2027

STRATEGIC OUTLOOK · PREVIEW EXCERPT

NATO EASTERN FLANK

The year the flank's deadlines fall due

NATO's eastern flank in 2027: declared end-states, an American share under review, and drones still answered by fighters



LOCATOR MAP · NATURAL EARTH · PLACES AT AREA LEVEL · BOUNDARIES ARE NOT AN ENDORSEMENT OF ANY CLAIM

DOCUMENT	VERSION	RESEARCH CUTOFF	PUBLISHED	JUDGMENTS	OVERALL CONFIDENCE
VO-2027-NEF	1.0	15 November 2026	17 November 2026	6 · frozen	moderate

Preview excerpt. This file contains the cover, the executive assessment, the judgment table and the publication record of the full document. The complete publication adds the position entering 2027, the evidence and evaluation rule for each judgment, the alternative pathways, the cross-system implications, the monitoring framework and the full source register.

01 EXECUTIVE ASSESSMENT

The year the flank's deadlines fall due

CENTRAL JUDGMENT MODERATE

2027 is the year in which the eastern flank's declared end-states fall due while its American share is renegotiated and, on the evidence at the cutoff, no summit is scheduled to arbitrate either. Vigil expects the dates to be met by declaration more often than by completed structure, the front-line states to keep their spending lead, and no United States announcement ending its role in Poland or Lithuania. Drones, sabotage and damaged cables are expected to keep being answered by fighters, courts and procurement frameworks.

The dated commitments, budgets and court acts were read at primary sources or public broadcasters. The principal uncertainty is a small number of decisions in Washington, unpublished at the cutoff and due within weeks of it.

The eastern flank enters 2027 as a working system in which almost nothing is finished. Nine multinational formations stand in nine host states, the Baltic mission has flown as an air defence mission since 1 August 2026, and every ally is bound to a five per cent investment commitment with annual plans and a review in 2029[1,2]. What distinguishes 2027 is that many promises made since 2022 carry a date inside it. This outlook asks which of those dates become structures, not how the system would perform if attacked. VIGIL ASSESSMENT

The clearest test is Germany's brigade in Lithuania. Berlin says that Panzerbrigade 45 is to be fully operational by the end of 2027 with about 4,800 soldiers and 200 civilian staff, and reported in September 2026 that almost 80 per cent of its posts were filled, with compulsory postings introduced for a few specialities[3]. Vigil expects the declaration to arrive on time and the published end state to be completed later. VIGIL ASSESSMENT

The American share is the least settled element. Washington ended an armoured brigade's deployment to Poland in May 2026, let its rotation in Lithuania lapse from June to October, and opened a posture review whose options were due with the Secretary on 6 November[4,5,6]. About 78,000 United States personnel were assigned to European Command on 30 September, close to a statutory floor of 76,000[7]. Vigil does not expect Washington to announce the end of its rotations in Poland or Lithuania in 2027, and grades the basis for that judgment low. VIGIL ASSESSMENT

Money is not the front line's binding constraint. NATO's 2026 estimates place Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Poland between 4.7 and 5.3 per cent of GDP on core defence, and the European Union's loan instrument had paid about €13.5 billion in advances by late October[8,9]. The constraint is conversion: Vigil's record holds few deliveries naming a receiving force, and one commissioned ammunition plant whose first reported deliveries went to Ukraine[10,1]. ESTABLISHED

On the night of 10–11 November drones crossed all three Baltic states; mission fighters made two attempts over Lithuania to bring one down and failed, and each government described the origin differently[11,12]. The answers on offer are procurement frameworks and programmes with end-2027 targets[13,14]. Vigil does not expect Lithuania's integrated system or the European Union's drone initiative to be declared fully operational by 31 December 2027. VIGIL ASSESSMENT

Russia and Belarus appear here only as allied governments describe them. Estonia's service assessed no Russian intention to attack a NATO member in the coming year; Lithuania's services assessed Russia's capacity to threaten other states as limited while it fights in Ukraine at the present intensity, with strategic

objectives unchanged; both report a force being enlarged for later[15,16]. Denmark's service adds a low but growing risk of a limited attack on a bordering state[17]. Vigil records these assessments and adopts none. ATTRIBUTED

The Ankara declaration of 8 July 2026 named no date or place for a next meeting; the Secretary General said timing remained to be decided, and Albania's prime minister said on 12 November that a summit would "for sure" not be held in 2027, which NATO has not confirmed[18,19,20]. Elections are due in Estonia, Finland, France, Slovakia and Poland[21]. Vigil expects 2027 to be decided in budgets, ministerial meetings and courts. VIGIL ASSESSMENT

PRINCIPAL DRIVERS

DRIVER 01

Declared end-states with 2027 dates

The German brigade and Lithuania's counter-drone system carry end-2027 targets set by the bodies that must meet them; the European drone initiative and Estonia's remaining air-defence fire units carry 2027 dates at second hand[3,14,22,1].

DRIVER 02

A United States posture decided by review

A six-month review tests allies on access and basing, spending paths and gaps in NATO's force model. Completion was set for December 2026, so implementation falls in 2027, above a congressional floor of 76,000 personnel[6,7].

DRIVER 03

Front-line budgets at their ceiling

The highest spenders are no longer rising as a share of output: Lithuania's 2027 draft sets defence at 5.0 per cent of GDP against 5.38 in 2026, and Poland's at 4.5 per cent with a 7.1 per cent deficit. The largest increase read is Germany's[23,24,25].

MOST CONSEQUENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN VIEW

A brigade declared before it is complete

Vigil expects Germany to declare its Lithuania brigade operational in 2027 while housing and specialist posts are still being filled[3].

A year without a summit

Vigil considers it plausible that no leaders' meeting is held in 2027; disputes over burden would then pass to ministers and bilateral bargains with Washington[20,26].

Convictions without a state named

A Finnish court convicted two crew members of aggravated sabotage on 5 November 2026 with no reported finding on state involvement; Vigil expects further rulings in that form[27].

PRINCIPAL UNCERTAINTIES

WHAT IS NOT KNOWN

- The outcome of the United States posture review was unpublished at the cutoff and could be published before this outlook is read.
- Whether negotiations on Ukraine produce a text that touches allied basing, as one newspaper reported and the Kremlin denied, cannot be established.
- No flank state publishes interceptor stocks and NATO does not publish its engagement rules.

CONFIDENCE – THE ANALYTICAL BASIS

HIGH MODERATE LOW

How well sourced and how contested the evidence is. High is the quietest mark by design.

EXPECTATION – THE OUTCOME

EXPECTED PLAUSIBLE NOT EXPECTED

Vigil's judgment for the stated horizon. Never a number.

EVIDENCE STATUS

ESTABLISHED ATTRIBUTED VIGIL ASSESSMENT UNRESOLVED CONDITIONAL

What kind of statement a sentence is. The louder the mark, the less is claimed.

02 FINAL JUDGMENT TABLE

The 2027 judgments at a glance

ID	JUDGMENT	EXPECTATION · HORIZON	BASIS	SUPPORTED IF
VO27-NEF-01	Vigil expects Germany to declare Panzerbrigade 45 operational in Lithuania by 31 December 2027, and expects that declaration to be made before the brigade's published end state of about 4,800 soldiers and 200 civilian staff in Lithuania is complete.	EXPECTED By 31 December 2027	MODERATE	By 31 December 2027 the German defence ministry, Bundeswehr or government has stated that the brigade is operational or fully operational (einsatzbereit, voll einsatzbereit), and an official figure or a public-broadcaster or wire report shows fewer than about 4,800 soldiers stationed in Lithuania, posts filled by rotation, or the Rūdninkai barracks not fully occupied.
VO27-NEF-02	Vigil does not expect the United States to announce, by 31 December 2027, that it is giving up its framework role in NATO's multinational formation in Poland or ending, without replacement, its rotational deployment to Lithuania. Vigil considers it plausible that reductions published from the Europe posture review fall mainly on forces based in Germany.	NOT EXPECTED By 31 December 2027	LOW	By 31 December 2027 no White House, Department or European Command statement announces either act, and a United States rotational unit, or an announced successor, is reported in Lithuania on that date. The second sentence is scored separately: borne out if more than half of the reductions announced from the review, by number, come from Germany; not scored if none is published with country figures.
VO27-NEF-03	Vigil expects NATO's defence expenditure estimates for 2027, if published by 31 December 2027, to show Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland each above 3.5 per cent of GDP, fewer than ten allies in total at or above that level, and European allies and Canada together below 3.0 per cent.	EXPECTED By 31 December 2027, on NATO's latest published estimates	MODERATE	NATO's latest estimates published by 31 December 2027 show, for 2027, all four states above 3.5 per cent, fewer than ten allies at or above it, and European allies and Canada below 3.0 per cent, on the share NATO sets against the core guideline.
VO27-NEF-04	Vigil does not expect either Lithuania's integrated counter-drone system or the European Drone Defence Initiative to be officially declared fully operational by 31 December 2027; it expects contracts, prototypes and partial capability by that date.	NOT EXPECTED By 31 December 2027	MODERATE	By 31 December 2027 Lithuania's defence ministry or armed forces have not stated that the integrated system is fully operational or in service nationwide, and neither the Commission, the Council nor the European Council has stated that the initiative has reached full functionality. Statements of initial, partial or sectoral capability do not count.
VO27-NEF-05	Vigil expects at least one further court decision in Finland's Eagle S or Fitburg cable cases by 31 December 2027, and does not expect any NATO member government or any court to attribute to a state, by that date, Baltic undersea cable or pipeline damage that occurred from October 2023 onward.	EXPECTED By 31 December 2027	MODERATE	A Finnish court, including the Supreme Court deciding on leave, issues a decision in either case dated from 16 November 2026 to 31 December 2027, and no NATO member government or court states as a finding that a state or its services directed or carried out such damage.
VO27-NEF-06	Vigil expects the 2027 public reports of Estonia's and Lithuania's intelligence services to assess again that Russia does not intend, or lacks the capacity, to attack a NATO state in the year ahead, and expects Russia and Belarus to hold the announced Union Shield 2027 exercise without any NATO member government reporting a new permanent Russian ground formation based in Belarus.	EXPECTED By 31 December 2027	MODERATE	Each report published in 2027 states no intention to attack a NATO member in the year ahead, or capacity limited while the war continues; the Russian or Belarusian defence ministry reports Union Shield 2027 as conducted by 31 December 2027; and no NATO member government states that a new Russian ground formation is permanently based in Belarus. If one service publishes, it alone is scored.

03 PUBLICATION RECORD

Edition, version and forecast-freeze status

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