Trump Strains NATO

What is the issue?

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- NATO summit was recently held in Brussels amid raise trade tensions between the U.S. and the members of the alliance.
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- In this context, Mr. Trump’s clarion call for countries to enhance defense budgets has aggravated the situation.
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What is causing fissure within the organization?

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- **Significance -** NATO is a cold war era bloc of that comprised of pro-U.S. powers and had positioned against the Soviet alliance.
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- With the end of the cold war, the alliance became a mere collective security net, and its importance weakened drastically.
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- Currently, NATO allies uphold some form of military cooperation but diverging worldviews of members has greatly reduced its unity.
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- **Budget -** U.S. is traditionally the largest contributor to the NATO (22% of the total), and many U.S. presidents have tried to correct this imbalance softly.
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- But Trump is assertively asking other countries to spend 4% of their GDP on defense annually and has even questioned their commitment to the alliance.
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- Notably, most NATO allies are even faltering to progress towards the currently mandated 2% mark, which is to be reached by 2024.
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- The U.S. on the contrast is now shelling out well over 3% of its annual GDP on security and is clearly moving towards the 4% mark.
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- Mr. Trump’s abrasive diplomacy and the stern financial demands are likely to cause severe strain within NATO in the coming days.
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Why did Trump single out Germany for criticism?

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- Germany enjoys a big trade surplus with the U.S., an aspect that is irking the Trump administration, which is presently embracing protectionism.
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- In this context, Trump has lashed out on Germany for not spending enough on defense, despite having strong economic metrics in recent years.
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- Additionally, he has also targeted Germany for buying huge volumes of gas from Russia despite U.S. sanctions against the latter.
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- Notably, Russia’s regional ambitions and its interventions in international theaters to thwart American efforts are indicative of a new cold war.
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What is the actual situation?

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- Spending - Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 has created a new security situation in Europe after more than two decades of relative peace.
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- As a consequence, Europe’s expenditure on defense has been on the rise since 2014, even without Trump’s rhetoric.
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- Even otherwise, Washington’s commitment to Europe’s security is just 5% (NATO and other commitments included) of the total U.S. defense budget.
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- Politics - Trump seems to be exploiting polarizing issues within NATO to further his domestic political prospects among ultra nationalists.
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- Also, his offensive against Germany and his rhetoric against Russia seem to be logical if viewed from this prism.

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Source: The Hindu

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