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PERSPECTIVE OF UKRAINIAN YOUTH:

how to
strengthen
NATO



Analytical Brief

Based on the Study Prepared by the Participants
of Stage II of the Project “Youth Without Borders:
Together in NATO”



Section I. Expanding the role of youth in NATO



Photo: Youth Coucil Ukraine-NATO, Kyiv, 2025

Topic I.

Education, innovation, technology

The review of NATO's previous initiatives indicates two consistent trends. First, a gap persists between the stated commitment to 'enhancing the role of youth' and the practical mechanisms for their engagement. For example, although youth summits are intended to empower young people to address key security challenges, meaningful participation opportunities remain limited, as these events often follow traditional lecture-based formats.

Second, several NATO educational initiatives designed to engage and train young people are not universally accessible. In particular, seminars and visits conducted under Allied Command Transformation's cooperation with academic institutions are available only to students from partner universities. As a result, NATO has yet to establish a comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable framework for youth involvement in education, innovation, and technology.

To strengthen the role of youth in NATO's work on education, innovation, and technology, the Alliance should expand opportunities to students from non-partner universities by introducing 'observer access' or 'open seats' options for ACT events. NATO youth forums and summits should be redesigned as cooperation platforms



featuring interactive panels, joint projects, and working groups that enable direct collaboration between young participants, experts, and officers. The Alliance should also continue organising annual youth hackathons that bring together students, entrepreneurs, and researchers to develop technological solutions.

Additionally, NATO should increase the number of places in the Young Professionals Programme and apply selection principles that ensure representativeness. Establishing a permanent mechanism for engagement with young scientists, innovation communities, and think tanks would further strengthen youth involvement. Finally, NATO should develop a joint educational course, 'AI & Security for NATO Future,' created in cooperation with leading AI-focused universities and higher education institutions from partner nations, targeted at students and young researchers.

Topic II.

Communication and diplomacy

NATO faces a significant communication challenge with Generation Z, driven primarily by a mismatch in communication formats. While the Alliance relies on traditional channels – such as lengthy briefings, official communiqués, and multi-page reports – young people primarily consume information through short-form video content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts.

A second challenge is the low level of awareness among youth. Having grown up largely in a period of peace (until 2022), many young people perceive defence issues as abstract. According to the 2024 Eurobarometer*

58%

of respondents aged 18–24 are unable to explain what NATO does

41%

view defence spending as wasteful

only
23%

would consider a career in the defence sector

The third challenge is the prevalence of formal youth participation without meaningful influence.

Although the NATO Youth Summit has been held since 2019, an analysis of more than 50 youth resolutions indicates that none have been reflected in strategic decision-making.

Without a systematic response to these interconnected issues, **NATO risks losing the support of the generation** that will shape the future of Euro-Atlantic security.

* <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3392>



To strengthen NATO's engagement with Generation Z, the Alliance should develop university courses and online programmes that increase understanding of NATO's activities. Establishing a dedicated social media unit within the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence would enable structured cooperation with platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X. NATO should also conduct research on youth engagement with its content across social media channels.

The internship and apprenticeship programmes should be expanded, and participation in the NATO Youth Ambassadors initiative should be opened to young opinion leaders, bloggers, and educational influencers who shape public attitudes among youth. The Alliance could further promote youth involvement by introducing a monthly feature, 'NATO Youth in Action,' which highlights the success stories of young programme participants.

Additionally, NATO should develop a series of media literacy training modules for universities in member and partner states. Finally, the NATO Youth Advisory Board should be transformed into a permanent consultative and coordinating body to ensure consistent and meaningful youth input.

Topic III.

Leadership and participation in decision-making

According to NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geană, young professionals play an important role in shaping the Alliance's future. In practice, however, their influence remains limited. While participants in the NATO 2030 Young Leaders Programme contributed recommendations for the NATO 2030 initiative, these inputs were reflected only in the declaratory section of the final document.

The Young Professionals Programme, launched in 2020 to provide early-career experts with practical experience within the Alliance, offers a very limited number of placements. It remains accessible primarily to individuals with privileged access to higher education, professional opportunities, and advanced language training, and it does not facilitate the creation of a sustainable alumni network. More broadly, young people lack familiarity with NATO's programmes, as access to information sources is uneven and often limited.

To address the identified gaps in youth participation in Alliance decision-making, several steps should be taken. First, governments of NATO member and partner states should establish permanent youth councils under the ministries of defence, foreign affairs, education, and other bodies responsible for international security. Mechanisms for youth involvement in NATO activities should be made more inclusive, accompanied by clear tools for assessing the effectiveness of youth participation programmes. The mandate of the NATO Youth Council should be revised to ensure youth involvement in decision-making processes, not merely in advisory discussions.

The Alliance should expand the number of educational and leadership programmes



for young people across member and partner countries and establish an international network of alumni of NATO youth programmes to support experience-sharing and mentoring. Additionally, NATO should invest in communication platforms, social awareness campaigns, podcasts, and digital and cyber education courses to improve youth understanding of NATO's role. Finally, systematic coordination between government institutions, youth organisations, and international partners is essential to ensure coherent and sustained youth engagement.

Section II. Youth perceptions of NATO 2030 – priorities and opportunities



Photo: president.gov.ua

Topic I.

Collective defence and deterrence

Disinformation, fake news, and propaganda are increasingly shaping NATO's information environment, with platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Telegram, and X serving as primary channels for their dissemination. Information warfare now constitutes a significant portion of hybrid threats, which continue to intensify: in 2024, Russia conducted hundreds of hybrid attacks against NATO and European states. Moscow is also carrying out extensive disinformation campaigns targeting NATO members, using both traditional media outlets (RosTV, Sputnik, RIA Novosti) and social media.



Between June 2024 and May 2025, nearly 11 million Russian disinformation posts and comments were recorded across ten major platforms.*



Furthermore, over the past five years, the **Russian Federation has launched cyberattacks against almost every European state.** The overall trend is that hybrid threats – particularly cyberattacks, disinformation operations, and manipulation on social media – are evolving more rapidly than NATO’s institutional mechanisms for countering them.

Recommendations for enhancing NATO’s collective defence and deterrence capabilities include the following measures. NATO and member states should amend regulations to enable DIANA and Allied Air Command to conclude accelerated contracts for the modular development and production of UAVs. A contractual framework under NATO Defence Investment should be established to allow manufacturers to automatically transition to a ‘war mode’.

Additional measures include the creation of a unified NATO cyber reserve and the introduction of a Pre-Authorised Mobility Corridors (PAMC) mechanism with administrative channels for the rapid movement of critical cargo. Finally, the Alliance should implement the Multi-Level Authorisation (AMA) system, which provides multi-tiered prior approval of ‘permit packages’ to facilitate the swift transfer of critical defence systems between partner governments.

Topic II.

Resilience to new threats and technological leadership

The primary new threat to NATO comes from Russia, which is conducting the largest war in Europe since World War II and waging a hybrid campaign against Europe and the Alliance,

encompassing military provocations, information operations, and economic pressure. Countering these threats requires increased defence budgets among partners, strengthened air and missile defences, expanded ammunition production, and targeted counter-propaganda efforts.

China also represents a strategic concern, emerging as a major global actor using economic, political, and technological tools to extend its influence and reshape international norms. To address this challenge, NATO requires a coherent policy

* <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/virtual-manipulation-brief-2025-from-war-and-fear-to-confusion-and-uncertain>



that aligns allies' approaches to economic, technological, and security issues.

NATO's southern flank presents a complex intersection of military, political, climate, and humanitarian challenges, with regional instability quickly affecting the wider Euro-Atlantic area. Effectively addressing these threats necessitates a comprehensive '360-degree' approach, integrating conventional and emerging issues, including cybersecurity, climate change, and disinformation.

The global arms control system is in deep crisis, representing a significant challenge for NATO. The Alliance's response should combine strengthened deterrence with a readiness for dialogue. Cyberspace has emerged as a critical threat domain, posing serious risks to NATO's security. The Alliance must adopt a systematic, operationally focused approach, including enforcing high cyber hygiene standards for all contractors and establishing state-owned backup communication channels.

Maintaining technological leadership is a strategic imperative for NATO's twenty-first-century defence capabilities. Member states should therefore increase investments in research and development, start-up ecosystems, cyber defence, and artificial intelligence training.

Topic III.

Multi-level partnership

Current security dynamics indicate the emergence of a de facto 'axis' of authoritarian states – Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela – actively coordinating efforts to undermine the influence of democratic countries and shift the global balance of power. Without a coordinated response, NATO risks losing strategic influence in three key regions: the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe.

Under these circumstances,

NATO must act decisively, focusing on expanding partnerships in critical regions and developing mechanisms for multilevel cooperation.

Priority should be given to strengthening ties in Eastern Europe, the Indo-Pacific, the Global South, and the Middle East. An effective partnership model should integrate military, political, technological, and humanitarian dimensions, coordinating the efforts of government agencies, civil society, academia, and youth, thereby supporting NATO's strategic priorities through 2030.

NATO should prioritize frequent multinational exercises, intelligence sharing, and joint youth technology programmes with partner countries in Eastern Europe, particularly **Ukraine and Moldova**. In the Indo-Pacific, the Alliance should conclude framework agreements with Japan, Australia, and South Korea, and develop collaborative digital and educational platforms for young people and military professionals.

To enhance NATO's engagement with the South and Middle East, humanitarian



aid, technological support, and professional exchanges should be coordinated on a unified platform. The Alliance should also implement hybrid resilience and early warning mechanisms, strengthen preventive engagement and risk management with authoritarian regimes, and establish educational and innovation platforms, as well as international forums for global youth. Multi-level communication with the public and allies should be fully integrated to support these initiatives.

Section III. Ukraine's contribution to Euro-Atlantic and global security



Photo: Konstantyn and Vlada Liberov

Topic I.

Development of modern technologies

The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has become an unprecedented testing ground for the rapid development and deployment of combat technologies, particularly the extensive use of air and maritime drones.

The effectiveness of drones was clearly demonstrated by Ukraine during



Operation Spider's Web and the destruction of approximately 33% of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.



Photo: Maxar Technologies / AFP

Given that NATO doctrine relies heavily on SEAD/DEAD operations and air superiority to support frontline operations and strategic deep strikes on critical enemy infrastructure – conditions that may be unattainable in both European and Indo-Pacific theaters – the Alliance should draw lessons from Ukraine's experience to adapt its operational concepts and technological development.

First, NATO should integrate Ukraine's operational experience to enhance the effectiveness of tactics against mass air attacks while maintaining cost-efficiency. This includes increasing the production of UAV interception systems, particularly anti-aircraft guns and FPV interceptor drones; expanding joint production facilities between NATO countries and Ukraine; and deploying high-cost technologies to protect critical infrastructure while using cost-effective counter-UAV solutions.

Second, the Alliance should prioritize the adaptive adoption of emerging technologies, combining mass production of drones and maritime unmanned aerial vehicles with the development of strategic reserves and resilient supply chains to ensure readiness for protracted conflicts. Countermeasures against large drone 'swarms' should be implemented, along with a unified information system modeled on Ukraine's DELTA platform.

Topic II.

Combat experience of Ukrainian military personnel

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted a new set of challenges for NATO, as modern combat increasingly diverges from principles embedded in traditional Alliance doctrines.



- 1 A key issue is centralized planning:** NATO's reliance on hierarchical procedures and rigid bureaucratic cycles slows responsiveness to rapidly evolving situations.
- 2 A second structural challenge is the Alliance's dependence on expensive, high-tech platforms** – particularly aircraft, advanced air defence systems, and artillery – which, while providing significant advantages, remain vulnerable to large-scale, low-cost adversary responses.
- 3 The third challenge is the inadequacy of conventional tactical metrics.** NATO's traditional KPIs, focused on platform numbers, range, and strike capability, do not fully capture effectiveness in modern warfare, where speed, agility, and rapid information processing are decisive.

NATO should integrate lessons from Ukraine's combat experience into educational programmes, training procedures, and institutional partnerships with member and partner states, ensuring the scalability, replicability, and practical value of Ukrainian innovations. Key measures include the use of UAVs for reconnaissance and operational strikes with digital fire-correction channels, deployment of mobile electronic warfare procedures, and implementation of counter-artillery measures within NATO's transformation and training frameworks.

The Alliance should develop joint training modules and a comprehensive set of operational TTPs (tactics, techniques, and procedures). A 'frontline-proven' criterion should be introduced to allow rapid validation of methods proven effective in combat and their subsequent inclusion in NATO standards.

Additionally, NATO should establish a network of industrial partners by identifying 'reserve industrial partners' across EU and NATO countries capable of quickly retooling manufacturing to meet defence requirements.

Topic III.

Strengthening the human dimension of NATO: lessons in resilience from the example of Ukraine

The human dimension of full-scale war, as evidenced by Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invasion, is characterized by a scarcity and exhaustion of critical specialists in fields essential to societal stability, including military medicine, psychological support, and rescue operations.

A key challenge in wartime is the adversary's attempts to destabilize societies from within through disinformation, sabotage, cyberattacks, and psychological operations, as demonstrated by Ukraine's countermeasures against Russian hybrid campaigns, such as the Maidan-3 disinformation operation.

Russian hybrid activities also extend beyond Ukraine, affecting NATO countries. For instance, in October 2025, Polish and Romanian authorities detained Ukrainian





nationals recruited for sabotage, intelligence gathering, and bomb preparation. The human dimension further encompasses the reintegration of war-affected veterans and civilians, the creation of inclusive societies for the growing population of people with disabilities, and the management of extensive infrastructure losses.

To address the shortage of critical specialists, NATO should establish a Union Platform for Critical Specialists. Enhancing resilience to hybrid threats requires the creation of a NATO Internal Resilience Module, coupled with regular joint training for security services and civil administration in collaboration with countries experienced in crisis management.

To unite and mobilize veterans, NATO should launch the NATO Veterans & Resilience Network, coordinated by the Alliance in cooperation with member states, operating on a permanent basis. For post-conflict reconstruction, NATO should develop a comprehensive plan outlining scenarios, standards, and a responsibility matrix. Finally, to ensure societal inclusiveness, NATO should integrate inclusiveness as a strategic principle within its Resilience framework.

CONCLUSION AND STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

NATO faces a rapidly evolving security environment marked by hybrid threats, technological shifts, and the growing importance of youth and human dimensions in defence. Lessons from Ukraine's experience underscore the need for adaptive strategies, including the integration of frontline innovations, enhanced youth engagement, technological modernization, and strengthened resilience against disinformation and cyberattacks.

To maintain its strategic advantage through 2030 and beyond, the Alliance must expand multilevel partnerships, develop inclusive training and operational frameworks, and ensure rapid industrial and logistical responsiveness. By addressing these challenges comprehensively, NATO can safeguard collective security, reinforce deterrence, and remain effective in an increasingly complex global landscape.

Full text of analytics






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