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IDEAS**

NATO'S STRATEGY AFTER 75 YEARS OF ADAPTATION

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NATO'S STRATEGY AFTER 75 YEARS OF ADAPTATION

The NATO Summit in Washington has concluded. During this week, NATO leaders have met in the U.S. capital to address security challenges on both sides of the Atlantic on a symbolic date: the 75th anniversary of collective defense. It was Jens Stoltenberg's last international meeting as Secretary General, as he will pass the baton to former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte in September, following an extended mandate due to recent geopolitical developments.

Now, with clearer leadership in NATO for the coming years, three critical issues will continue to pose challenges for the organization: the continuity of political commitments during a hyper-electoral period for member countries, the credibility of Ukraine's accession process to NATO, and questions regarding European deterrence capabilities, especially in the defense industrial base.

In this document, the Security, Defense, and Aerospace Office of LLYC analyzes how NATO and its members arrived at this Summit, the main conclusions, and next steps for the most uncertain international environment since the end of the Cold War.



75 YEARS OF NATO: THE ALLIANCE WE KNOW TODAY

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), founded in 1949, has been fundamental to global security. Initially created to counter Soviet expansion, it established itself as a bulwark of security during the Cold War, culminating in the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991. After the Cold War, NATO redefined its role, focusing on crisis management and peacekeeping, expanding its geographical and operational reach.

In the new millennium, NATO became significantly involved in Afghanistan, which sparked debates about the distribution of responsibilities within the Alliance. However, the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 damaged its credibility and motivated competitors like Russia to challenge the West.

Having begun with twelve members, NATO has grown to thirty-two recently incorporating Finland and Sweden. This post-Cold War expansion aimed to collaborate with former adversaries to promote stability in Europe. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 revitalized NATO's focus on deterrence and collective defense, reaffirmed in the summits of Cardiff, Brussels, Madrid, and Vilnius.

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The Madrid summit in 2022 introduced a new Strategic Concept reflecting the current security environment, emphasizing unity and the values of NATO members. The Vilnius summit in 2023 consolidated the northern expansion with the inclusion of Finland and Sweden, significantly increasing the land border with Russia, as Finland adds 1,300 km to this new frontier and closes the Baltic Sea's access for Russia.

A superficial analysis of the Lisbon Strategic Concept, though correct for its time, clearly shows the urgency for renewal surrounding the summit held in the Spanish capital. To mention just two examples: the Lisbon Strategic Concept did not reference China, and perhaps more worryingly today, it was written when the Russian Federation was an active partner of the Alliance, participating in many of its partnership instruments and maintaining an intense and cordial political dialogue through the NATO-Russia Council. Circumstances have changed considerably since then.

Equipped with a new Strategic Concept, the Vilnius summit represented a qualitative leap compared to previous decades. The inclusion of Finland and Sweden added two new and unexpected allies to NATO, shifted its center of gravity northwards, doubled the length of the land border with Russia, as Finland contributes 1,300 km of this new border, and tightened the Baltic Sea's access for Russia¹.

The Alliance has tested its capacity to adapt to new geopolitical challenges over recent decades, maintaining its relevance on the global stage. NATO continues to be a pillar of international security, playing a vital role in the protection and stability of its member states and beyond.

Looking to the future, NATO's ability to adapt and demonstrate resilience will remain crucial in facing emerging challenges and ensuring a secure and stable environment for international business and global politics.

¹ LLYC (2023) “Conclusiones de la Cumbre de la OTAN en Vilna (Lituania)”. 3-4.

PREVIOUS SUMMITS (KEY SUMMITS THAT SHAPED NATO INTO WHAT IT IS TODAY): SUMMARY AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Washington D.C. Summit

- Expansion of NATO and New Members: The European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) was established within NATO as a solid European pillar of security within the Alliance. This allowed European Allies to carry out their own operations led by the Western European Union (WEU).
- Mediterranean Dialogue: Engaged with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Wales Summit

- Response to Russia's annexation of Crimea. The Readiness Action Plan was adopted in Wales. This includes increased airspace surveillance (AWACS) on the eastern flank, a greater naval presence in the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean, as well as more frequent international exercises.

Madrid Summit

- New Strategic Concept following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- For the first time, NATO identifies the southern flank as a medium-term focus.

1999

2014

2022

2010

Lisbon Summit

- NATO Modernization: New Strategic Concept, progress in the military campaign in Afghanistan, development of capabilities, and new relations with Russia, including a missile defense cooperation agreement.

2018

Brussels Summit

- Reaffirmation of Mutual Defense Commitment: NATO's efforts on military mobility, committing Allies to strengthen the transnational movement of land, air, and naval forces.
- The "Four Thirties" initiative was approved, which aims to create 30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 combat ships, ready for use in 30 days or less.

2023

Vilnius Summit

- 360-Degree Approach of the Alliance: The Defense Production Action Plan was approved to enhance military capabilities and increase interoperability. A multi-year package of political, financial, and support measures was created to facilitate the future integration of Ukraine into NATO.

Source: Author's own elaboration



FROM VILNIUS TO WASHINGTON: HOW WE ARRIVED AT THIS SUMMIT

The context surrounding this meeting for the Alliance members was particularly complex, both economically and geopolitically. Framed between an intense and prolonged electoral period, with the results of the European Parliament elections still recent and the selection of high EU positions being questioned by member countries like Italy, which rejected the tripartite agreement for Ursula von der Leyen, António Costa, and Kaja Kallas to be the heads of the Commission, the Council, and the EU's foreign policy in the upcoming legislature.

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In addition, this is compounded by a tense lead-up to the French general elections, which produced tight results for Emmanuel Macron's party, the weakening of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party after the European elections, and a U.S. presidential election whose outcome could alter current commitments to collective security by this member state. Similarly, the United Kingdom was experiencing the early days of a new legislative and political alignment following the election of a new Prime Minister, Keir Starmer of the Labour Party, whose first official foreign visit was the Washington Summit.

The primary goal of the summit was to reconcile distant positions and signal cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance to the world, and particularly to the

adversaries of the Western bloc. It was perceived as essential to ensure continued support for Ukraine. However, the summit also occurred during a period of stagnation in the war in Ukraine, following over two years of fighting and differing views among allies on the significance of the conflict, the level of support for Ukraine, and future options. While some allies are firmly convinced that the Russian invasion is a direct action against the West and represents an existential threat, this belief wanes as geographic distance separates them from the conflict.

It is true that since the Munich Security Conference and the recent Kyiv Security Forum, public discussion has focused on Ukraine and its future prospects. Specific requests have been made to increase the supply of material and to “approve an accession plan for any possible scenario,” as highlighted in the “Memo to the President” published by the Atlantic Council and signed by 41 international security leaders².

Before the NATO summit, members agreed to continue providing Ukraine with €40 billion in military aid for the next year, aiming to offer the country long-term guarantees and support against political setbacks. Contrary to Stoltenberg's original proposal, the funds were not committed for several years but only for one year, after which NATO will review this decision annually as a non-binding commitment.

Kyiv was also expected to receive good news about additional air defense systems, as Ukrainian officials had been urging their Western allies to provide more of these systems to defend against frequent missile and drone attacks by Russian forces on critical and civilian infrastructure.

But this was not the only discourse leading up to the summit. From the eastern flank, as reflected in the Public-private dialogues of Globsec³, deterrence was seen as “the crown jewel” of the Transatlantic Alliance. However, it was noted that for NATO's deterrence to remain effective and credible, sufficient forces needed to be provided, or in some cases, established from scratch. Additionally, there was a recognized need to expand NATO's relationships with private companies to address disruptive technologies in collective security with innovative solutions.

² Cf. Herbst, J. (2023) *Memo to the president: A bold agenda for the Washington Summit: How to advance vital US interests by helping Ukraine win and defining its path to NATO membership*, Atlantic Council.

³ Grabar-Kitarović, K. and Sklenár, M. (11 de junio, 2024) *Globsec's private-public sector dialogue #6: Eastern Flank's expectations from the NATO Summit*, GLOBSEC.

This eastern flank stance toward the summit mirrored a sentiment expressed in a letter to outgoing European Council President Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission. In the letter, the four European NATO member states with the highest defense spending, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, and Poland, identified Russian hybrid warfare as an “existential threat.” They called for “a common push and extraordinary tools to fund and launch a defense line” to fortify their borders⁴. In this vein, during King Felipe VI’s official visit, it was announced that Spain would deploy a NASAMS missile battery within NATO to reinforce Estonia’s air defense starting in September, in addition to over 4,000 assets already deployed in the region.

However, from the southern flank, especially among Mediterranean member states, there was an expectation for a structural transformation of NATO different from the demands of Central and Eastern Europe and North America. According to Lieutenant General (r) Fernando López del Pozo and Captain Alberto Vázquez Crespo in a May 2024 analysis, NATO must recognize the threats and challenges from the south.

The east-south duality debated at the Cardiff summit and the “NATO’s southern neighborhood” defined in the Madrid Strategic Concept have been insufficient. At the Vilnius summit, there was a call for a deep reflection process on southern threats, the results of which would be revealed at the Washington Summit⁵. While merely conducting and publicly communicating this reflection process kept the southern issues on the Washington agenda, member states like Spain approached the summit with the expectation that the Alliance would promote “practical cooperation with southern partners, which is not always sufficiently intertwined or politically supported⁶.”.

⁴ Reuters (2024) Poland, Baltics call for EU Defence Line on border with Russia, Belarus | Reuters.

⁵ Ibidem

⁶ Ibidem



Spain, in particular, approached the summit with the intention of renewing its relevance in collective security, aiming to reaffirm its commitment to the expansion of the Alliance and progressive investment in a robust defense and technology industry. Moreover, Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares had previewed that the summit would “approve an action plan for the southern flank, which directly impacts security across the Sahel and Africa.”

“Nevertheless, the major “elephant in the room” in the hours leading up to the summit was the defense industry”.

Nevertheless, the major “elephant in the room” in the hours leading up to the summit was the defense industry. Over the past two years, NATO has developed new plans for Europe’s territorial defense, reformed command and control structures, and established a “New Force Model” with up to 500,000 troops at various levels of readiness. However, there is growing concern, as noted in a recent CSIS report⁷, whether NATO is prepared for a prolonged war with a peer competitor. These analyses commonly recommend a robust, integrated, and resilient defense industry.

In response to this context, outgoing Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had already announced he would use the Washington D.C. summit to urge NATO leaders to agree on an industrial defense commitment that ensures sustained demand and encourages long-term investment. Sources suggest that NATO should also agree to acquire more platforms, air defense systems, and artillery, and develop capabilities in emerging technologies...⁸

Member states, to varying degrees but with considerable consensus since 2022, identify necessary actions to strengthen the Alliance, such as increasing military equipment production in response to Russia’s volume strategy, deploying military equipment and troops on the eastern flank to reinforce presence and deterrence, and conducting joint exercises to demonstrate the effectiveness and preparedness of defense plans.

⁷ Monaghan, S. et al. (2024) Is NATO ready for war?, CSIS.

⁸ Cf. Idem.



These measures, while costly, are essential and will require significant political commitment. Over the next three to five years, it will be crucial for all member states and Alliance partners to collaborate not only to meet the 2% GDP defense spending goal but also to ensure this spending is invested in technology and capability development to level the playing field among members and support seamless cooperation in joint exercises, training measures, collective aid to third nations, and, most importantly, daily collective security maintenance.

Replicating the recent success of the defense investment commitment, which led 23 NATO countries to spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense (up from 11 countries the previous year), will depend on the political commitment of leaders and specific incentives to meet this objective. NATO leaders had announced that they would publish their first 'Industrial Defense Commitment,' aimed at helping members define national arms production strategies. This effort sought to encourage members to increase their national industrial capacities and return to stricter standardization of munitions for battlefield interoperability.

The push for this commitment emerged from the deficiencies in interoperability among NATO members exposed by Russia's war against Ukraine. Additionally, the EU and NATO announced in the week leading up to the summit that they would partner to support defense sector financing, attract more private investors, and respond to industry demands for increased funds for innovation and production.

This summit was tasked with meeting a demand that had been latent since Madrid: to endow the Alliance with an expansive vision, both geopolitically and in terms of strategic communication, transforming it from paper into reality. Therefore, the debates in Washington focused on how to counter the impact of new dynamics in international strategic competition: such as the reindustrialization of the European security and defense sector, the importance of addressing hybrid warfare, and the influence of perception and information not only in armed conflicts but also in the exercise of soft power, as seen in the revisionism of competitors like China or Russia.

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THE WASHINGTON NATO SUMMIT: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Following the conclusion of the NATO Summit in Washington, the Alliance has underscored its unwavering commitment to collective defense through a comprehensive strategy addressing threats from all directions. The historic accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO marks a significant milestone, reinforcing security in the High North and the Baltic Sea. This expansion exemplifies NATO's Open Door Policy as stipulated in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty.

A notable highlight of the summit is the significant increase in defense spending among member states. More than two-thirds of NATO members have met or exceeded the goal of spending at least 2% of their GDP on defense. European allies and Canada have collectively increased their defense spending by 18% in 2024, representing the largest increase in decades. This financial commitment is crucial for addressing existing deficiencies and meeting the demands of an increasingly contested global security environment.

NATO has embarked on the most significant reinforcement of its collective defense posture in a generation. This includes the deployment of combat-ready forces on the Eastern Flank and enhanced capabilities for rapid reinforcement. New defense plans have been implemented, ensuring the Alliance's readiness to deter and defend against potential adversaries on short notice. The updated Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) policy and the establishment of the Aegis Ashore site in Poland further strengthen defenses against ballistic missile threats, complementing existing assets in Romania, Spain, and Turkey.

Nuclear deterrence remains a cornerstone of NATO's security strategy. The Alliance maintains its commitment to modernizing its nuclear capabilities and sustaining a credible deterrence mission to preserve peace and prevent aggression. This

commitment underscores the importance of nuclear weapons in NATO's overall defense posture.

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The summit also highlighted the critical role of transatlantic defense industrial cooperation. Strengthening defense industries in Europe and North America and reducing barriers to defense trade are essential steps. The Defense Production Action Plan, initiated at the Vilnius Summit, aims to ensure that NATO can meet its standards and deliver critical capabilities in a timely manner.

Russia's aggressive actions and military buildup continue to be a significant concern for NATO. The Alliance condemned Russia's provocative behavior, including the deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus and its ongoing violations of airspace. NATO's firm stance includes supporting Ukraine and implementing measures to counter Russian hybrid threats, demonstrating a resolute commitment to maintaining Euro-Atlantic security.

The fight against terrorism remains a fundamental aspect of NATO's collective defense strategy. Updated Counter-Terrorism Policy Guidelines and the new Action Plan will guide the Alliance's efforts to address terrorist threats, ensuring readiness and solidarity among member states.

China's rise also presents new challenges. NATO has urged China to act responsibly in cyberspace and outer space, and to engage in discussions on strategic risk reduction. The Alliance focuses on protecting itself from coercive tactics while remaining open to dialogue that ensures the security of its member nations.

NATO partnerships are crucial for enhancing stability and supporting its core tasks. Strengthening political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners such as Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and celebrating anniversaries of key initiatives like the Partnership for Peace reflect NATO's commitment to collective security.

The European Union remains an indispensable partner for NATO. Enhanced cooperation in areas like defense, space, cyberspace, and emerging technologies is essential for a robust transatlantic security framework. Ensuring the participation of non-EU allies in EU defense initiatives is crucial for a cohesive approach to shared challenges.

NATO's commitment to the southern neighborhood, including initiatives in the Middle East and Africa, aims to foster regional stability. Establishing a liaison office in Jordan and expanding support for Iraq are strategic moves towards achieving greater security and prosperity in these regions.

Innovation and climate resilience are at the forefront of NATO's transformation. Initiatives such as the Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the NATO Innovation Fund drive technological advancements, while integrating climate change considerations ensures preparedness for future security challenges.

Finally, NATO's commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and Human Security highlights the Alliance's dedication to gender equality and the protection of fundamental norms. These efforts are crucial in an era where these values are increasingly under threat, reinforcing NATO's role as a stabilizing force in global security.

The statements made at the Washington Summit aim to illustrate a strengthened and united NATO, ready to face evolving security challenges and committed to the protection and prosperity of its member nations. However, this will continue to be tested by the challenge of Ukraine's path to the Alliance. The final communiqué declares Ukraine's pathway to NATO as "irreversible," a significant pronouncement for a consensus-based organization. Furthermore, the "bridge" to Ukraine's membership is beginning to take shape, with the Alliance committing to send a senior civilian official to Kyiv and establish a command in Wiesbaden, Germany, for coordinating security assistance and training. Allies have also agreed to provide Ukraine with a package of new air defense systems, including four Patriot batteries.

“What will happen between now and Ukraine's eventual membership, which could still be decades away?”

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But while allied leaders have asserted that the bridge will be a reality, major doubts persist about its duration and conditions. What will happen between now and Ukraine's eventual membership, which could still be decades away? So far, there have been no announcements that the United States is willing to ease restrictions on the use of U.S.-supplied weapons. There is frustration among Ukrainian delegations that they are not allowed to strike deep within Russia, and a sense that the U.S. is limiting Ukraine's ability to fight more effectively.

Additionally, there is a climate of uncertainty surrounding the U.S. elections. President Joe Biden's speech at the summit's opening was strong and presidential, but there is still doubt about whether he has what it takes to win in November. A defeat for Biden would mean a victory for former President Donald Trump, which raises concerns among European member states about the longevity of the agreements reached.

One of the most persistent challenges will be to optimize the industrialization and defense spending of European Alliance members. In this regard, the European Union (EU) has emerged as NATO's natural partner on the path to effective regional defense.

The EU has the capacity to bolster European deterrence in areas where NATO still faces gaps. Programs such as the European Defense Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP), the European Defense Fund (EDF), and the European Defense Industrial Reinforcement through Common Procurement (EDIRPA) are motivating member states to develop a robust industrial capacity. It remains imperative that the new European Parliament approves the EDIDP as soon as possible, and that the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) allocates a significant portion of the budget for defense industrial purposes.

These initiatives are not only aimed at strengthening the European defense industry but also have a dual impact on NATO. Firstly, they represent an increase in defense spending by the 23 EU member states within NATO, which currently account for 24% of the Alliance's total defense spending, thus increasing available resources. Secondly, they will encourage many countries to develop shared capabilities and improve interoperability. This will enhance cooperation between NATO allies, both within and outside the EU, and increase European influence in future relations with the United States, especially if Donald Trump wins the upcoming elections in November.

While political disputes among some members will continue, this should not hinder close coordination and complementarity between the two organizations. The seriousness of the security threats facing the European and transatlantic communities demands a unified response from both.



5 KEY AREAS TO FOCUS ON FOR THE NEXT SUMMIT:

NEW LEADERSHIP

Mark Rutte, former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, has been appointed as the new NATO Secretary General, succeeding Jens Stoltenberg, who had extended his mandate due to the recent geopolitical situation.

HISTORICAL AND SYMBOLIC CONTEXT

The summit was held in the U.S. capital, just like the 50th-anniversary summit in 1999, which coincided with the Kosovo crisis. This anniversary is a source of great satisfaction, highlighting 75 years of achievements in ensuring security for the allies. Additionally, NATO came to the summit with a record number of members (32) and the largest resources ever, having overcome the challenges posed by the Afghanistan withdrawal.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The war in Ukraine, now over two years old, and the disagreements among allies regarding support for Ukraine and future strategies were key issues at the summit. Some allies view Russia's invasion as an existential threat to the West. The summit aimed to align positions and demonstrate the Atlantic Alliance's cohesion to the world and adversaries, ensuring continued support for Ukraine despite uncertain election processes in many allied countries, including the internal situation in the U.S.

STRATEGIC CONTINUITY

Following the approval of the **Madrid Strategic Concept in 2022**, which defines Russia as the main threat and China as a systemic risk, the Washington Summit has served as a moment of continuity for the alliance. Despite the political uncertainties facing member states, no major strategic changes are expected during the new leadership period of the Alliance.

BURDEN SHARING

Advances have been made in increasing allies' defense budgets, though notable differences remain. The summit was marked by a call to countries that have not met the commitment to spend at least 2% of GDP on defense. Spain's position is complex, aiming for gradual industrialization and investment in defense, but still facing uncertainties regarding national funding strategies. However, the Mediterranean member states' effort to emphasize the geopolitical importance of the Sahel and North Africa has resulted in another step forward to achieving a more comprehensive strategic plan for the Southern Flank by the Alliance, as outlined by Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares, along with the possible appointment of a "special representative" of the Alliance for the southern neighborhood.



AUTHORS



Pablo García-Berdoy.

Public Affairs Leader LLYC for Europe.

pablo.gberdoy@llyc.globa



Carlos Samitier.

Senior Public Affairs Consultant LLYC.

csamitier@llyc.global

GLOBAL MANAGEMENT

Francisco Sánchez-Rivas

Chair of the Board
fjsanchezrivas@llyc.global

Alejandro Romero

Partner and Global CEO
aromero@llyc.global

Luisa García

Partner and Chief Operating Officer Global
lgarcia@llyc.global

Adolfo Corujo

Partner and CEO of Marketing
acorujo@llyc.global

Miguel Lucas

Global Senior Director of Innovation
mlucas@llyc.global

Arturo Pinedo

Partner and Global Chief Client Officer
apinedo@llyc.global

Tiago Vidal

Partner and Chief Talent and Technology Officer
tvidal@llyc.global

Marta Guisasola

Partner and Global Chief Financial Officer
mguisasola@llyc.global

Albert Medrán

Global Director of Marketing, Communications and ESG
amedran@llyc.global

MARKETING

Rafa Antón

Partner and Global Creative Director
rafa.anton@llyc.global

Federico Isuani

Partner and Chief Strategy Officer of Marketing Solutions Américas
federico.isuani@llyc.global

Jesús Moradillo

Partner and Chief Strategy Officer of Marketing Solutions Europe
jesus.moradillo@llyc.global

Javier Rosado

Partner and Chief Strategy Officer of Marketing Solutions Americas
jrosado@llyc.global

Gemma Gutiérrez

Managing Director of Marketing Solutions Europe
gemma.gutierrez@llyc.global

CORPORATE AFFAIRS

María Esteve

Partner and Managing Director for Latin America
mesteve@llyc.global

Jorge López Zafra

Partner and Managing Director of Corporate Affairs for Europe
jlopez@llyc.global

Gina Rosell

Partner and Senior Director of Healthcare for Europe
grosell@llyc.global

Luis Guerricagoitia

Partner and Senior Director of Financial Communication for Madrid
lguerricagoitia@llyc.global

EUROPE

Luis Miguel Peña

Partner and CEO of Europe
lmpena@llyc.global

Iñaki Ortega

General Manager Madrid
iortega@llyc.global

María Cura

Partner and General Manager Barcelona
mcura@llyc.global

Marlene Gaspar

General Manager Lisboa
mgaspar@llyc.global

Ángel Álvarez Alberdi

Head of Brussels Office
angel.alberdi@llyc.global

LATIN AMERICA

Juan Carlos Gozzer

Partner and CEO for Latam
jgozzer@llyc.global

LATAM NORTE

David González Natal

Partner and managing director for Northern Latam
dgonzalezn@llyc.global

Mauricio Carrandi

General Manager Mexico
mcarrandi@llyc.global

Andrés Ortíz

Senior Partner of Dattis by LLYC
Dattis by LLYC
andresortiz@dattis.com

Camila Gómez

President of Dattis by LLYC
Dattis by LLYC
camilagomez@dattis.com

Alejandra Aljure

General Manager Colombia
aaljure@llyc.global

Michelle Tuy

General Manager Panama
michelle.tuy@llyc.global

Ibán Campo

Managing Director Dominican Republic
icampo@llyc.global

LATAM SUR

Flavia Caldeira

General Manager Brasil
flavia.caldeira@llyc.global

María Eugenia Vargas

General Manager Argentina
mevargas@llyc.global

Daniel Tittinger

General Manager Peru
daniel.tittinger@llyc.global

Gonzalo Carranza

Partner and General Manager Ecuador
gcarranza@llyc.global

Juan Cristóbal Portales

General Manager Chile
juan.portales@llyc.global

UNITED STATES

Jeff Lambert

Chairman & CEO of Lambert by LLYC



jeff.lambert@llyc.global

Yndira Marin

Director of Operations and General Manager USA
yndira.marin@llyc.global

Mike Houston

President Lambert by LLYC and CEO of BAM by LLYC



BAM by LLYC
mike.houston@llyc.global

Matt Jackson

Managing Partner
matt.jackson@llyc.global

Don Hunt

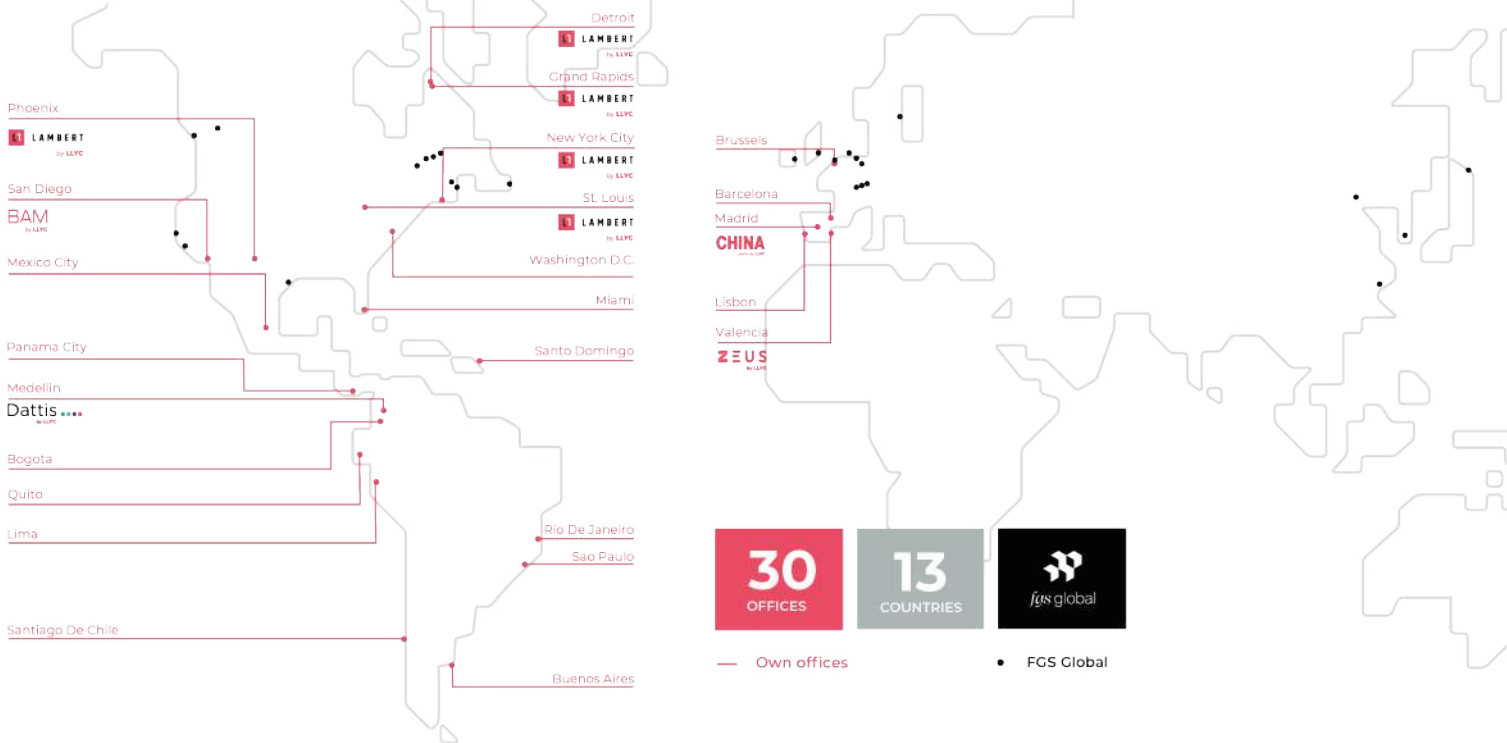
Managing Partner
don.hunt@llyc.global

Michelle Olson

Managing Partner
michelle.olson@llyc.global

LLYC

OFFICES



LLYC

Madrid

Lagasca, 88 - planta 3
28001 Madrid, España
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

Barcelona

Muntaner, 240-242, 1º-1ª
08021 Barcelona, España
Tel. +34 93 217 22 17

Lisboa

Avenida da Liberdade nº225, 5º
Esq.
1250-142 Lisboa, Portugal
Tel. + 351 21 923 97 00

Miami

600 Brickell Avenue, Suite 2125
Miami, FL 33131
United States
Tel. +1 786 590 1000

Nueva York

3 Columbus Circle, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10019
United States
Tel. +1 646 805 2000

Washington D.C.

1025 F st NW 9th Floor
Washington D.C. 20004
United States
Tel. +1 202 295 0178

Ciudad de México

Av. Paseo de la Reforma 412
Piso 14. Colonia Juárez
Alcaldía Cuauhtémoc
CP 06600, Ciudad de México
Tel. +52 55 5257 1084

Av. Santa Fe 505, Piso 15,
Lomas de Santa Fe,
CDMX 01219, México
Tel. +52 55 4000 8100

Panamá

Sortis Business Tower
Piso 9, Calle 57
Obarrio - Panamá
Tel. +507 206 5200

Santo Domingo

Corporativo 2010, de la Avenida
Gustavo Mejía Ricart, en Piantini,
Santo Domingo.
Tel. +1 809 6161975

Bogotá

Av. Calle 82 # 9-65 Piso 4
Bogotá D.C. - Colombia
Tel. +57 1 7438000

Lima

Av. Andrés Reyes 420, piso 7
San Isidro, Perú
Tel. +51 1 2229491

Quito

Avda. 12 de Octubre N24-528 y
Cordero - Edificio World Trade
Center - Torre B - piso 11
Ecuador
Tel. +593 2 2565820

Sao Paulo

Rua Oscar Freire, 379, Cj 111
Cerqueira César SP - 01426-001
Brasil
Tel. +55 11 3060 3390

Rio de Janeiro

Rua Almirante Barroso, 81
34º andar, CEP 20031-916
Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
Tel. +55 21 3797 6400

Buenos Aires

Av. Corrientes 222, piso 8
C1043AAP, Argentina
Tel. +54 11 5556 0700

El Salvador 5635, Buenos Aires
CP. 1414 BQE, Argentina

Santiago de Chile

Avda. Pdte. Kennedy 4.700,
Piso 5, Vitacura
Santiago
Tel. +56 22 207 32 00
Tel. +562 2 245 0924

CHINA

parte de LLYC

Velázquez, 94
28006, Madrid, España
Tel. +34 913 506 508

BAM

by LLYC

702 Ash Street, Unit 100,
San Diego, CA 92101 ,
Estados Unidos

LAMBERT

by LLYC

47 Commerce Ave SW,
Grand Rapids, MI 49503,
Estados Unidos
Tel. +1 616 233 0500

1420 Broadway, First Floor,
Detroit, Michigan 48226,
Estados Unidos
Tel. +1 313 309 9500

16052 Swingley Ridge Rd,
Chesterfield, Missouri 63017,
Estados Unidos
7201 N Dreamy Draw Dr,
Phoenix, Arizona 85020,
Estados Unidos
Tel. +1 480 764 1880

450 7th Ave #2002, New York, NY
10123, Estados Unidos
Tel. +1 212 971 9718

Dattis

by LLYC

Carrera 9 # 79A -19, piso 3,
Bogotá, Colombia
Tel: (+57) 60 1 651 52 00

Calle 10B # 36 - 32, oficina 401
Medellín, Colombia
Tel: (+57) 60 1 651 52 00

ZEUS

by LLYC

Base 1 La Marina de. C. de la
Travesía, s/n, Poblados Maritimos,
46024 Valencia

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LLYC is your partner in creativity, influence and innovation.

We aim to turn each day into an opportunity to nurture your brand. We believe boldness is the way to achieve it.

Corporate Affairs + Marketing

MARKETING + CORPORATE AFFAIRS

+1,200
professionals make up
the LLYC Team.

83,1 M€
operating revenue in 2022.

Ranked among the
TOP 40 COMPANIES
in the PR industry,
according to PRWeek
and PRovoke.

NAMED BEST AGENCY
in Europe 2022 in the PRWeek
Global Awards.

**LATIN AMERICAN
CONSULTANCY OF
THE YEAR**
2023 by PRovoke

LLORENTE Y CUENCA