

# A CONVERSATION ON NATO'S COMPETITIVENESS

Munich Security Conference 2026 | MITRE-Hosted Panel

Photo Credit: NATO

## DETERRENCE REALITY CHECK: BUILDING ALLIED ADVANTAGE THROUGH ACCELERATED INNOVATION, ADAPTATION, AND INTEGRATION

Future conflicts will be decided by scale, tempo, and integration. Forces that can sense first, decide faster, and integrate effects across the warfighting domains and the electromagnetic spectrum gain decisive advantage. Where innovation, adaptation and integration fall short across military services, nations, domains, systems, and data, adversaries exploit these seams early in crisis, accelerating their ability to adapt and seize the initiative. This is not a future risk; it is being demonstrated and refined on today's battlefields. The security challenge is urgent: to close these seams now or allow dynamic adversaries to continue turning fragmentation into their advantage.

NATO must adapt with urgency to strengthen deterrence and its ability to defend. Allies benefit from political alignment and rising defense investment, but that advantage will diminish as adversary rearmament accelerates and strategic competition intensifies. Adversaries are testing NATO's cohesion through coordinated, multi-domain, hybrid tactics informed by lessons learned from Ukraine.

While NATO retains strong forces, its ability to integrate them by sharing data at scale, and executing rapidly across nations and commands, remains a challenge. These gaps, and potential solutions, can be acutely examined along the Eastern Flank and Baltic Sea, where the risk of early testing by adversaries is highest.

Adaptation and integration need to be continuous, with near-term goals established and accomplished, then followed by evaluation, iteration, and new goals. Further, these cycles must occur in everything NATO does, from routine operations, to exercises, to multinational coalition operations and activities, to procurement and production. By the end of the decade, the Alliance must demonstrate deterrence through integration at scale, leaving no viable path to a rapid fait accompli.

National military investment alone will not deliver deterrence. The core challenge is turning increased spending into integrated, adaptable combat power at speed and scale across forces, warfighting domains, command and control structures, data environments, acquisition, and industry. Addressing this requires:

- combat-credible forces, positioned near the edge of conflict, enabled by the integration of real-time communications and data, sensors, effectors, and Command & Control;
- rapid fielding and integration of relatively low-cost uncrewed and minimally crewed systems with traditional systems;
- continuous data-driven experimentation tied directly to operational plans; and
- industrial scale production built on interoperability by design, common standards, and collaborative multi-stakeholder approaches.

Together, the above efforts deny adversaries their window for success, and, as necessary, enable NATO integrated execution to respond with speed, thus enabling deescalation, faster recovery, or a broader range of immediate options to end conflict quickly.

## PURPOSE OF MITRE'S PANEL AT MSC 2026

MITRE's "Deterrence Reality Check" panel will examine how future conflict will be driven by scale, tempo, and integration. It will address the key challenge of turning increased defense spending into rapid, large-scale innovation, adaptation, and integration across domains, forces, command structures, data environments, acquisition processes, and industrial capacity. Given that the Baltic Sea and Eastern Flank may be tested first, panelists will also discuss which capabilities most directly strengthen deterrence, where operational gaps remain, and what actions must be taken (by NATO, Allies, and Industry) to close them.

## PANELISTS WILL ADDRESS THESE QUESTIONS:

- In the next 1-2 years, which capabilities will matter most for effective deterrence across NATO's Eastern Flank and the Baltic Sea? How can mission engineering and systems modeling help inform investment choices in capabilities?
- How might integration be tested first, what could fail, and what are underlying causes for these gaps? Are we where we need to be with multi-domain integration, C2, and ISR?
- How do we better leverage production, integration, and sustainment to strengthen deterrence? Are we getting better at integrating this with other military functions?
- What political alignment is required to move from parallel national defense programs toward genuine Euro-Atlantic integration that scales interoperable capability fast enough to matter?
- How can industry collaborate more effectively – through shared creativity, partnerships, and speed – to deliver systems solutions for NATO's highest-priority needs?
- How can NATO and the Nations transform distinct national programs into integrated operational systems-of-systems that scale faster, adapt more easily, and reduce risk?
- What must change to turn innovation into real deterrent power faster? What things should we stop doing because they slow integration and transformation?
- How can we use experimentation and rapid deployment to accelerate integration of traditional and affordable systems in the field?

## ABOUT MITRE

As a non-profit operator of federally funded research and development centers, MITRE brings unmatched objectivity and expertise in mission engineering, systems integration, and data-driven analysis. MITRE employs these capabilities to develop effective and affordable solutions for the world's most pressing defense and security challenges. Through our public-private partnerships, we work seamlessly across governments and commercial industry. Our organization provides unbiased systems engineering and integration solutions, free from commercial conflicts of interest, to over 70 U.S. allies and partners globally.

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