NATO 3.0: systemic shift or hype?

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2. Presentation outline

NATO Watch: a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation that works to promote public awareness and foster debate on the role of NATO in public life

- ❑ What is NATO 3.0?
- ❑ Faultlines in NATO 3.0
- ❑ Three European pathways
- ❑ UK positioning among the three paths
- ❑ A fourth path?
- ❑ Q&A

3. The NATO 3.0 framework

- NATO 1.0 (1949–1991: The Cold War)
- and NATO 2.0 (1991–2014/2022: The Post-Cold War Era)
- NATO 3.0:

  - Europe as the primary conventional defender
  - The US as a nuclear guarantor and strategic backstop
  - Drawdown of US conventional forward posture
  - Mandatory European self-reliance in critical ‘enablers’
  - Aggressive defence industrial scaling

4. NATO 3.0: Faultlines

- ❑ The 5% GDP spending target vs. domestic realities
- ❑ Divergent security priorities (the out-of-theatre rift)
- ❑ The capability gap
- ❑ The industrial procurement ‘buy American’ trap
- ❑ Will the US drawdown happen?
- ❑ Decoupling and the credibility of nuclear deterrence

5. European contingency strategies: three pathways

Alternative Path	Primary Mechanism	US Role	Main Strategic Focus
More European NATO	Increased spending targets (3.5% + 1.5% GDP) within existing NATO architecture	Core ally & nuclear guarantor	Seamlessly absorbing US conventional responsibilities
European Defence Compact	'Plan B' coalition of the willing backed by €500B in joint debt	Excluded during gridlock; reintegrated later	Overcoming political blockages or US absence in a crisis
Complete Sovereign Autonomy	European Security Council (ESC) under EU structures	Disengaged / strategic distance	Full institutional independence from Washington

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6. UK positioning on the three paths

Strategy Area	UK Position	Active Policy / Action
More European NATO	Primary focus	Boosting defence spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2035 and investing heavily in advanced autonomous tech.
European Defence Compact	Pragmatic partner	Using minilateral networks like the JEF to lead European security outside of EU structures.
Complete EU Autonomy	Strict rejection	Resisting EU institutional control while prioritising the US-UK bilateral defence relationship.

7. A fourth path?

- European sovereign autonomy based on cooperative security and defensive restraint:
  - Non-offensive defence (NOD)
  - Comprehensive societal resilience
  - Diplomatic engagement (with Moscow, Washington and Beijing) for de-escalation and to end the war in Ukraine
  - Active nuclear risk reduction

- Mainstream criticism:
  - Trust deficit
  - Appeasement critique

8. Q&A and discussion

“Europeans need to relearn the ability to think about strategy suited to their circumstances. This requires public debate.”

Lukas Mengelkamp and Sam Vincent, ‘Beyond Manoeuvre Theory for European Defence’, Global Policy 2026