where it does seem like some of the decisions are already baked in and already made and they're just going through the process to give it an air of credibility to it.

So I think the main concern, and I'm not the first to say this, is that any additional US military posture reductions will go faster than the ability of the Europeans to step up and carry that burden themselves. Because as we know, it takes a long time to go from increased defense spending to increased arsenals, increased readiness, and you can't just flip a switch. And while we've seen these 20% increases in European defense spending, very impressive, we see large economies like Germany stepping up, we see the British trying to do better, although some of their immediate year numbers are a little bit disappointing, but it's going to take time.

And the rebuttal to that from the Bridge Colby camp is, well, time is what we don't have in the Pacific potentially. And so this is where we have to be serious and we have to understand that the essence of strategy is the coordination of ends and means. And you really have to scrutinize anyone who would say you need to pull an armored brigade combat team out of Europe and send it to the Pacific because as Cam said, it just doesn't make sense.

So in short, it's about European stepping up, holding them accountable to carrying more of the burden with increased defense spending, but that will take time. But it really is, if you see the Secretary General's formulation, he talked 1.0, that's kind of the early years of NATO. 2.0 was really him saying the Europeans weren't carrying by and large their fair share, even though we did have Afghanistan there. And as I made a pitch, they did carry a lot of the burden there. And really this new paradigm where primarily because of Vladimir Putin's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and then the massive naked aggression re-invasion in 2022, we see the massive increase in defense spending. And also let's be honest, President Trump has scared the heck out of our European allies and that's probably had some role in increased defense spending.

Nonetheless, we're in a better place now, but we need to [watch out or for a 'check's in the mail' mentality] in terms of future defense spending. And we're seeing really intense guns-versus-butter domestic debates among a lot of our political allies that are really, really quite tough, including in Britain and elsewhere. And we're seeing some of that here at home. We saw the defense budget request of \$1.5 trillion. It's unclear on reconciliation. So I'm going to say if we're going to preach and browbeat people about meeting 3.5% of GDP spending, then maybe we should do that ourselves, kind of walk your talk and by the way we need to. So I'll take a breath there. Cam, what do you want to add to that?

CAMERON MCMILLAN: Yeah, I'd just say I agree with Brad and probably a lot of your colleagues, Missy, of trying to figure out the specifics of it. I think it is intentionally vague. That's my opinion. And I think elements of it are baked in. I do think they will be looking at how individual NATO nations are doing basically with defense spending or fielding combat capabilities or forward-stationed units. If you take Germany, for example, they've got forward-stationed units now in the Baltics, or I should say rotational.

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And I think that those will likely be matched with any force posture decisions, which is kind of counterintuitive. I mean, what should dictate our force posture positions, are A, military realities and B, the American interest. So Poland, which rightly gets pointed to as a very positive example of stepping up on defense. That armored brigade combat team there is really valuable and really important. But I mean Estonia, Latvia, the Baltics, they're spending a lot per GDP, but the reality is they're really small countries, so they need help. And if they were not meeting, which they completely are, those targets, for example, if you put Spain where Latvia is, I'm not going to say don't put troops there because we're upset with their domestic political decisions.

And then the only thing that I'd say on wherever this thing falls out is, I don't know where it will, but I know the one thing that I don't want to come out of it, and it's that armored brigade combat team in Poland to come out of there. And these are really important for all the strategic reasons that Brad said of signals to the Kremlin and just deterrence, but there is also just cold, hard military reality on the continent. We've seen the kind of troop numbers, are usually things that are in the headline, Congress put some troop number floors in the previous NDAA.

But to be honest, I mean, numbers of troops is important, but what's really important is combat capabilities. And if you look at that BCT in Poland specifically and we think about most dangerous courses of action in the Baltics or ones at Kaliningrad, that is the American combat power because the Polish army is going to be pretty busy in that scenario, that would bust up into the Baltics and reopen ground lines of communication. So why is that important? Because then the Russians don't do it because then they say, if I make a shot and I take the big gamble and I go for Kaliningrad and I see if I can break up NATO or if I go into the Baltics, they know they're going to meet American Abrams and Bradleys and it's going to be a bad day and that at the end of the day, they're not going to be able to do it.

So that to me is really important. And what comes out of this cannot be those key capabilities, like the enablers and stuff that Brad was talking about, that the Europeans would have difficulty replicating, but it also cannot be things that, yes, are larger combat formations but are relatively modest when you look at American troop presences in history in Europe when we used to have whole divisions and corps. I mean, three BCTs is honestly not that much. And even if you compare it to the Korean peninsula, we've got two BCTs there and that's a single peninsula. So it's a lot of ground to cover. So all that to say is that I am frankly worried of what's going to come out of it and I hope that the Poland BCT specifically is protected.

BRADLEY BOWMAN: Joe, 30 seconds, just if I may, very quickly, if you look at the NDAA legislation, it's focused on numbers of troops in Europe. I think Cam said all that beautifully. It's focused on not going below a specific number. What is it, Cam? I think 76,000 or so roughly, but that's not the main point. You could say, well, is 72,000 really going to be so dangerous? The point that Cam and I are trying to emphasize, it's what kind of troops they are and what kind of units they are matters. And what we see the administration reducing is the combat power and that's what matters most to deterrence. And I would take Cam's point, agree with it and build on it. It's not just about cold steel and hard power, that hard power is also a symbol of political commitment. And unfortunately, some of the comments emanating from the White House that if countries didn't spend X or Y in defense, we weren't going to honor Article V, was really unfortunate and misguided because it cast doubt on the American political commitment.

And the only thing more important than the amount of deterrent steel in Eastern Europe is the perception of Vladimir Putin that when that national security advisor walks into the Oval Office and says, "Mr. President, we got a Crimea-style invasion of the Baltics, what do we do?" If Vladimir Putin [believes] that the president at the desk says, "It's not our fight," then we're more likely to see [aggression]. So that's why every statement from the president's mouth and these hard power, tangible things are so important because it [shapes] perceptions related to political commitment, which is at least half of deterrence. Thanks. Back to you, Joe.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

Featuring Bradley Bowman, Sinan Ciddi, and Cameron McMillan

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

JOE DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Brad. Thanks, Cam. Missy, great question. And Brad, your comments there kind of make for a nice transition into George Condon's question. George from National Journal submits this question, "Given the president's angry remarks about allied response on Iran and statements that we don't need or benefit from the alliance, is it fair to say that NATO is facing a crisis or are the verbal fireworks a distraction?" Brad, I think I know what you're going to say. Over to you.

BRADLEY BOWMAN: I'll try to be succinct. I think we have this weird paradox where on some level European defense spending and growing combat capability is as good as we've seen it in a long time and yet the tension within the alliance is also elevated. And I don't take any joy in saying this as a patriotic American, but a major reason for that is some of the rhetoric emanating from the White House and things... associated with Greenland, which was a completely self-inflicted wound and unforced error. So Europe is going to defend itself as best they can no matter what, but this is not tangential to the American interest. Students of history will remember we had two world wars start in 30 years and sooner or later, despite efforts to stay out of those wars, we were pulled in and more than 500,000 Americans paid the ultimate price in those wars.

So is it easier to have a few tens of thousands of troops in Europe and to support our European allies to prevent the war or to deal with a war that we could have prevented? I think that's an easy question to answer. So yes, there's tension. We had real problems with Orban being squishy on Moscow. We have real problematic statements emanating out of the leadership of Spain. I could give you an hour on all the issues with Erdogan. So this is not me saying everything's peachy keen, but NATO is a grand strategic asset and treasure for the United States. We are powerful but we need friends and our NATO allies are among our best friends.

JOE DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Brad. George, great question there. Let's transition quickly over to, back to Turkey. Sinan, you just testified again on Turkey and in particular on its human rights. You've got some concerns there. Can you flesh out a little bit more what you told the commission?

SINAN CIDD: Sure. I could possibly give it from the angle of some of the members who attended that commission hearing. Specifically, we had Congresswoman Dina Titus from Nevada ask a couple of interesting questions. And just to piggyback from on what Brad just outlined, put aside what I think is a misperception of NATO suggesting that it's a less-than-useful alliance. You know what's a really problematic ally? I would say with allies like this, who needs enemies. I mean, you have a country such as Turkey, not just rhetorically, but physically threatening NATO allies and European partners. Turkey just positioned a F-16 fighter jet, 4th generation fighters, not even 5th gen that it has acquired yet, but 4th generation fighters onto Cyprus, the occupied part of North Cyprus, which Turkey has occupied since 1974. And this is in direct violation of end user agreements pertaining to US military articles under ITAR restrictions, as in there are certain obligations that come with operating US platforms once a country acquires them through foreign military sales and you're not supposed to do certain things with them.

Now, putting them into contested territory like an occupied part of Cyprus, that should have immediately triggered a congressional oversight or investigation or at least some sort of concern being voiced from the administration saying, "Why is Turkey putting its fighter jets into direct contested space, which could result in armed conflict breaking out between Cyprus and Turkey, if not Greece and other European powers?" And there's been no sort of questioning whatsoever.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

Featuring Bradley Bowman, Sinan Ciddi, and Cameron McMillan

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

And Dina Titus's question to me was basically very simple and she asked, "Is the administration ever going to question or come to terms with all the litany of concerning behaviors this NATO ally presents rather than try to whitewash them?" To which my answer was, "I hope so." And when she asks, this is freely available on YouTube, you're welcome to watch it. It's quite a short exchange I have with her. Two questions. When she asks, "Why does Trump not essentially hold Turkey to account as opposed to just trying to heap platitudes on him?" My answer is quite simple, A... Well, not A, I just think that the president is not hearing all the advice that he should be hearing from members of his administration in national security roles that really position Turkey in a very problematic light for them.

And the other potential outside of Cyprus is concerning naval buildup and escalatory naval buildup by the Turks inside of the island chains of the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Seas where there are significant deposits of natural gas as well as potentially oil. And unless this is essentially brought to essentially a negotiated settlement in terms of whose maritime rights, whose exclusive economic zones belong to whom, although that appears that is actually settled under existing international law, Turkey contests it, but it contests it belligerently and increasingly militarily.

And there is essentially no adults in the room, I would argue, that essentially stand up to Turkey's increasingly belligerent behavior. And the more platitudes the administration heaps upon people like Erdogan, the higher the likelihood of conflict. I'm fearful of seeing breakout in East Mediterranean, but that concern also carries forward for me in the case of Israel versus Turkey in the Middle East. And again, there has been not much by words of rhetoric or by constraining behavior to hold Turkey to account over its increasing negative predisposition towards Israel.

BRADLEY BOWMAN: Hey, Joe, a 30-second addendum. Sinan knows more in his pinky than I do in my entire body about Turkey and Erdogan, but just building on something that we wrote together in our op-ed, it's clear that Erdogan has spent a lot of time and effort into building a personal relationship with President Trump... And that's clearly paying off. If you look at the press conference, as we highlight in our piece a week ago today, Trump called Erdogan "a respected man, a respected leader." I mean, I'm sorry, but that's not exactly, I think, the assessment as we wrote in the piece that I think most Americans would use for someone who's fully embraced Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization. If you think October 7th is just fine and you embrace murderous Hamas, that's not the activity of a respectable gentleman.

And so I think unfortunately, a lot of leaders have just said, "If I can just flatter President Trump, then I can get policies that I want." But I would say what matters is not the personal relationship between leaders, although that's important. What matters, as Cam said earlier, are what are the interests of the United States. I would apply that to force posture in Europe. I'd apply that to the decision to give the F-35 to Turkey. It's not how chummy are they or how much do I like this person, it's what is in the American interest. And if you bring a sober, objective, nonpartisan lens to these issues, some of these are not that complicated. So back to you, Joe.

JOE DOUGHERTY: Tom Bowman at NPR asks, "Given what President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have said about NATO, do you think it's up to Congress now to put more specific language in about what types of US troops must remain in Europe?"

BRADLEY BOWMAN: As Cam and I have argued, more important is what type of units and what type of troops. And we know what Europe most needs and we know what brings the greatest deterrent value, and unfortunately that's the very kind of units that this administration is withdrawing.

I would recommend Congress...focus not just on having a floor for end strength, but having as much of a restriction as constitutionally allowable for withdrawal of these key BCTs that Cam laid out so beautifully. Back to you, Joe.

JOE DOUGHERTY: By the way, if you have a follow-up question and you'd like to talk with any of our experts directly, feel free to reach me at press@FDD.org, and I'll be happy to schedule that interview.



FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

Featuring Bradley Bowman, Sinan Ciddi, and Cameron McMillan

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

It does remind me, Brad, when you were just talking about that, that you and Admiral Montgomery, back before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, you warned that the invasion was going to be happening and you also made strong suggestions on how the US can support Ukraine. What more can the US and the West do to support Ukraine against Russia's unprovoked attack?

BRADLEY BOWMAN: Thanks, Joe, for the question. Admiral Montgomery is a national treasure generally and particularly on Ukraine issues, and it's been an honor to write with him a lot through the years on this topic. I just would remind everyone that the Biden administration committed more than about \$66 billion in security assistance to Ukraine. That sounds like a lot of money, but that's less than 3% of what we spent on the Pentagon over the same time period. So the question for us back then is helping Ukraine to continue to exist, degrading the second leading conventional threat we confront in Russia, and sending a positive deterrent message to Beijing worth 3% of what we send to the Pentagon. You can tell, I think the answer is yes.

Unfortunately, that was not persuasive to the Trump administration and they cut off the vast majority of our Ukrainian security assistance initiative funding. I think that was a mistake. But yes, the Europeans should be paying for most of that. They are paying for most of that.

But this is not charity and the outcome matters to us, so we should be helping with our massive economy, one. Two, we need to be ramping up production capacity and collaboration with our European partners, first for what we need, but also for what Ukraine needs. Three, we should be helping Ukraine ramp up their own production capacity. We know that Ukraine has developed a very impressive production capability, even as they're undergoing the worst invasion of Europe since World War II. Pretty darn impressive.

And then lastly, both for their benefit and ours, I recommend in our forthcoming book, *Axis of Aggressors*, that we establish a Frontiers of Freedom Forum where we have Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan, South Korea, NATO, and Americans at a table and we're learning every possible thing we can from Ukraine and Israel... I'm saying that America has things to learn from Ukraine and Israel, requires a little humility and a little truth telling. Ukraine is the best country in the world, the best military in the world in counter-drone. We have a lot to learn from them, the US military does. And if you don't believe me, look at the details of what happened during the 40-day war. Look what happened in Kuwait. In many ways, we got our world rocked with drones and we had a four-year warning and we still weren't ready.

So we need to focus on learning lessons from these two amazing beleaguered democratic partners in Ukraine and Israel, proliferate those lessons, tactics, techniques, and procedures to the US military, and then share them with South Korea and Taiwan and others as well.

And I'll end with this. Our research here tells me that the good guys and gals we're losing the lesson sharing race. What do I mean? We had more than 10,000 North Koreans fighting with Russia against Ukraine. Those North Koreans went home and I have very good reason to believe that they are proliferating their lessons learned and tactics and techniques and procedures across the North Korean military. And the North Korean military is going from a barrage warfare, human wave warfare. Soviet-style model to a precision strike model with very formidable drone and other capabilities able to target within 15 to 30 meters anything on the Korean peninsula. You think our war plans are ready for that? Do you think we've learned every lesson in South Korea? I worry not. And the response to that would be, "Oh, don't worry, we're talking. We're sharing lessons." Okay, okay. Then why were we so unprepared in the 40-day war in the Persian Gulf?

So I think we need to institutionalize this lesson learning process, the sharing of these TTPs first for our benefit, but also sharing from these amazing partners we have in Ukraine and Israel to our other beleaguered Democratic partners, namely Taiwan and South Korea. Sorry, Joe, I got excited, but I hope that's helpful.

JOE DOUGHERTY: That is okay, Brad. I kind of set you up there.



FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

Featuring *Bradley Bowman, Sinan Ciddi, and Cameron McMillan*

Moderated by *Joe Dougherty*

BRADLEY BOWMAN: Yeah.

JOE DOUGHERTY: Brad had mentioned the Axis of Aggressors book that is forthcoming. FDD comms team will make sure that each of you on the call gets that publication, which is coming out soon. I think it's time now to wrap up the call. I'm going to ask each of our experts to provide a one-minute summary of their thoughts today. But before doing so, a special thanks to Ellie Bufkin and the FDD comms team for their outstanding job in the background for making sure everything went so smoothly.

A reminder, FDD is a nonpartisan research institute focused on national security and foreign policy. You'll find all of our research at fdd.org. And if you'd like to chat with Brad, Sinan, or Cam separately, please reach me at press@fdd.org.

Gentlemen, over to you for final thoughts. Let's start with Cam then Sinan, and then we'll wrap it up with Brad. Cam.

CAMERON MCMILLAN: Yeah, thanks, Joe. I'll close by just reiterating my bottom lines and that are, one, going into this summit, the administration has already done damage to American combat power in Europe over the past year and as a result, American deterrence in Europe. What would be, in my mind from a military perspective, a successful summit is a reversal of certain drawdown decisions like the Long-Range Fire Battalion and ensuring that the Armored Brigade Combat Team in Poland stays there. So those are very specific things, but I would hope that those come out of the summit or that the president directs the Pentagon after speaking with European leaders to remedy those. If he does not, I completely agree with Brad that Congress needs to do everything within its constitutional authority to ensure that America retains absolutely valuable capabilities on the continent.

Second, I think a result both in Ukraine and in NATO more largely, the United States is increasingly losing influence and leverage as a result of our own actions. Not just being rude, not just making insults, but yes, threatening the sovereign territory of our allies, but also making less of a contribution. One of the natural consequences of devoting less resources to Europe will be that our influence will drop. We don't want the Europeans dependent on us, agree. But one of the byproducts of that is if you're dependent on the United States, we're going to have some influence over you.

So I'm not arguing for that Europe being dependent on the United States. I certainly think it's good and very necessary that they step up. But the administration needs to recognize that you cannot have it both ways. You cannot do less and demand more. So going into this summit, my expectations are low for those things being fulfilled, but to use Sinan's line, I hope so.

And then on Ukraine, I hope that European leaders can make some progress with the president, hopefully increasing PURL orders and potentially being able to actually start applying pressure on the Kremlin for once.

That's it for me. Thank you.

SINAN CIDD: Couple of things. I would just say watch out for the fox in the hen house. If we're serious about collective security and preserving the sanctity and effectiveness of the transatlantic alliance, which has been the bulwark of stability, of American and European security since World War II, we shouldn't pander and use the NATO, upcoming NATO summit as a means to just launder Erdogan's wishlist. There's an opportunity to hold to account a malign actor inside of NATO, help allies force and demand better from its allies. We saw what the problematic nature of the Hungarian regime presented to European security and European cohesivity. Erdogan is a \$1.7 trillion economy that presents a much bigger threat to NATO security.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the NATO Summit in Ankara

July 1, 2026

Featuring Bradley Bowman, Sinan Ciddi, and Cameron McMillan

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

And for some people, when I'm asked as to whether that should be questioned or doubted by all means, but I would also suggest this, if you look at any country that has appropriated and operates the F-35 fighter jet, I don't see the long litany of issues that Turkey is facing in being able to acquire this platform. Why is that? Are we just being sort of a stickler for Turkey? In the words of Erdogan and his government, are we just trying to prevent Turkey's rise as a great power or is there a simpler explanation as in we're denying the sale and we should continue to deny the sale because Erdogan's actions in a whole number of theaters present a clear and present danger to the cohesivity of NATO, regional stability in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. That's where I would argue that the truth lies closer to.

And remember, Turkey's had many opportunities to essentially make things right. It could have divested itself of S400 systems. It could have satisfied the legal requirements, but there is a wider trust issue to be met here. And I would just end on the premise that European allies should demand better and they should expect more from allies and not just pander to what Erdogan would like simply because they're up against the wall in terms of defense procurements.

BRADLEY BOWMAN: Joe, eye on the clock, three quick points in 60 seconds or less. I think the time for some of our NATO allies to say "the check is in the mail" on defense spending is over. It's time for them to show us that they mean what they say by putting their money where their mouths are or more accurately aligning their actual budgets and allocations with political commitments. This is the "Show Me the Money" Summit. Forgive the Jerry Maguire reference there.

So that's what I'm watching. Some of our allies are really stepping up. Some of them are not. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not recommending we threaten Article V if they don't spend enough. No, no, no, that's a gift to Putin. But I am saying hold people accountable to their commitments just like a good parent would. So that's first point.

Second point is NATO as an alliance and American military posture in Europe, makes Americans safer. So whatever they're doing or not doing, whatever annoys you or doesn't annoy you, we are safer, we're more secure because of NATO and because of American posture there. It helps us. 4,000 to 5,000 US planes took off from European bases in support of Epic Fury. If that's not power projection benefit, what is? Okay, what is? We should have cooler heads prevail. We should speak respectfully to friends, international friends, just like we do in our personal life if you want them to keep being your friends and be there for you in your moment of need. And let's remember NATO was there for us in our moment of need. They fought, bled, and died alongside Americans for two decades in Afghanistan. Let's not forget that.

Lastly, if all you care about is China or if all you care about is Iran, the last thing you want is additional aggression by Moscow in Europe. And the quickest way to get that, that thing that will be a disaster for Eastern Europe, a disaster for the transatlantic community, a disaster for the United States, and a disaster to spend any more resources focusing on Iran and China will be new aggression in the Baltics, for example. And the quickest way to get that is a suggestion from the White House that we will not honor our Article 5 North Atlantic Treaty commitments that we agree to in 1949 on Constitution Avenue in Washington, DC.

So words matter, respect and tone matter, budgets matter, combat power matters. That's where I stop. Thanks.

JOE DOUGHERTY: Gentlemen, thank you for your terrific analysis. This concludes today's call.