

# GREAT DECISIONS

## *Spring 2025 Update*

The Future of NATO • American Policy in the Middle East

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### The Future of NATO

Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, there have been multiple instances of attempted, and in some cases successful, sabotage directed at pipeline and undersea cable infrastructure. European states have expressed concern regarding these incidents of sabotage and have called for action. On January 14, 2025, Operation Baltic Sentry was launched by NATO, aimed at protecting these critical pieces of infrastructure. Various allies have contributed to the effort, as it currently falls under Standing NATO Maritime Group 1, one of NATO's ready-response naval units, which is currently led by a Dutch commander. Additionally, a new unit, Task Force X, was established. NATO's Task Force X deploys autonomous maritime systems to enhance surveillance, detect and counter underwater threats, and protect critical undersea infrastructure, particularly in the Baltic Sea.

U.S. President Donald Trump has paused military aid to Ukraine, highlighting a growing divide between European leaders and Washington on how to address Russia. In response, states like the UK, France, and Germany have suggested that Europe must take a more active role in its defense. Remarks made by French President Emmanuel Macron and incoming German Chancellor Friedrich Merz have underscored this urgent need. The European Commission, which often collaborates closely with the alliance, proposed borrowing €150 billion on March 4, 2025, to finance rearmament for EU member states. The proposed areas of investment

include, but are not limited to, drones, missiles, and air defense munitions—each of which has played a major role in the Ukraine war. This is part of a larger plan aimed at raising a total of €800 billion for EU member states' defense. Additionally, NATO members in Europe have announced new joint initiatives focused on developing new weapons.

In light of recent comments and actions taken by U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration—including accusing Ukrainian President Zelensky of being a “dictator”—NATO allies are questioning the U.S.'s commitment to defending Europe. Countries such as the UK and France have announced new spending goals for their militaries, while others have called for European leadership. With the ongoing and projected rise of the Global South, many NATO allies and the organization itself have increased engagement with countries in this region. This ranges from defense education and training programs to military exercises.

### Recommended Readings

- <https://shape.nato.int/news-releases/baltic-sentry-to-enhance-natos-presence-in-the-baltic-sea>
- <https://www.act.nato.int/article/nato-task-force-x/>
- <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2024-nato-and-global-south-report-azubalis-055-pcnp>

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## American Policy in the in the Middle East

On November 27, 2024, Israel and Hezbollah reached an agreement for a ceasefire following an escalation of hostilities between the two parties. The terms of the ceasefire stipulated that over a 60-day period, both sides would withdraw their forces from southern Lebanon, with the Lebanese Armed Forces deploying south of the Litani River to enforce the agreement. The deal was mediated by the United States and France. Despite the ceasefire, Israel continues to maintain positions in southern Lebanon, and both sides have accused each other of violating the terms of the agreement.

On January 19, 2025, Israel and Hamas agreed to a three-phase ceasefire, which was subsequently implemented. Each phase was scheduled to last 42 days, with the first phase involving a prisoner exchange between the two parties. The second phase aimed to establish a more durable ceasefire, including a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and additional prisoner exchanges. The final phase of the agreement focused on rebuilding Gaza and addressing outstanding issues. On February 5, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the United States would “take over” Gaza and assume direct administration of the territory. This statement drew immediate condemnation from U.S. allies and partners, while Israel expressed support for the move.

Between November 29 and December 7, 2024, a coalition of Syrian rebel groups, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) (formerly known as the Al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliate), launched an offensive against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. This offensive culminated in Assad’s flight and the collapse of his government, marking the end of 53 years of Ba’athist rule in Syria and ushering in an uncertain future for the country. A provisional government has been established, with Ahmed al-Sharaa, formerly the leader of HTS, serving as the current president of Syria. Additionally, Israel has conducted military operations in southwestern Syria, citing security concerns. The newly formed Syrian government has dismissed Israel’s claims, asserting that they are unfounded. Israel has further stated that the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement, signed between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel, is now void due

to the collapse of the former Syrian government. The new Syrian administration, however, has affirmed its commitment to honoring the agreement.

### Recommended Readings

- <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/israel-and-fall-assad-rejoice-repel-reach-out-reload>
- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/03/1160786>
- <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-the-israel-hezbollah-ceasefire-deal/>

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*The UPDATES were written by Olivia Gross, associate editor at FPA, with assistance from Muhammed Sayed, FPA intern..*