

Is Europe preparing for war?

Yes – deliberately and openly. Europe is in its largest rearmament since the Cold War, built to make war less likely, not to start one.



“Europe prepares for war” makes a good scary headline. The unscary version is more interesting, because you can check it line by line.

The money

In 2025 European NATO members spent over \$574 billion on defense, nearly a fifth more than the year before – the largest single-year jump since the Cold War ended. At The Hague that June, the allies committed to 5 % of GDP by 2035, split deliberately: 3.5 % for core defense, 1.5 % for the unglamorous underpinnings – cyber defense, hardened infrastructure, civil preparedness. A first progress review comes in 2029, which is not a coincidence: it is the year the Bundeswehr’s chief named as Russia’s earliest readiness for large-scale war.

The EU built the financial plumbing to match: the ReArm Europe framework opens fiscal space and common instruments worth up to €800 billion, with the €150 billion SAFE program lending governments money for joint purchases – air defense, artillery, ammunition, drones, all bought together to escape the old curse of [thirty armies buying thirty of everything](#).

What the money physically becomes

Ammunition plants running new shifts in Germany, Norway and Poland. Air-defense batteries under the European Sky Shield initiative. New brigades: Poland growing past 200,000 troops, Germany standing up a permanent brigade in Lithuania – its first foreign garrison since 1945. Baltic Sentry patrols over undersea cables. Drone and counter-drone programs racing to absorb Ukraine’s lessons. None of it is secret; most of it

comes with a press release, because being seen to prepare is half the point.

The civilian half

The stranger-sounding half is aimed at homes: the EU’s 2025 preparedness strategy asks every household to be able to manage 72 hours on its own – water, food, medicine, a radio. Read correctly, it is not a war announcement. It is all-hazards resilience (the same kit serves in a flood or blackout), and it is deterrence by other means: a society that cannot be panicked by three days of cut power is a poor target for the [hybrid campaign already underway](#).

Preparing for war, or preventing it?

The distinction sounds rhetorical; it is arithmetical. Wars begin when an attacker calculates quick, cheap success – the current intelligence estimates of Russian readiness around 2029–2030 are estimates of when that calculation might tempt. Every visible brigade, shell line and stocked pantry moves the math the other way. Europe is spending historic sums precisely so that the historic headline never gets written – and the open question it is answering along the way is whether it can do this as one continent rather than thirty procurement offices.

[All questions →](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED

How much is Europe actually spending?

Over \$574 billion in 2025 – up nearly 20 % in a year – with a Hague summit commitment of 5 % of GDP by 2035: 3.5 % on core defense plus 1.5 % on resilience and infrastructure. Spain took an exemption.

What is ReArm Europe / SAFE?

The EU's rearmament framework: fiscal room and common borrowing worth up to €800 billion, including the €150 billion SAFE loan program for joint procurement of air defense, ammunition, drones and more.

Why are governments telling households to stock 72 hours of supplies?

The EU's 2025 preparedness strategy asks every household to manage three days of water, food and medicine. It is all-hazards advice – floods, blackouts, cyberattacks – and resilience itself deters: a society that can't be panicked is harder to coerce.

Does preparing for war make war more likely?

The evidence points the other way. Wars start when attackers expect quick, cheap success; visible preparation raises the expected price. Europe's build-up is explicitly designed to make the 2029–2030 warnings never come true.

Will the 5 % target actually be met?

Openly uncertain – 2035 is far and fiscal pressures are real, with a first review set for 2029. What is already measurable: 2025 saw the largest one-year European defense increase of the post-Cold-War era.

SOURCES

- NATO: 2025 defence expenditure figures; Hague Summit Declaration (June 2025)
- European Commission: ReArm Europe / Readiness 2030, SAFE (€150bn)
- EU Preparedness Union Strategy (March 2025): 72-hour household guidance
- BND / Bundeswehr readiness estimates 2029–2030