

NATO finds gaping holes in Europe's defences

BRUSSELS, July 24 (Reuters) - The war in Ukraine and the looming U.S. presidential election dominated a NATO summit in Washington this month but, away from the public stage, the alliance's military planners have been focused on assessing the enormous cost of fixing Europe's creaking defences.

NATO leaders agreed plans last year for the biggest overhaul in three decades of its defence capabilities, amid growing fears of Russian aggression. Behind the scenes, officials have since been poring over the minimum defence requirements to achieve those plans, which were sent to national governments in recent weeks, according to one military planner, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The minimum requirements detail the shortfalls in NATO armies in key areas, providing a rough indication of how many billions of euros it could cost to fix, the military planner said. NATO aims to convert these requirements into binding targets for individual governments to provide for the defence of Europe by autumn 2025, when it holds a regular meeting of defence ministers.

Reuters spoke to 12 military and civilian officials in Europe about the classified plans, who outlined six areas the 32-nation alliance has identified as the most pressing to address.

These include shortages in air defences and long-range missiles, troop numbers, ammunition, logistical headaches and a lack of secure digital communications on the battlefield, the conversations with NATO officials showed.

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