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EUROPEAN DEFENCE STUDY – SUMMER 2023

After the war: how to keep Europe safe

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List of abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
EDA	European Defence Agency
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFP	Enhanced Forward Presence
EPC	European Political Community
EPF	European Peace Facility
GDP	gross domestic product
LNG	liquefied natural gas
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
XR	extended reality

Methodology and acknowledgements

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This is the twelfth in a series of reports I have written for Friends of Europe on European security and defence issues. It follows studies on France and Germany in 2017, the United Kingdom and Poland in 2018, Italy in 2019, transatlantic defence cooperation and the Arctic in 2020, the Sahel in 2021, and the Black Sea, space and the Western Balkans in 2022.

The research was conducted as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine entered a second year, causing untold suffering and devastation. The outcome of Putin's war will be decisive for the future European security order but it remained uncertain at the time of writing. I have thus made a conscious effort to think beyond the current conflict and imagine the security challenges Europe will face in a variety of scenarios once the fighting stops, and how best to address them.

This report is based partly on interviews with more than 40 current and former senior officials in governments, the European Union and NATO, the military, the European Parliament, diplomacy, think tanks and civil society in Europe and the United States. The interviews were conducted between February and April 2022.

Many serving officials, soldiers and diplomats were able to talk only on condition they were not identified, due to the nature of their positions. Others, including NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Chair of NATO's Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, and the Managing Director of the European Defence Agency, Jiří Šedivý, agreed to on-the-record interviews, for which I am most grateful. Once again, I am deeply grateful to Irina

A NATO warship and aircraft on exercises in the High North in March 2023; Source: NATO

Foreword

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When major geopolitical events or turning points occur, strategists are faced with two distinct challenges. One is to deal with the immediate repercussions of the shock, find ways to mitigate its impact and define tangible and achievable short-term objectives, such as the avoidance of defeat or of a major historical regression where a return to the status quo ante is not immediately within our grasp. The second challenge is to figure out how the world has changed for good as a result of the crisis and which adaptations the transatlantic democracies need to make to uphold their security, defend their interests and promote their values in the long haul that lies ahead.

It is not easy for Western policymakers to manage both dimensions of a crisis as political attention inevitably gravitates towards the immediate issues and decision points. If we take the example of the biggest crisis currently facing the transatlantic democracies, namely Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, we can see this rule of thumb of crisis management in action.

Americans and Europeans have rushed to clamp sanctions on Russia. Within little over a year, the EU is already on its tenth package of sanctions and discussing what could be in an eleventh package soon. Washington has supplied a range of modern weapons to Ukraine and financial assistance on a scale not seen since the granting of Lend-Lease to the United Kingdom at the outset of World War Two. In just one year of the war in Ukraine, US spending on Ukraine has surpassed the $100bn mark and barely a week goes by without the Biden administration announcing

another raft of air defence launchers, missiles or ammunition in support of the plucky Ukrainian resistance. For the first time, the EU has bought weapons on behalf of its member states or compensated them for weapons they have transferred to Kyiv. It is training thousands of Ukrainian soldiers while taking in – either temporarily or for a longer time – over six million Ukrainian refugees.

On the other side of Brussels at NATO headquarters, Putin's all-out war on Ukraine has led to a further build-up of the alliance's deterrent and response forces on its eastern borders. This return to the primacy of collective defence started after Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. The shock factor of Russia's aggression induced Finland and Sweden to seek NATO membership and abandon a policy of non-alignment that they had been happy to live with even throughout the Cold War and the proximity of the Soviet Union.

After one year of unrelenting support to Ukraine and providing weapons to Kyiv, such as tanks, air defence, long-range artillery and airborne cruise missiles that they ruled out at the beginning of the war, NATO and the EU wonder how long the fighting in Ukraine will last and whether it will be possible, and at what price, for Kyiv to regain full control of all its territory. With the first signs of war weariness appearing in the Western democracies, and particularly the United States, the questions on the minds of policymakers and analysts alike are: **has Russia been sufficiently weakened? Have the Ukrainians prepared sufficiently well, and has the West provided Kyiv with enough arms and ammunition for the**

forthcoming Ukrainian offensive to be successful? Can the war be ended this year and on terms favourable to Ukraine and its Western partners rather than the Kremlin?

Focusing on the immediate and short term is not only inevitable but also useful in helping to determine the longer-term future. The more Russia limps off the Ukrainian battlefield, the less likely it is to threaten a NATO member state or to aspire to lead a coalition of authoritarians against the West. Yet, this said, the post-war world will be different from the one that preceded it. Whether victorious or defeated, Russia will remain a resentful and revanchist power out to weaken the transatlantic democracies in any way it can. If it cannot send its troops across NATO's borders, it will almost certainly continue its hybrid warfare campaigns against societies in Europe and North America. It will continue its close partnership with China while becoming increasingly dependent on Beijing and pushing its narrative of the evils of the West and the superiority of the authoritarian model. The military and economic competition between the US and Europe, on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other, looks set to intensify. Both sides will compete for influence in the Global South, where the Ukraine war has revealed that many countries prefer to sit on the fence and pursue their own immediate interests rather than those of the democracies.

With the international liberal order contested, rules and treaties broken, and the principles of the UN Charter violated, we seem to be headed for a less stable and even more dangerous world. There is no 1989 moment on the horizon when the West's adversary will suddenly collapse from within, leading to the triumph of Western values and a massive improvement in the security environment. **So as Paul Taylor, my colleague as Senior Fellow at Friends of Europe, writes in this, his latest report on European security for Friends of Europe, both the EU and NATO need to hunker down for the long haul.**

Some will say that the contours of this new, more turbulent and conflict-prone world were present before 24 February 2022 when Putin launched his invasion. The use of force was already making a comeback, as evidenced by the violence in Syria, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo or between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Russia's incursions into Georgia, Crimea and the Donbas. Yet the current war in Ukraine has brought home to European and North American audiences the shocking reality of modern conventional warfare with its tens of thousands of deaths on both sides, its millions of refugees and displaced people and its horrendous destruction of critical infrastructure and entire Ukrainian cities.

Europeans have drawn the understandable conclusion that they cannot afford to have the same happen on their territory and have huddled around NATO whose strategy is to defend every square kilometre of the alliance's territory. At the same time, they have looked to the EU to make their societies more resilient against shocks, whether state-driven or more natural in the form of climate change and pandemics, and to reduce critical vulnerabilities in energy supplies, industrial supply chains and control of vital technologies. In responding to the war in Ukraine, both the EU and NATO are beginning a difficult process of adjustment to this new world and to the challenges of what European Commissioner, Thierry Breton, has described as putting Europe on an "economic war footing".

What does all this mean in practice for both the EU and the transatlantic security partnership? How well are the EU and NATO performing in upgrading their security models to face a world of more competition and tension, as well as potentially more clashes and even conflicts between the major powers? Are they able to protect their citizens against hybrid attacks as effectively as against conventional threats or even Russia's recent not-so-subtle hints regarding the use of nuclear weapons? Can they transform not only their defence production lines but also their

government-private sector relationships and even their societies more broadly to be if not on a semi-permanent war footing, then at least at a higher degree of peacetime preparedness and mobilisation than they have traditionally been used to? What have the EU and NATO achieved so far not only in assisting Ukraine but also to make Europe as a whole more secure? What more could be achieved if the EU and NATO were to implement all the proposals for greater cooperation that they have agreed on in the three Joint Declarations that they have signed thus far? Perhaps most importantly of all, what must Europeans do to sustain the vital transatlantic security and defence relationship or prepare for a future in which it would be less strong and dependable?

These are the difficult but essential questions that Paul Taylor tackles head-on in this report published just ahead of the NATO summit in Vilnius in July 2023. Once again, Paul demonstrates the expert grasp of the European and transatlantic security landscape that he acquired during his distinguished career as a diplomatic correspondent for Reuters in a number of European capitals and subsequently as a columnist for Politico.

As in his 11 previous reports on European security for Friends of Europe, Paul pulls no punches when it comes to analysing both the scope of the challenges and the effectiveness thus far of the policies and decisions that EU and NATO leaders have been able to agree on. Yet the credibility of Paul's analysis is grounded in the many in-depth interviews that he has conducted with over 40 political leaders, diplomats, military commanders, senior officials and academic experts, including decision-makers at the highest levels. This makes this report, like the previous ones that Paul has written for Friends of Europe, remarkably comprehensive and objective in giving expression to many sides of the debate.

Paul has also concluded his report with a number of recommendations, which embody a useful balance between boldness and feasibility, and which taken together provide the

reader with a valuable roadmap for the future of European security and defence. **These recommendations should and indeed must command the urgent attention of both policymakers, experts within the strategic community and the interested public alike.**

In his preface to "Gulliver's Travels", the celebrated Irish novelist, Jonathan Swift, wrote that his "purpose was to inform and not to entertain" his readers. The subjects and issues that Paul Taylor addresses here are not particularly pleasant to either read about or to think about. They are certainly not where we hoped to be 35 years on from the dramatic end of the Cold War and dreams of a perpetual peace, at least on our European continent. Yet they are the reality that we must all face up to. The Russia-Ukraine War has been called a wake-up call for Europe. It is the great merit and service of Paul Taylor's latest report to tell us if our leaders have indeed woken up and are indeed answering the call.

Jamie P. Shea.

Wreckage of Russian tanks in Bucha, outside Kyiv, in April 2022; Source: Dmytro Larin / Shutterstock

Executive summary

A NEW COLD WAR

Whatever the outcome of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, **Europe is entering a new kind of Cold War**.

Europeans must adjust to an era in which sovereignty and territorial integrity on their continent are once again called into question by a revisionist power. **Europe as a whole may not be at war, but this is no longer peacetime**. Defence and security will take a far higher priority than for the last three decades and will require a significantly larger slice of public resources.

While Western forces are not directly engaged, the West is waging a defensive proxy war against Russian aggression in Ukraine. If and when the fighting stops, there will be no return to the world before. **European leaders must prepare their citizens for a decade of defence by spelling out the price of their sovereignty, security and freedom**.

Although support for greater defence spending is currently high throughout Europe, sustaining such a commitment for a prolonged period will require political leadership and public understanding of what is at stake. The temptation to return to 'business as usual' and divert funds to other priorities will be strong as soon as the shooting stops in Ukraine and possibly sooner. It is hard to persuade politicians in a democracy to spend money on preparing for something that may never happen, whether it be war or pandemics.

The new era will be different in many ways from the five decades of East-West conflict that ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of communist rule in central and eastern Europe and the break-up of the Soviet Union. It is no longer a standoff between two heavily armed blocs. Russia may still have the world's biggest nuclear arsenal, but it has been overtaken by China as the second global economic and political power. The fulcrum of great power rivalry has shifted from central Europe to East Asia.

China's growing role complicates the strategic picture for Europeans, since they face increased pressure from the United States to decouple their economies from a country that has become the workshop of the world, a lucrative market and the dominant supplier of vital minerals and electronic components. **For the US, countering China's power is the overwhelming challenge of the 21st century**. For Europeans, dissuading Beijing from throwing its full weight behind Moscow is the immediate priority.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member **Türkiye's ambivalence in its balancing act between Ukraine and Russia is another factor of uncertainty and potential instability**, given its hostile relations with Greece and Cyprus, and tensions with other Eastern Mediterranean neighbours.

Yet **for Europeans, Russia has once again become the principal threat to the stability of their continent** since President Vladimir Putin tore up international law and post-Cold War agreements by sending tanks into Ukraine on 24 February 2022 to try to erase his neighbour's national identity and democracy, and make the independent sovereign state again a vassal of Moscow.

We do not yet know how the botched invasion will end, but some long-term consequences for Europe are already clear.

A new hard frontier stretching from the Arctic to the Black Sea will divide the continent for as long as Putin, or successors who share his aggressive, anti-Western revisionism, hold power in the Kremlin. The grey zone that existed for 20 years between NATO and European Union members on the western side of the continent and Russia to the east is disappearing. Finland and Sweden – previously militarily non-aligned – have already opted to join NATO. **Ukraine and Moldova will be de facto in the West, even if there is a long transition before they eventually become EU and NATO members.** Belarus will for the foreseeable future be on the Russian side of that border. Georgia's future status is uncertain, due

Ukrainian soldiers in the forest near Bakhmut in May 2023;
Source: Jose HERNANDEZ Camera 51 / Shutterstock

to its political polarisation and vacillation between the EU and Russia.

The idea of Ukrainian neutrality, which President Volodymyr Zelensky had been prepared to discuss before the war and even in the first weeks after the invasion, is no longer on the table. In the words of Sven Biscop, Director of the Europe in the World Programme at the Egmont Institute, "Ukraine was a buffer state; it has become a frontier state." [1]

Barring an improbable comprehensive peace agreement, Russia will remain economically and diplomatically isolated from the West under sanctions as long as its troops are on Ukrainian soil and probably for a long time afterwards. That will certainly be the case if the fighting ends without any formal negotiated deal, leaving a frozen or smouldering conflict that Moscow can turn up and down.

A DECADE OF DEFENCE

Keeping Europe safe will require a significant uplift in defence spending, since all European nations shrank their militaries and let equipment and ammunition stocks run down as they pocketed a 'peace dividend' after the end of the Cold War. **Allies will need to reshape their armed forces to prepare for**

high-intensity warfare in Europe rather than the expeditionary counterterrorism, crisis management and peacekeeping operations outside the North Atlantic Treaty area that dominated the last 30 years. Even those missions were a stretch for threadbare European forces.

NATO leaders seem set to declare at their Vilnius summit in July 2023 that defence expenditure of 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) should be a floor, not a ceiling. However, **it would be futile to engage in another transatlantic battle over a numerical target** such as the objective of "aim[ing] to move toward the 2 percent guideline" within a decade, set at the Wales summit in 2014 but still not fully achieved by most allies. Only seven allies met that target in 2022 – the US, United Kingdom, Greece, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. France and Croatia came close.

Output matters more than input. **The quality, composition and efficiency of rearmament and contributions to security operations are more important than a headline number**. For example, the UK spends a somewhat larger share of its GDP than France on defence, but most defence experts reckon it gets less bang for the buck than the French armed forces. **There is also bound to be regional differentiation in spending** between countries on the frontline, who feel an

[1] Interview with the author, April 2023

immediate threat from Russia, and those in the west or on the southern flank, whose security environment looks different. That explains why Poland is planning to raise defence spending to 4% of GDP, but Spain and Portugal are well below 2%.

The new era will also require a whole-of-society approach to security, engaging the private sector and civil society, as well as the military and internal security forces and emergency services.

Many of the components of our security, including energy and communications networks, the international banking system, cyberspace, the media and social media, reside outside the military sphere or the public sector. Safeguarding them entails an unprecedented degree of cooperation among government actors, companies, first responders and citizens. Finland, NATO's newest member, can serve as a model in many of these aspects, particularly for countries on the alliance's eastern flank.

BOOST FOR NATO AND EU

The return of major interstate war to Europe for the first time since 1945 thrust NATO back to centre stage as the only organisation capable of handling the territorial defence of the Euro-

Atlantic area. It prompted militarily non-aligned Sweden and Finland, already close to NATO, to apply for membership. It also reaffirmed the vital role of the United States as the guarantor of European security. Without US military assistance, Ukraine would have been defeated despite the courage and determination of its leadership, armed forces and population. But it is too simple to say, as some central and eastern Europeans do, that NATO is now 'the only game in town'.

The war has also hastened the transformation of the European Union from an overwhelmingly civilian economic and regulatory organisation into a geopolitical player, supporting Ukraine with commonly funded arms and ammunition, as well as through sanctions, military training for the Ukrainian forces, refugee absorption, economic assistance to Kyiv, rapid diversification of Europe's energy supplies and embryonic diversification of critical supply chains to build resilience.

In the short run, the conflict in Ukraine may have dealt a blow to the French-impelled objective of European strategic autonomy, since it sent Europeans in the north and east scurrying to Washington and NATO for protection, backed by US nuclear weapons. Yet it also highlighted the many non-military levers that the EU, not NATO, controls, as well as the longer-term need

and potential for Europeans to develop military capabilities in common and take more responsibility for their own security in future, when the US will be preoccupied with growing rivalry with China.

France is right to point to risks for transatlantic cooperation if Donald Trump or a like-minded Republican nationalist wins the 2024 US presidential election. Even if Democratic President Joe Biden, often described as the 'last Atlanticist', is re-elected, **the US will expect Europeans to do more for themselves**, starting with funding the reconstruction of Ukraine.

If a crisis were to flare over Taiwan, the US would be bound to draw down forces in Europe for missions in the Indo-Pacific, leaving the Europeans to fill those roles. Those capabilities include vital enablers in which European countries are woefully deficient, such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, space, strategic airlift, air-to-air refuelling, and command and control. While defence remains a national prerogative, it makes sense to procure and operate some of these enablers in common, along with NATO-standard ammunition. The EU has created funds that could be redirected and expanded for these purposes.

One of the lessons of the Ukraine conflict has been the importance of hybrid operations, both before and during the conventional armed conflict. The EU has a broader toolbox than NATO for countering hybrid threats below the threshold of armed conflict and for handling cyber-security, counter-disinformation and strategic communications.

The war has spurred closer cooperation between the two organisations, which works much better at the day-to-day staff level than at the political level, where intractable disputes involving Türkiye, Cyprus and quasi-theological issues with France intrude. This budding partnership ought to lead to **a new EU-NATO division of labour, based on functional criteria, namely who is better equipped to handle which task, rather than geographical or ideological considerations, such as east versus south, territorial defence versus expeditionary missions, or Atlanticist versus Europeanist**. There is bound to be some overlap.

HOW DOES THIS END?

Several outcomes of the war in Ukraine are possible. Western military officers and government officials consider an outright Ukrainian military victory that recovers all the territory that Russia has seized since 2014, including Crimea, improbable. Nor does Russia seem likely to be able to destroy Ukraine as an independent state or

even to seize and hold all the four partially occupied regions that it illegally declared annexed in September 2022.

The more likely scenarios are either a prolonged war of attrition with little change in the frontlines or a Korea-style ceasefire without a peace agreement. **In either of those cases, a return to major hostilities within a few years would be likely** as neither Moscow nor Kyiv would be satisfied with the status quo.

Those scenarios would require long-term Western security commitments for Ukraine, strong engagement to protect Moldova against Russian destabilisation efforts and continued support for Georgia's independence. Unless the war ends with a peace agreement, Ukraine is highly unlikely to be admitted soon to NATO, since it would not have full control of its territory and its accession could bring the alliance into direct conflict with a nuclear-armed Russia. It is far from meeting the criteria for EU membership, even if the process were accelerated and staged.

Various proposals have been advanced for interim 'security guarantees', including the Kyiv Security Compact put forward by former NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Ukrainian presidential chief-of-staff Andriy Yermak. This calls for binding bilateral agreements between Kyiv and a group of major

Western allies for "a multi-decade effort of sustained investment in Ukraine's defence industrial base, scalable weapons transfers and intelligence support from allies, intensive training missions and joint exercises under the European Union and NATO flags." [2]

It does not include a mutual defence clause equivalent to NATO's Article 5 nor permanent allied boots on the ground in Ukraine. **The aim is to make Ukraine able to defend itself – and unattractive to invade – without needing Western forces**. It is hard to imagine that Western allies, who were unwilling to commit their own forces to help Ukraine before 24 February 2022, would do so after the fighting stops, especially in the absence of a formal agreement to cease hostilities but perhaps even if the terms of a ceasefire were agreed. This applies just as much to the US as to France or Germany.

The EU will take the lead in coordinating and co-financing the reconstruction effort in Ukraine, which should give it leverage to ensure Kyiv moves forward with the rule of law, transparency and anti-corruption legislation and enforcement required for eventual membership. It may need to resort again to collective borrowing to fund the mammoth recovery and rearmament effort, just as it did for its own economic revival after the COVID-19 pandemic. NATO and the EU

[2] The Presidential Office of Ukraine, September 2022

should coordinate their incentives to push fragmented European defence industries towards greater cooperation both to supply Ukraine and to strengthen the defence of Europe.

The West should keep diplomatic channels open to Moscow, even if Putin remains in power, to avoid miscalculation and escalation, pass deterrent messages and address practical issues arising from the war and other potential flashpoints, such as the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. That dialogue should also probe for any openings towards a return to existing arms control agreements and for possible future negotiations on disengagement and arms limitation.

Talking to Russia is not rewarding Putin, whatever more hawkish EU and NATO members may say. Talking to the Soviet Union saved the world from potential nuclear Armageddon during the Cuban missile crisis, multiple Berlin crises and the standoff over intermediate-range nuclear forces in the 1980s. At the same time, Western governments and institutions such as universities and cultural organisations should **support Russian civil society both within the country and abroad**. Blanket bans on Russian visitors and vexatious restrictions on Russians resident in the West other than oligarchs with Kremlin connections are counterproductive.

HOW TO SPEND IT

After the war, NATO planners and other military analysts reckon **it will take Russia between four and ten years to reconstitute its severely depleted ground forces and be in a position to launch a major offensive again**. Meanwhile, Moscow has ample means through cyber-attacks, sabotage, manipulation of regional conflicts, covert and mercenary actions and disinformation to cause problems for the West. Its nuclear power, and navy and air forces have barely been engaged in the Ukraine campaign and remain intact.

That timeline gives the West at most a decade to strengthen its own deterrence and defence with the aim of preventing a future conflict with Russia by showing it has the capabilities, technological edge, political resolve and unity to prevail if necessary.

This report will consider what is required for the future defence of Europe in light of the war in Ukraine. It will draw tentative lessons from the conduct of operations so far and consider what kind of forces, technologies, organisation and human resources are required. It will look at **how to spend Europe's defence bonus rationally** and efficiently without waste, duplication or gold-plating. It will also look at **what steps are needed to ensure that**

NATO and the EU respond early enough in a crisis and are not hamstrung until a war erupts.

It will examine **how nuclear deterrence has functioned during the war** and what, if any, impact Russian nuclear sabre-rattling has had.

It will discuss **how much forward defence NATO needs for credible deterrence and assurance on its eastern flank** and what the strategic implications of Finland's and Sweden's entry into NATO are for the balance of power, particularly in the Baltic and Arctic theatres. While European armies clearly need more armour and ammunition than they have today, calls to station whole tank divisions permanently in Poland and the Baltic states make no sense and will not happen. The damage inflicted by Russian missiles on Ukrainian cities and civilian infrastructure highlights **the need for better air and missile defence in Europe**. The use of drones for intelligence gathering, surveillance, and targeting and pinpointing attacks shows another area where Europe needs to catch up fast. **NATO needs to beware of preparing to fight a 20th-century war just because it has observed two former Soviet armies engaging in mostly very 20th-century warfare**.

The study will consider **how to bolster Europe's resilience through a whole-of-society defence effort** by engaging the private sector and civil society in planning and exercising emergency procedures from the outset. It will explore the respective roles of NATO and the EU, the opportunities for cooperation between the two and the division of labour to avoid political friction.

With NATO refocused on its primary role of collective defence, this study will also look at the question of **who will handle crises beyond Europe's southern and south-eastern borders** involving political instability, jihadist violence, climate-induced emergencies and mass migration.

Three days after Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine in February 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz made a landmark speech to the Bundestag declaring a *Zeitenwende* or historical turning point. We must ensure that this change of mentality and priorities is translated into a sustained, decade-long investment in defence, security and resilience to keep Europe safe in a more dangerous era.

Tank barriers in front of the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol, Ukraine;
Source: Choco Pie / Shutterstock

Chapter 1:
A fragmenting world

NO 'ROARING TWENTIES'

However Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine ends, it has already changed Europe's strategic environment irreversibly. **The continent has entered a prolonged period of geopolitical confrontation** that will most likely be neither an all-out east-west war nor a return to business-as-usual peacetime. There will be no 'roaring twenties' in Europe.

"We will continue to face a Russia that wants another Europe, where President Putin can control neighbours. So even if the war stops tomorrow, we will not return to where we were before the war," NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in an interview for this report. [1]

European societies face a painful adaptation to a more dangerous and hostile world, which few citizens – at least in western Europe – have yet fully understood. The next decade will be shaped not only by the need to withstand an angry, revisionist Russia but also by growing strategic rivalry between China and the United States, with mounting pressure to curtail European economic ties with the communist Asian giant.

"What is left of the post-Cold War security architecture is on life support or dead," said a senior NATO official. "The premise that we had for decades that everyone at the table had an interest in the status quo is no longer the case. Russia told us so and now they are showing that they meant it." [2]

"We need to be ready for a security environment which in the short to mid-term is about instability, unpredictability, escalation management, very far away from the post-Cold War peace dividend in Europe," the official said. European countries slashed defence spending and shrank their armies between 1990 and 2014 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, reallocating what became known as a peace dividend to other social or environmental spending priorities.

The post-World War Two multilateral,

[1] Interview with the author, March 2023

[2] Interview with the author, March 2023

rules-based international order, under which European integration flourished, is broken and unlikely to return in the same form. China and Russia want to change the rules of the game and are using all their levers of influence to win over countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America frustrated by what they see as Western dominance. Many see Russia's action in Ukraine as no different from US actions in Afghanistan or Iraq. Western efforts to frame the global divide as being between democracies and autocracies do not resonate far beyond the prosperous developed world.

Institutions such as the United Nations Security Council and the pan-European Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are deadlocked by great power differences. Some UN agencies and fora such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the multilateral framework on climate change continue to function, although their agreements are not enforceable.

Attempts to make the Security Council more representative of developing and emerging nations and to give permanent seats to Germany and Japan have failed over the last 30 years for lack of consensus. There is no prospect of reform for the foreseeable future, given the antagonism among the five permanent members – the US, Russia, China, the UK and France.

Instead, it is more likely that the West will seek to exercise political influence through informal groupings, such as the G7 family of major industrial democracies or the G20 grouping of major global economies, and by developing NATO's partnerships with like-minded Asian and Pacific countries. At the same time, China and Russia are building up parallel influence networks, such as the BRICS grouping of emerging economies with Brazil, India and South Africa or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) of Eurasian nations. They seek to build separate internet networks and payments systems to counter US dominance of international trade and financial transactions through the dollar's central role as the global reserve currency. Many developing nations are seeking to play both sides to maximise their interests.

The economic globalisation on which Europe built its prosperity for the last 30 years faces profound ruptures in the coming years, casting doubt on the old continent's business model and hence on its ability to go on funding current levels of social welfare and pensions. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and extended reality (XR), with profound implications for security and individual freedom, are developing faster than EU regulation can discipline them.

Nor is there any reason to expect that the spread of jihadist militancy and instability around Europe's southern borders in Africa and the Middle East will abate. On the contrary, the impact of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa and the Southern Mediterranean is likely to exacerbate resource conflicts over water, land and food, and drive mass migration and the political and religious radicalisation of a fringe of the population.

A NEAR AND FARAWAY WAR

Most western Europeans have experienced the war in Ukraine on television and the internet, through higher energy, petrol and food prices, cushioned in some countries by government subsidies, and through the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. Opinion polls show widespread support for Ukraine and

for sending arms to help Kyiv defend itself has held firm so far despite the economic impact. [3] Yet to many the conflict still feels, in the infamous words of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain about Czechoslovakia in 1938, like "a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing."

The nations of central and eastern Europe, which lived under Soviet domination until 1989 and have taken in millions of Ukrainians fleeing the devastation of their cities and homes, feel a much more immediate threat to their security and way of life. States bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine have taken steps to bolster their defences, tighten border controls with Russia and secure the presence of more Western NATO troops to deter any attack on them while emptying their arsenals of mostly Soviet-era weapons to help the Ukrainians resist.

In a major setback for Russia, Finland and Sweden ended decades of military non-alignment and applied for membership of the US-led defence alliance after the invasion, which triggered a sudden shift in their public opinion that had previously favoured neutrality. Finland joined NATO in April 2023. At the time of writing, Türkiye and Hungary were holding up ratification of Sweden's accession, but Stockholm seemed likely to become the 32nd member before the end of 2023.

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[3] European Council on Foreign Relations, February 2023

Putin set out Moscow's far-reaching ambitions to turn back the clock on the post-Cold War European security order in draft treaties sent to the United States and NATO in December 2021. The demands included an end to any further NATO enlargement; a rollback of deployments of NATO forces on the territory of all central European countries that joined the alliance after 1997; a ban on all Western military activity in Ukraine, the South Caucasus and Central Asia; and strict limits on military exercises in NATO countries. [4]

Russia seeks to recreate an extended sphere of influence not only on the territory of the former Soviet Union, explicitly mentioned in the draft treaties, but also over its former central European satellites, which chose democratically to join NATO.

Putin's objectives in launching the all-out invasion appear to have been the elimination of Ukraine as a sovereign, independent nation with a distinct culture and identity, and its permanent subjugation to Russia. The survival of a vibrant, democratic, European Ukraine is in itself a defeat for Putin.

UKRAINE SCENARIOS

NATO and EU officials and Western

strategic experts expect that when the fighting in Ukraine eventually stops, Russia will continue to present the biggest threat to European security, whoever is in power in the Kremlin and whatever the situation on the ground.

Putin, who has equated his 'special military operation' with the 'Great Patriotic War' to defeat Nazi Germany, appears willing to continue the conflict indefinitely in the belief that Russian numbers and stamina will ultimately overcome Ukraine's numerically inferior forces and resources, and that Western support for Kyiv will fade as inflation fuels discontent in the US and Europe.

If, after a long war of attrition, Putin were to succeed in extending Russia's grip over southern Ukraine from the Donbas region to Crimea and perhaps as far as Odesa, he might well go further and try to bring other former Soviet republics under Moscow's control. He has already used the territory of Belarus for his assault on Ukraine and has announced plans to station tactical nuclear weapons there. His next target would most likely be Moldova, already subject to Russian energy blackmail and subversion efforts, and where the Kremlin perpetuates a frozen conflict in the breakaway region of Transnistria, garrisoned by 1,500 Russian 'peacekeepers'.

Ukraine, for its part, would not accept such

[4] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

a defeat and would seek to reverse Russian gains as soon as it had reconstituted its forces and received more advanced Western equipment.

If, on the other hand, Ukraine were to recapture territory Russia has seized since February 2022, perhaps cutting off supply routes to Crimea in a counter-offensive, Moscow would be very unlikely to agree to a negotiated settlement. Any ceasefire would likely be temporary. If, against most expectations, Ukraine managed to drive Russian forces out of all territory occupied since 2014, except perhaps Crimea, Moscow would most likely spurn any negotiation. Most military analysts

regard as wishful thinking the prospect of a complete Ukrainian victory, followed by the fall of Putin, a triumph of democratic opposition forces against Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and the end of the separatist regime in Transnistria sustained by Russian troops.

The prevailing view is that the most likely scenarios are either a long war of attrition or a Korean-style ceasefire along a line of control without a permanent peace agreement. There might be at most limited negotiations, possibly via Türkiye or China, on issues such as prisoner exchanges, missing persons and grain exports. [5]

Crimea and its "territorial waters"

Source: Euractiv
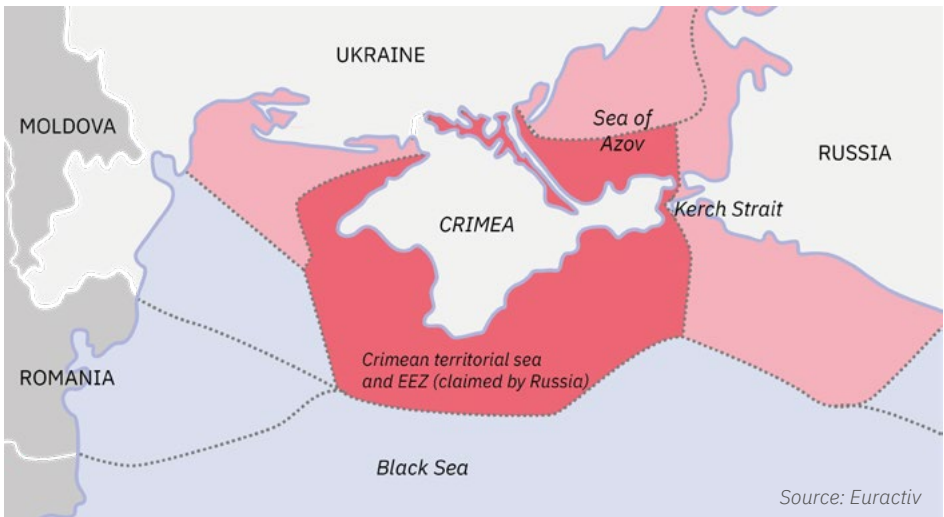
[5] Leaked secret documents published in US media in April 2023 showed that the US intelligence community believed that neither side was likely to achieve a decisive breakthrough and that the war was headed towards a prolonged stalemate. The New York Times, April 2023

Any outcome short of an improbable outright Ukrainian victory would leave a long-term source of instability that would hamper reconstruction efforts and cement the division of Europe.

If checked or repulsed on the battlefield in Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated many other ways of making life uncomfortable for Europe including cyber-attacks, disinformation, election interference, the manipulation of migration at the EU's borders, the use of mercenaries to undermine European interests in Africa and possibly the Western Balkans, as well as the disruption of commodity markets.

NO WAY BACK

Russia will need several years to reconstitute its decimated ground forces and equipment after the Ukraine conflict. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) estimated in February 2023 that Moscow had lost nearly 1,000 or about 40% of its main battle tanks in the first year of the war and up to half of its pre-invasion fleet of updated T72B3 tanks, forcing it to rely on older models brought out of storage. Similar losses applied to other armoured vehicles. [6]

Several of Moscow's elite infantry units have been decimated in combat and NATO

officials estimate the Russian military casualty toll by March 2023 at more than 60,000 dead and at least twice that number wounded. The initial invasion force consisted of about 150,000 soldiers. Russian forces have since suffered further heavy losses in fighting around the south-eastern town of Bakhmut. The Wagner Group private military company – the Kremlin's extended arm in Africa as well as Ukraine – threw waves of freshly recruited ex-prisoners into that battle, sustaining massive casualties. Western intelligence estimates that Ukraine lost one soldier for every five Russians killed in Bakhmut.

NATO experts believe it will take the Russian military between four and seven years to rebuild, according to Admiral Rob Bauer, Chair of the alliance's Military Committee.

"They will still be hampered most likely by sanctions if they try to reconstitute, so it's not going to be easy for them," Bauer said in an interview for this report. "We will also need time in a different way than the Russians. We will need time to produce the weapons systems and the ammunition and to find the people and to reorganise ourselves." [7]

European governments began to reverse the decline in defence spending after Russia seized Crimea in 2014, but only a handful have reached the NATO guideline

[6] Presentation of the annual IISS Military Balance by IISS director John Chipman and staff, February 2023: International Institute for Strategic Studies, February 2023

[7] Interview with the author, March 2023

of allocating 2% of GDP. Crucially Germany, Europe's biggest economy, is far from the target at about 1.5%. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered a surge of military spending announcements across Europe, including the creation by Berlin of a €100bn five-year fund on top of its regular military budget to modernise the armed forces, but the government has been very slow to start disbursements.

Whether European countries have the political staying power to achieve and sustain such a major increase in defence investment over the next decade is a key challenge. Adapting to a prolonged period of 'no war, no peace' will be difficult in democracies where there is strong public

Defence expenditure of NATO members as a share of GDP
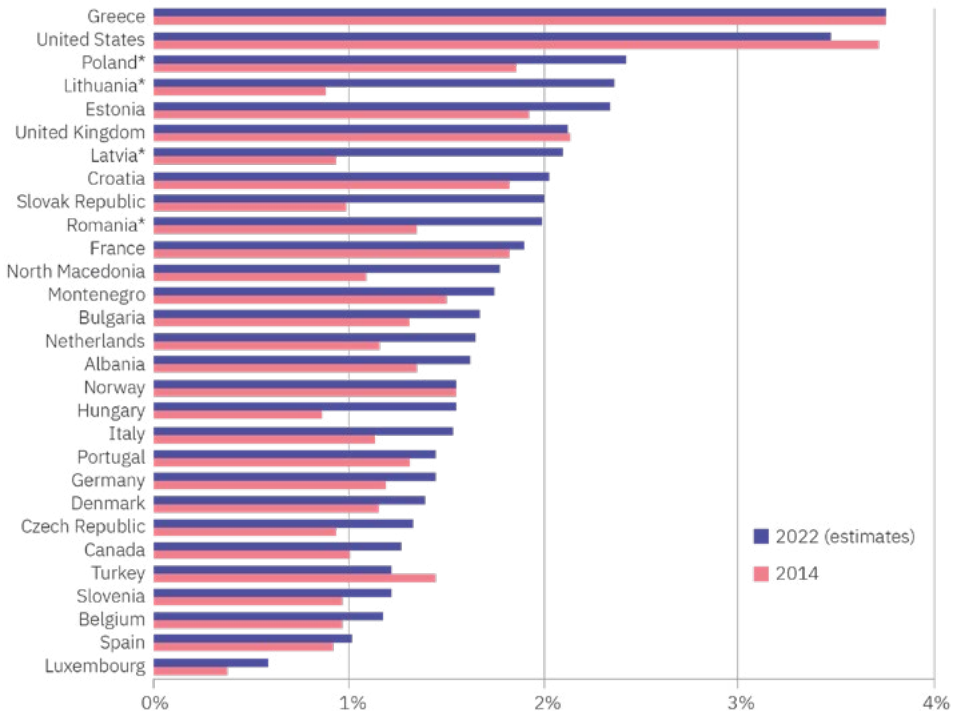
National laws and political agreements call for 2% of GDP to be spent on defence annually.

Source: NATO

pressure to focus government spending on health, pensions, education, transport and the transition to clean energy.

"Much of our societies are unprepared to deal with the reality of war," said Katarzyna Pisarska, Founder of the European Academy of Diplomacy and Chair of the Warsaw Security Forum. "They are prepared to live through short-term crises and go back to normal. The problem here is that there is no return to normal. We're very bad at informing and preparing societies for long-term conflict with an adversary who wants to harm us. I fear many countries have not been able to transmit the sense of urgency." [8]

The greater the distance that European citizens are from the battlefield in Ukraine, the less acute their sense of danger and hence their willingness to envisage long-term sacrifices for security.

"The Belgian taxpayer doesn't believe that we're ever going to have Russian boots stomping on the streets," said a veteran west European diplomat who held senior positions in both NATO and the EU. "If you want to convince the Belgian or Dutch public that we have to make an additional effort, you can only do it if you put it in the name of the European project. It's hard otherwise to convince them to spend money on defence rather than hospitals." [9]

ECONOMIC RUPTURE

There will also be no going back to the economic interdependence with Russia that flourished in the quarter-century between 1989 and February 2022. Moscow provided roughly 40% of all EU gas imports right up until the invasion of Ukraine, and Europe took some 50% of Russian gas exports. Indeed, its market share continued to grow even after Putin's annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine in 2014. By April 2023, that number was down to 9%, chiefly comprising sales to Hungary and Austria.

Most European countries, with the exception of Hungary and Serbia, have since severed their energy ties and radically reorientated their supplies from Russian gas and oil pipelines to Norwegian and North African suppliers and liquefied natural gas (LNG) mostly from the United States and Qatar. The sabotaging of the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines from Russia to Germany beneath the Baltic Sea by still unidentified bombers in September 2022 merely perpetuated the halt to Russian gas supplies that had already occurred.

Giving up Russian gas has been painful but so far not insurmountable for Germany, which drew up to 55% of its gas imports

from Russian state monopoly Gazprom, and Italy, which was equally dependent on Russian gas but has rapidly switched to North African suppliers. A mild winter meant there were no power cuts in Europe and gas stocks at the end of winter were higher than in previous years. Officials in both countries said there was little or no prospect of returning to Russian supplies after the war because EU sanctions were likely to persist and the conflict is hastening the transition to renewable energy sources and alternative fossil fuel suppliers.

The economic rupture with Russia has been sharp, with the value of imports into the EU falling by 50% between March 2022 and December 2022, despite the soaring price of oil and gas. Many European multinationals have sold or closed their subsidiaries in response to sanctions and pressure from activists. Energy majors Shell and Total have pulled out of investments in Russia. Carmakers Renault and Mercedes sold their Russian businesses and exited the market, while Volkswagen ceased business there and had its assets frozen by a Russian court.

Although it has cushioned the initial economic shock using deep currency reserves, **Russia faces a deepening economic crisis in the medium term** for lack of foreign investment and has lost many of its young talents who fled abroad in opposition to the war or to avoid mobilisation. Its long-term growth potential will be eroded by the brain drain, the difficulty in sourcing key technologies and a shortage of capital. Whether Gulf Arab states that have been neutral in the war, or China, which declared a 'no-limits friendship' but has stopped short of supplying weapons or key technology to Moscow, will step in as investors seems doubtful, given the risk of incurring US secondary sanctions. [10]

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Germany's economic model, but the impact of the end of cheap Russian gas on the viability of its production of chemicals and industrial goods, as well as the sudden closure of the Russian export market just when China is experiencing a slowdown, poses huge adaptation challenges for Europe's biggest economy.

Moreover, that economic wrench, which will depress corporate tax revenues, comes just as the government has committed itself to a multi-year step-change in defence spending.

CHINA TRADE VULNERABLE

Looking ahead, Europe's intense economic relations with China are vulnerable to unpredictable events in East Asia. China supplied 20% of the EU's imports and took

[10] For an assessment of the longer-term economic impact of sanctions, see: Centre for Economic Policy Research, December 2022

49th NATO BALTOPS exercise in the Baltic Sea on 8 June 2020; Source: NATO

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki; Source: Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock

9% of its exports in 2022.

A Chinese military attack on Taiwan could radically change that. While European countries would be unlikely to play more than a symbolic military role in supporting a US military response, the EU would face immediate pressure from Washington to join economic sanctions against Beijing and radically cut back trade and investment. Europe would also face major supply chain disruption since 50% of world trade is shipped through the Taiwan Strait, and Taiwan is the biggest supplier of semiconductors to the European market.

In March 2023, **European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen set out a strategy designed to 'de-risk' economic ties with China**. The plan involves diversifying supplies of critical minerals and electronic components, screening inward investment by Chinese entities in European companies in sensitive technologies and infrastructure, as well as proposals to screen outward investment by EU firms in China on security grounds. [11]

It is unclear how far Germany, France and Italy, the three EU countries with the biggest business relationships with China,

[11] European Commission, March 2023

[12] European Parliament, 2023
[13] Les Echos, April 2023; Politico, April 2023
[14] Politico, April 2023
[15] Marco Rubio, Twitter, April 2023

will embrace that strategy. Chinese state-owned companies have bought control of container terminals in Greece, Italy and France, as well as Rotterdam in the Netherlands and a stake in a terminal in Hamburg, Germany – key gateways for US reinforcement of NATO in Europe. [12]

After a state visit to Beijing in April 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron said Europe should not let itself be dragged by the US into a confrontation with China over Taiwan. He reaffirmed that Europe must pursue "strategic autonomy" and act as a "third pillar" between Washington and Beijing, and not a "vassal".

"The great risk for Europe would be if, just as it manages to define its own strategic position, it were caught up in a global disorder and in crises which are not ours," Macron said. "The worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers on this topic and take our cue from the US agenda and a Chinese overreaction." [13]

Macron's stance drew criticism both within the EU, where Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said: "Instead of building strategic autonomy from the United States, I propose a strategic partnership with the United States," [14] and in the US, where Republican Senator Marco Rubio said that if Europe was not willing to "pick sides between the US and China

over Taiwan, then maybe we shouldn't be picking sides either [on Ukraine]." [15]

The French leader had previously come under fire in central Europe for saying Russia should not be humiliated and should be offered "security guarantees" after the war. Some west European leaders agree with Macron's message, if not his style and timing.

QUESTIONS OVER FUTURE US COMMITMENT

The uproar over Macron's comments came against the backdrop of wider rifts in Europe over the future of the US security commitment to the continent. The French see the US strategic pivot to Asia as a geopolitical inevitability, only temporarily interrupted by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The invasion prompted Washington to boost its forces on the 'old continent' from 60,000 to 100,000 and to take the lead in providing massive military assistance to Kyiv.

President Biden's firm support for Ukraine and painstaking coalition-building with European leaders and the EU before and during the war were a model of transatlantic leadership. But **the conflict also reminded Europeans of how dependent they remain on the United States for defence**

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[16] The New York Times, January 2019; Politico, October 2020
[17] Interview with the author, February 2023
[18] Fox News, March 2023

and deterrence, 77 years after the end of World War Two, and how vulnerable Europe might become under a different US leader.

Many Europeans were spooked by former President Donald Trump's open disdain for NATO and hostile attitude towards the EU, particularly Germany. The Republican president is reported to have discussed several times with aides in 2018 and 2019 the possibility of withdrawing the US from the alliance. His former national security advisor, John Bolton, said he believed Trump would have pulled out of NATO had he been re-elected in 2020. Trump is a declared candidate for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination. [16]

"What if Trump had been president when Russia invaded Ukraine?" said Camille Grand, Distinguished Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations and a former assistant secretary general of NATO for defence investment. "Do we put European security on the line every four years depending on the choice of a few thousand voters in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin?"

Whoever is in the White House after 2024, "we will have to deal with an America that has Europe at best as its second priority," Grand said. [17] Both Trump and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, another potential Republican presidential contender, have advocated scaling back US support for Ukraine, arguing that it is a vital interest for Europeans, but not for the United States. [18]

In a May 2023 CNN interview, Trump declined to say whether he wanted a Ukrainian victory but boasted that he could end the war in 24 hours by talking to Putin and Zelensky. "I don't think in terms of winning or losing. I think in terms of getting it settled so we stop killing all these people and breaking this country," he said.

Of America's European allies, the Republican frontrunner said: "I want Europe to put up more money because they're laughing at us. They think we're a bunch of jerks. We're spending $170bn for a faraway land and they're right next door to that land and they're in for 20 [bn]." The figures do not correspond to any statistic on relative US and European assistance for Ukraine. [19]

Current and past US officials on both sides of the aisle say **bipartisan support for NATO in Congress remains strong**. They dismiss the idea that the US will reduce its commitment to European security as soon as the fighting stops in Ukraine because it faces a growing challenge from China. **However, they expect European nations to substantially increase their own defence capabilities to free up more US forces to meet global responsibilities**.

[19] CNN, May 2023

Michael Ryan, who was deputy assistant secretary of defence for European and NATO affairs during the Trump administration, said it was in his country's vital interest to be in Europe, not least because of the integrated transatlantic economic relationship, which created prosperity and jobs in the United States.

"Forget the [domestic] politics. We're not going anywhere," Ryan said. "The US realises it cannot handle China on its own, so that we have to work with the Europeans." [20]

Jim Townsend, who held the same Pentagon position in the Obama administration, said his great fear was not that the United States would turn away from Europe, but that west European nations would slide back into complacency about defence as soon as the war stopped or even before.

"They want this to go away," said Townsend, now a Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security. "Intellectually they agree on the need to do more for their own defence, but there is not the political will to do something about it even with Putin on the march." [21]

Townsend said the issue was aggravating east-west splits in both the EU and NATO, with east Europeans complaining that the west Europeans "still don't get it" about Russian aggression, while west Europeans felt that the easterners were becoming too militaristic. The US would be pulled into moderating those disputes and holding the alliance together.

"That will keep the US ever more busy in Europe. But future US leaders may not embrace that role," he said. "Biden gets it, but he's the last European in the White House."

So amid growing geopolitical rivalry and fraying international order, Europe is entering a decade of danger divided on its own ambitions and its positioning in relation to the other major powers. How Europe fares in this increasingly bare-knuckled global contest will depend on the vitality and adaptability of two collective institutions – NATO and the EU – which together provide the backbone of the continent's security and prosperity.

[20] Interview with the author, February 2023
[21] Interview with the author, March 2023

Chapter 2:
The resurrection of NATO

NO LONGER "BRAIN DEAD"

Russia's all-out assault on Ukraine put NATO back centre-stage in European security less than a year after the alliance's credibility had taken a hit with the chaotic Western retreat from Afghanistan in 2021. The 74-year-old military alliance has gained new investments, new members and above all a new sense of purpose – returning to its core mission of collective defence.

NATO had formed the backbone of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that was supposed to stabilise the country after the US-led invasion drove out the ruling Islamist Taliban movement that had given shelter to al-Qaeda militants responsible for the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States. The sight of Taliban fighters re-entering Kabul in triumph, while European and US allies bickered over the handling of the hasty withdrawal ordered by the White House, may have been a factor in persuading Putin that the West was weak and would not

respond if he made a quick grab for Kyiv.

NATO's comeback showed that while they may no longer have the stomach for open-ended expeditionary operations, the Europeans and the US still see it as the indispensable shield of Europe. For all the French-led efforts to assert European strategic autonomy centred on the EU, **when push came to shove, European governments turned to NATO to protect them from an aggressive, revisionist Russia**. Indeed, two previously militarily non-aligned EU members, Sweden and Finland, swiftly applied for NATO membership. "The deterrence effect becomes totally different when we are part of a nuclear alliance," a senior Finnish government official said. [1]

The alliance, which Macron had diagnosed in 2019 as experiencing "brain death" due to the lack of transatlantic consultations under Trump, enjoyed a sudden resurrection. Within hours of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, NATO activated all its regional defence plans and reinforced its frontline units in the Baltic states and

[1] Interview with the author, February 2023

Poland. Within days, ministers agreed to deploy new battlegroups in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria to ensure a multinational presence along the entire eastern flank and provide reassurance for eastern allies. The alliance stepped up naval and air patrols to warn Moscow against any attempt to touch NATO territory, although it had prudently withdrawn all non-littoral warships from the Black Sea before the conflict.

The activation of NATO's crisis plans had been the object of regular command post exercises in preceding years, especially since Russia seized Crimea in 2014. Those tabletop war games often suggested it would be hard to achieve timely consensus decisions of the 30 nations in the North Atlantic Council to give the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), always a US four-star general or flag officer, the authority to mobilise forces in a crisis.

In the run-up to the assault on Ukraine, allies differed over the intelligence showing Russia was poised to invade. French and German officials continued to believe Putin was bluffing to extract concessions on Ukrainian neutrality and the abandonment of Kyiv's bid for NATO membership.

However, on the day the invasion began, unity prevailed. "We activated our defence plans and everything was in place [...] and more nations then transferred troops under the command of SACEUR immediately, that was airplanes, ships and a number of ground forces. From about 4,000 troops under the command of SACEUR, we went to 40,000," Bauer said. [2]

Two illusions that were swiftly punctured were that the war would be over within three weeks or that Russia would resort to tactical nuclear weapons if it were frustrated, though the latter concern continues to weigh on allied willingness to supply certain offensive arms to Kyiv.

CASCADE OF DECISIONS

Stoltenberg insisted that the NATO response to a more aggressive Russia did

[2] Interview with the author, March 2023

not start on 24 February 2022. "The war started in 2014 when President Putin annexed Crimea and went into Donbas. Since then, NATO has implemented the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War, with higher readiness, more troops, more prepositioned equipment and increased defence spending," he said. [3]

A cascade of NATO decisions ensued, including a commitment to raise defence spending to the allied guideline of 2% of GDP by 2024, although most European allies were closer to 1% than 2% in 2014; an agreement in 2016 to deploy rotating multinational battalions in a so-called Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland; a reorganisation of NATO commands in 2019; the adoption of two key documents designed to improve Defence and Deterrence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) and to prepare for the next 20 years of military technology through the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NCWC); and a rewrite of the alliance's Strategic Concept in 2022, formally designating Russia as a threat again for the first time since the end of the Cold War.

A July 2022 NATO summit in Madrid

NATO Summit Brussels 2022; Source: NATO

[3] Interview with the author, March 2023

adopted ambitious targets to have 300,000 troops on high readiness capable of reinforcing the eastern flank rapidly, most in less than 30 days. The next step, due to be taken at the Vilnius summit in July 2023, is to approve three regional defence plans for the north-west, from the Baltic to the North Atlantic; the central region, covering central Europe north of the Alps and across to the Black Sea; and the south, covering southern Europe and the Mediterranean.

Yet paradoxically, **despite its role in helping coordinate allied military assistance and providing non-lethal supplies of its own, NATO has not been the main actor in supporting Kyiv** because it has no money or weapons of its own and due to a political desire to avoid lending credence to the Kremlin's narrative that NATO was the aggressor in Ukraine.

NATO leaders resisted fierce pressure from Kyiv and its supporters early in the conflict to impose and enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine, which could have brought the alliance into direct confrontation with Russia and potentially triggered World War Three.

"From the outset, our priorities were to: one, support Ukraine; and two, avoid a war with Russia," a senior NATO official said. [4]

TRIPWIRE OR FORWARD DEFENCE?

As Russian tanks crossed into Ukraine, NATO faced immediate demands from Baltic and Polish leaders for a far more substantial allied military presence on their territory than had been agreed in 2016, more than a decade after they joined the alliance.

The initial EFP battalions, each with about 1,000 soldiers, were designed to respect the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, in which the alliance had pledged not to permanently station substantial armed forces in former Warsaw Pact countries that became NATO members. "Until the invasion, the forward presence was structured to reassure Russia as much as our own allies," said Malcolm Chalmers, Deputy Director-General of the Royal United Services Institute, a UK defence think tank. [5]

The multinational units were a rotating presence intended to serve as a tripwire to deter an invasion by making clear to the Kremlin that Russian troops would have to fight soldiers from the US, the UK, Germany, France and Canada as soon as they set foot on NATO territory, thus immediately internationalising any conflict.

If deterrence failed, NATO's strategy for

[4] Interview with the author, March 2023

[5] Interview with the author, February 2023

defending Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was based on dispatching rapid reinforcements to repel the invaders and using these small frontline battalions at most to slow the advance of Russian forces. But the Baltic states have so little strategic depth that Russian planners might well think they could capture them before NATO reinforcements could arrive, creating a *fait accompli* that would be hard to overturn.

Before the EFP was deployed, a study by the non-profit RAND Corporation, which advises the US government on defence issues, based on a series of war games with military and civilian experts concluded in 2016 that "the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours. Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad." [6]

The study argued that a force of about seven brigades, including three heavy armoured brigades – adequately supported by airpower, land-based fires and other enablers on the ground and ready to fight at the onset of hostilities – could prevent the rapid overrun of the Baltic states. That would require a force of roughly 35,000 troops – eight times the number NATO had in the region before Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The Balts and Poles were never convinced

that the EFP was a sufficient deterrent, but after seeing the horrors of Russia's assault on Kyiv and Kharkiv, they were determined to obtain a far more robust NATO presence. Besides, Russia had torn up the Founding Act with its unprovoked attack on a sovereign state, so past restraints no longer applied.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas led the calls for NATO to put tank divisions on the eastern flank to be ready to defend every inch of allied territory. "Now everyone sees that this tripwire concept doesn't really work," she said, calling the alliance's posture for her country "a plan to lose it and liberate it afterwards". [7] She also said she did not want to see Russian atrocities such as the cold-blooded killing of Ukrainian civilians in Bucha, outside Kyiv, on Estonian soil.

NO MAGINOT LINE

NATO has since thickened its forces across the Baltics and Poland, and deployed new units in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. At their 2022 summit, allies agreed that the battlegroups would be "scaled up [...] to brigade-size units, where and when required". [8]

However, there is daylight between the limited reinforcements that NATO has

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[6] RAND Corporation, 2016

[7] Financial Times, June 2022
[8] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, March 2023

NATO's Eastern Flank:
STRONGER DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE

40,000 TROOPS UNDER DIRECT NATO COMMAND   130 ALLIED AIRCRAFT AT HIGH ALERT

100,000 US TROOPS DEPLOYED TO EUROPE   140 ALLIED SHIPS AT SEA

ESTONIA — ALLIED TROOPS 2,200 / HOST NATION 10,500

LATVIA — ALLIED TROOPS 3,700 / HOST NATION 17,200

LITHUANIA — AIR DEFENCE / ALLIED TROOPS 4,000 / HOST NATION 7,500

POLAND — AIR DEFENCE / ALLIED TROOPS 11,600 / HOST NATION 122,500

SLOVAKIA — AIR DEFENCE / ALLIED TROOPS 1,100 / HOST NATION 13,500

HUNGARY — ALLIED TROOPS 900 / HOST NATION 21,400

ROMANIA — ALLIED TROOPS 1,650 / HOST NATION 27,400

BULGARIA — AIR DEFENCE / ALLIED TROOPS 4,700 / HOST NATION 75,000

24/7 AIR PATROL & SURVEILLANCE

AMPHIBIOUS TASK FORCE

CARRIER STRIKE GROUP

JUNE 2022 — All numbers indicative

Source: NATO

put in place and the Polish and Baltic demands for whole armoured divisions to be permanently stationed on the eastern flank, which allied commanders say makes no military sense.

"Today, Russia could still invade the Baltics right now before NATO could stop them," said Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Member of the European Parliament for Poland's ruling conservative nationalist Law and Justice Party. "We need a much, much bigger forward presence, including permanent bases in frontline states. It should be done by US and European forces under NATO command." He said Poland had decided after Russia's invasion of Ukraine to move more of its own forces closer to its eastern border and had scrapped its previous doctrine that designated the Vistula River, on which Warsaw sits, as its natural defensive line. [9]

This raises the fundamental question of the purpose of NATO's posture on the eastern flank. Is it chiefly to deter Russia by signalling that NATO countries are willing to risk their soldiers' lives from the outset of any attack? Is it mostly to reassure nervous eastern members that NATO has their back? Or is it designed to defend every inch of territory at the border and keep the Russians out?

[9] Interview with the author, March 2023

The answer is a mixture of deterrence and reassurance rather than defence and denial. "There is a very strong deterrence and reassurance value to having visible stuff on the border," one senior NATO political official said.*

But military commanders argue that NATO needs to employ its forces flexibly and not have them strung out in bases along the border like some latter-day Maginot Line, waiting for the Russians. [10]

"The more forces you fix by sending them to a Baltic state or to Poland or to the south-east, the more likely that most of them are in the wrong place when the attack comes. You put brigades in each of seven countries, and six of them will be in the wrong place," Bauer said. Instead, **NATO plans to designate high-readiness forces based in their home countries to reinforce specific regions in a crisis or wartime**. Some of their materiel and advance units will be pre-positioned in the host nation at reception facilities in peacetime, and they would regularly exercise rapid deployment.

For example, Germany, which leads the battlegroup that polices the ultra-sensitive so-called Suwałki Gap or Corridor – a 100km stretch of Lithuanian farmland separating the Russian Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad from Belarus – will put the lead elements of an armoured brigade in Lithuania, with some forces in reserve, according to Lithuania's NATO Ambassador Deividas Matulionis. [11]

"We want to have assigned forces based in their home countries earmarked for the defence of particular regions of the alliance," he said. The two countries are still arguing over how much of the force will be based in Lithuania.

SELF-DEFENCE FIRST

Pressed about the Baltic states' requests for more allied troops, NATO officials point to Article 3 of the founding 1949 Washington treaty, in which the allies commit to self-help and maintaining their own national defences, which they say is as important as the better-known Article 5 mutual defence clause. [12]

"There will be a lot more NATO forces reinforcing the frontline states, but they will have to invest much more in their own defence. We should expect the biggest defence spenders to be the most exposed, not the most distant," said Chalmers.

The perceived threat to their own survival has indeed prompted eastern allies to increase their defence spending to higher levels than west European counterparts. Poland and Lithuania raised

[10] Interview with the author, March 2023

[11] Interview with the author, March 2023

[12] Article 3 of The North Atlantic Treaty (1949): "In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly,

The main Baltic ports in 2019 and their evolution since 1999

Source: Serry, Arnaud. (2021). Port Reorganisation Revealing East-West Differentiation in the Baltic Sea Region. Regional Formation and Development Studies. 35. 101-110. 10.15181/rfds. v35i3.2276.
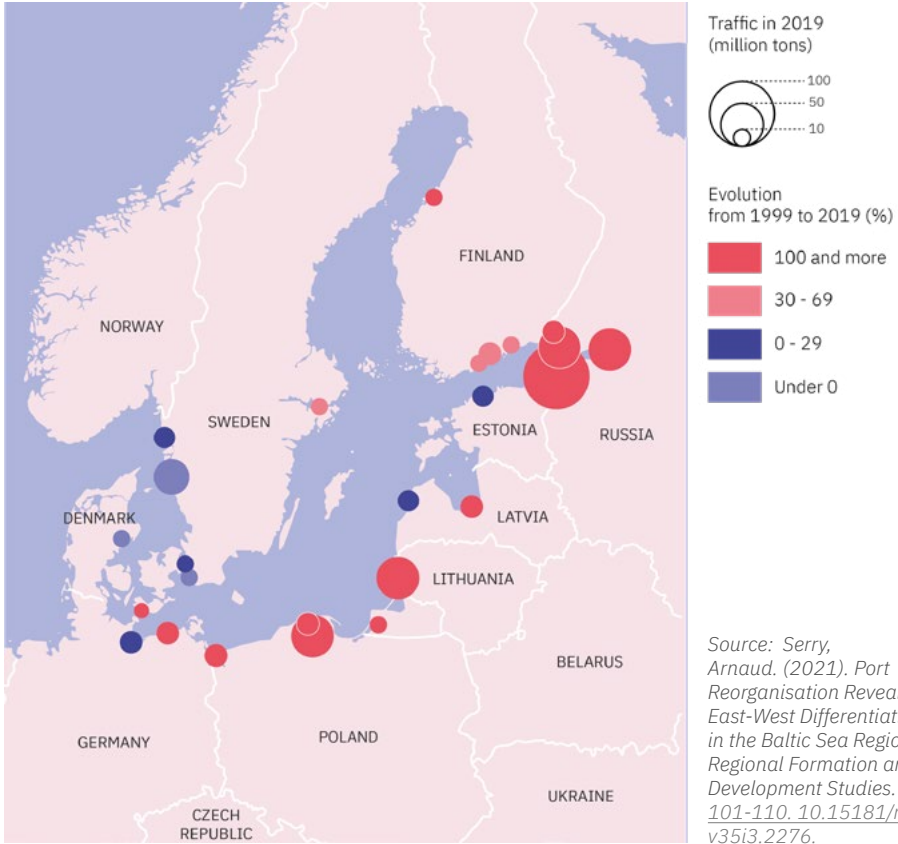
military outlays to nearly 2.5% of GDP in 2022, and Estonia and Latvia to more than 2%; all have announced plans for further major expenditure in the coming years. Poland has said it will spend 4% on defence in 2023 and has placed orders for tanks, howitzers and combat aircraft from South Korea and for F35 fighters, HIMARS missiles and Abrams tanks from the US. [13]

Once it receives the equipment, Poland will have more tanks than Germany, France, the UK and Italy combined. **This is already shifting the balance of influence within**

by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."

[13] Deutsche Welle, January 2023

*Extinguishing a simulated fire during international exercise
Sea Breeze in 2019 in the Black Sea; Source: NATO*

NATO, with the eastern allies exerting vocal pressure to boost weapons supplies to Ukraine, push for an all-out Ukrainian victory and to give Kyiv a clear path to joining the alliance, while France and Germany have been more cautious and the US is reticent about another divisive membership discussion.

GAME CHANGER

The accession of Finland and Sweden will give NATO a significant edge over Russia in the Baltic region and the High North – two geopolitically vital zones – and make the defence of the Baltic states much more robust.

Both new members will be net exporters of security and are expected to provide reserves and bases to rapidly reinforce their Baltic neighbours in a crisis. Having Sweden's central Baltic island of Gotland as NATO territory gives the alliance firmer control of the Baltic Sea, which will become a de facto NATO lake. Russia has a 512km shoreline on the Baltic around Saint Petersburg and the port of Vyborg, plus 145km of coast in Kaliningrad. Finland and Estonia would be able to close the Gulf of Finland to Russian shipping in wartime, while Poland and Sweden could interdict naval traffic in and out of Kaliningrad.

"Finland and Sweden in NATO is a game changer. It means their territory is available for planning and manoeuvre," said Ryan, the former Pentagon official. "It increases the strategic depth of NATO in the Baltic region – checkmate!"

Finland's large army and powerful artillery could help to thwart any Russian attempt to seize Norway's thinly defended Arctic coastline or the Svalbard archipelago. It will also hold Moscow's Kola Peninsula nuclear submarine bases at risk. The accession of the two Nordic nations will also facilitate the rapid deployment in a crisis of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, which brings together ten northern European countries for defence of the Baltic region. [14]

Pekka Toveri, a former head of Finnish military intelligence who is now a member of the national parliament, said his country's geography, ability to mobilise hundreds of thousands of reservists at short notice and whole-of-society defence culture would help secure NATO's north-eastern flank.

"After Finland and Sweden are in, NATO will pacify the situation in the Baltic region. Russia understands it has lost all possibility to go on the offensive in the region. Therefore, they'll look for some other area to attack," he said. [15]

[14] Center for Strategic & International Studies, March 2022
[15] Interview with the author, February 2023

During the war in Ukraine, Russia redeployed many of its forward units along its 1,300km border with Finland to bolster its invasion forces, leaving only one base manned. Finland is also expected to offer some troops to join the NATO EFP in Estonia.

HOLLOW CORE

If the situation in the north is improving, NATO's biggest problem lies in the heart of Europe in the hollow state of Germany's armed forces. **Despite increases in European defence spending in the eight years since Crimea, the invasion laid bare the dilapidated condition of most European allies' armies, none more so than Berlin's**.

The parliamentary commissioner for the armed forces regularly pinpointed the shortcomings in detailed annual reports. It was thus public knowledge that well over half of the Bundeswehr's (German Federal Armed Forces) helicopters are out of action, only nine of the navy's 15 major surface combatants can put to sea and barely half of the air force's Eurofighter combat aircraft can take off. [16] The hollowness of its land forces became fully apparent on day one of the war, when the commanding officer of the German army, General Alfons Mais, admitted in a social

media post that his forces were "more or less bare" and offered political leaders hardly any options to support NATO. [17]

The shortage of functioning tanks, armoured vehicles, missiles and ammunition was exposed as a wider European problem as Kyiv pleaded for weapons to resist the Russian onslaught.

"We have been shocked to find in what condition European equipment is, like Spain's Leopard tanks. Countries can't get their tanks moving," the senior Finnish official said. "We have more in our stocks than most other European nations do. The operational availability of our equipment is much higher."

Germany is so important because it would be the backbone of land defence in any continental war, with a key role in NATO's New Force Model. "NATO's force planning rests on the assumption that Germany will contribute three fully equipped armoured divisions to the land defence of the eastern flank," a German defence official said. "That is a very tall order." [18]

In a leaked memo to the armed forces chief of staff in March 2023, Mais said the Bundeswehr would likely miss those targets. The first division due to be operational in 2025 would not be fully equipped, even by taking assets from other

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[16] Friends of Europe, October 2017

[17] Politico, February 2022; original post in German: Alfons Mais, LinkedIn, 2022
[18] Interview with the author, April 2023

units. The second division due in 2027 was "unrealistic" and would not have sufficient large-scale equipment.

"The army will not be able to hold its own in high-intensity combat and will also only be able to fulfil its obligations to NATO to a limited extent," the memo quoted by *Bild* newspaper said. [19]

Past and present defence officials in several NATO countries interviewed for this report cast doubt on Germany's political willingness to sustain the necessary multi-year increases in spending required to meet the commitments, especially given the damage to its economic model caused by the cut-off of cheap Russian gas and pressure on its export markets.

"Whatever the chancellor says about reaching the NATO 2% target, and despite public support for a stronger military, he has to juggle all sorts of different imperatives in his fractious coalition and in his own Social Democratic Party (SPD)," the German official said.

Germany faces a general election in 2025, with key regional elections in 2024. Scholz's coalition parties are already fighting each other over public spending. The liberal Free Democratic Party, which holds the Finance Ministry, is insisting on a balanced budget and spending cuts. The ecologist Greens are seeking more money to fund the energy transition and make Germany carbon neutral, and the SPD wants more social spending. That does not augur well for defence. **If Berlin does not deliver on its commitments, that calls into question the NATO framework for reinforcing the eastern flank**, putting more of the burden on Poland.

HEAVY OR SMART?

Given the likely budget constraints, NATO will face tough choices on how much of Europe's extra defence spending should be ploughed into heavy weapons and platforms, such as tanks, artillery, fighter aircraft, aircraft carriers and submarines, and how much to invest in new and disruptive technologies, such as space systems, cyber-warfare, artificial intelligence, drones and missile defence. Inevitably, military commanders want it all.

Asked if NATO should focus more on heavy or smart weaponry in the light of lessons learned from Ukraine, Stoltenberg said: "We need both [...] because we cannot choose between either drones and cyber-defence or heavy armour and ammunition. If the war in Ukraine has taught us anything, it's that we need many different capabilities at the same time, and they support each other."

[19] Politico, April 2023

Bauer stressed that the alliance would continue to need armour and massed land forces to deter Russia and defend in case of an attack.

"For many years we thought the new wars would be about technology, cyber, AI, and that tanks and infantry were things of the past," he said. "The interesting thing about Ukraine is that we see wars of the past – trench warfare, artillery barrages, static warfare with a lot of killing and destruction. But we also see elements of modern warfare – drones, cyber, AI. **What makes the present wars very challenging is that it is the wars of the past and of the future today – all at the same time**.

"So this idea that you have to do away with tanks and you defend with cyber is actually not true. What we have seen is that cyber is problematic, sometimes damaging, but cyber has not been decisive in the sense that it changes the war in a way that is favourable for the Russians."

NATO defence planners say that among key shortfalls that must be remedied are air and missile defence, ammunition stocks, as well as a need for more precision-guided munitions.

While Ukraine has shown great inventiveness in networking civilian satellite terminals with drones and artillery fire to hit Russian targets, the war has illustrated that a force defending against Russian armour needs its own heavy metal capabilities, especially to counter-attack.

The SACEUR, US General Christopher Cavoli, dismissed the idea that NATO could leapfrog completely from 20th-century warfare to an electronic and digital future.

"Kinetic effects are what produce results on the battlefield. Cyber, information operations and so on, very important, but if the other guy shows up with a tank [...] you better have a tank," he told a conference in Sweden in January 2023. While precision could beat mass, the scale of forces involved in Ukraine went beyond anything that NATO had contemplated since the end of the Cold War. Today, Germany has just 300 tanks. Russia had lost some 2,000 tanks so far and fired on average 20,000 rounds of ammunition a day – as many as all European factories produce in a month.

"The scale of this war is out of proportion with all of our recent thinking, but it is real and we must contend with it," Cavoli said. [20]

Heinrich Brauss, a former army general and NATO defence planning chief now at the German Council on Foreign Relations, said NATO's advantage over Russia lay in combined arms warfare – the ability to integrate different branches of the military to achieve complementary effects

[20] Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, January 2023

in battle. For that, Germany needed to reinvigorate its conventional forces with a strong, credible forward presence linked to the US nuclear deterrent. "Right now, it's not enough," he said. [21]

The United Kingdom too has run down its army to such an extent that its NATO commitment to deliver an armoured division is no longer seen as credible. "We do not have any equipment for intense warfare on the European continent," said Lord Peter Ricketts, a former UK national security advisor and ambassador to NATO. "We have hollowed out the armed forces by doing expeditionary warfare." [22]

France too has focused largely on light, long-distance counter-insurgency operations in the last two decades at the expense of its heavy armour and artillery. Moreover, the five-year Military Programming Law, presented to parliament in May 2023, puts the emphasis on high-tech capabilities such as drones, cyber-warfare and space capabilities, as well as long-range naval forces to protect France's far-flung overseas territories and their sprawling exclusive economic zones rather than equipment for high-intensity warfare in Europe.

While NATO's focus is mostly on traditional weapons systems, it has just launched an effort to capture emerging disruptive technologies for military uses. The Defence Innovation Accelerator for the

North Atlantic (DIANA) offers deep tech test centres and access to venture capital anchored by a €1bn NATO Innovation Fund for scientists and startups in the fields of big data, AI, autonomy, quantum, biotechnologies and human enhancement, energy and propulsion, novel materials and advanced manufacturing, hypersonics and space.

A NUCLEAR ALLIANCE

NATO always stresses that it is a nuclear alliance, with three nuclear powers among its members – the United States, France and the UK. Five additional European allies – Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Türkiye – participate in a so-called nuclear sharing arrangement. They have US nuclear bombs stored on their territory and possess aircraft capable of delivering the weapons, over which the US retains sole control.

All allies except France participate in the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, which discusses a range of nuclear policy issues, including the overall effectiveness of NATO's nuclear deterrent; the safety, security and survivability of nuclear weapons; and communications and information systems. It provides a forum in which member countries can participate in the development of policy and in decisions

[21] Interview with the author, March 2023
[22] Interview with the author, March 2023

on NATO's nuclear posture, irrespective of whether or not they possess nuclear arms.

The French and British atomic forces are relatively small national deterrents of last resort with fewer than 300 warheads each compared to the more than 5,000 each of the US and Russia. They have neither the numbers nor the variety of ranges and capabilities to substitute for the US nuclear umbrella over Europe, and neither country formally offers nuclear protection to its neighbours. French leaders have made clear that their vital interests extend beyond their borders and that they might not wait for an aggressor to reach the Rhine River before resorting to nuclear weapons. But Paris has never extended its umbrella to Germany, its closest partner, and Berlin has not requested it.

Without more capable conventional forces in case of a Russian attack, NATO might face the choice of whether to resort to nuclear weapons too early in any conflict for them to be a credible weapon of last resort. Since the US withdrew from the treaty banning land-based intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in 2019, accusing Russia of multiple breaches of the accord, Moscow has had a free hand to field new short and medium-range nuclear-capable rockets that can reach all of Europe but not US territory.

Putin sought to play on those fears by announcing in March 2023 that Russia planned to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in neighbouring Belarus, adjoining NATO territory, as well as Ukraine.

This could recreate the perceived transatlantic decoupling risk that prompted Germany in the 1970s to request the deployment of US medium-range nuclear missiles on its soil, triggering massive protests by German and other European anti-nuclear movements. The battle over the cruise and Pershing missiles was so traumatic that no European government would wish to relive it. But NATO planners have discreetly discussed other steps to counter a new Russian INF threat, including high-precision conventional missiles and advanced missile-defence systems.

DETERRENCE AT WORK

Both Russia and the West have sought to use nuclear deterrence to secure their objectives in the war in Ukraine without actually unsheathing the doomsday weapons.

Putin tried to intimidate Western countries from the outset of the invasion from taking any action to help Ukraine. In his first broadcast announcing the so-called 'special military operation', he warned: "Anyone who tries to interfere

with us, or even more so, to create threats for our country and our people, must know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences as you have never before experienced in your history." [23]

He subsequently announced that Russia's nuclear forces had been put on a higher level of alert, although Western intelligence detected no sign of any change in their posture.

Russian leaders' references to their nuclear arsenal became more frequent and explicit as Russia began to lose ground in Ukraine and the West stepped up arms supplies to Kyiv. In early 2023, Deputy Head of the Russian Security Council and ex-president Dmitry Medvedev said, "nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends." [24]

Russia's nuclear rhetoric did not deter Western countries from supplying weapons to Ukraine, but it did limit both the pace and scope of those deliveries. German Chancellor Scholz spoke of his concern to avoid escalation as a factor in decisions on sending Leopard 2 tanks to Kyiv, insisting that the US should commit to supply its own Abrams tanks the same time to avoid Berlin being singled out for retribution. US officials said Biden also took into account the risk of nuclear escalation in calibrating his own decisions on arming

Ukraine. Weapons that could reach deep into Russian territory were out of bounds. There was also very strong guidance not to use Western-supplied weapons for an assault on the Crimean Peninsula, even though the West does not recognise Russia's claim to the region.

Western nuclear deterrence was successful in ensuring that Russia did not touch NATO territory and may also have been one reason why Moscow did not seriously attempt to interdict the flow of weapons transiting from Poland into Ukraine.

While Putin has not crossed the nuclear threshold so far, some senior Western officials warn that he might yet detonate a tactical nuclear bomb if Russian forces were in trouble in a Ukrainian counter-offensive. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told a NATO conference in April 2023: "We have all watched and worried that Vladimir Putin would use what he considers a non-strategic tactical nuclear weapon or use some demonstration effect to escalate, but in a managed risk escalation," Sherman said. "It is very critical to remain watchful of this." [25]

[23] Presidential Executive Office, February 2022

[24] TASS, January 2023(

[25] Reuters, April 2023

WHAT IF?

Poland has been pressing to join NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement and join the group of European nations equipped to deliver US nuclear bombs in wartime. However, neither the US nor other NATO allies are keen to store nuclear weapons so close to Russia for reasons of strategic stability and because they could be vulnerable to attack.

"We should maybe review NATO's nuclear sharing policy. Poland would be ready to enter nuclear sharing. This would bring the deterrent closer to Russia," Saryusz-Wolski said. But NATO officials said there was no military rationale for changing the existing arrangements and discussing it would awaken dormant public nuclear fears. There were other nuclear-related roles that Poland and new allies, such as Finland, could play, including training and exercising to accompany other nations' dual-capable aircraft in so-called SNOWCAT (Support of Nuclear Operations with Conventional Air Tactics) roles, said Leo Michel, a veteran former US Defense Department official. [26]

For European governments, the nightmare scenario would be if a future US president went further than Trump in casting doubt on Washington's commitment to defend European allies under Article 5, which the Republican president refused to reaffirm on his first visit to NATO in 2017 and only belatedly and reluctantly endorsed. Trump privately asked aides why he should promise to protect countries that were not paying their own share on defence.

There has long been debate about whether a US president would risk the destruction of Chicago by extending nuclear protection to Berlin or Vilnius. **Past presidents until Trump had always reassured the allies early in their terms of their commitment to Article 5**, as Biden did in an attempt to consign the Trump chapter to the past. Some European allies, notably but not only France, worry that a future US president could withdraw the nuclear umbrella, either explicitly or through political signalling. Others prefer not to think the unthinkable or try to buy a form of bilateral US insurance through arms purchases, troop-basing agreements or bilateral or trilateral security arrangements with Washington.

Any significant reduction of the US security commitment to NATO would unleash acute tension among Europeans. "The Europeans simply have no good answer to a Europe without America. That's a huge uncertainty. Ukraine would be the first victim," the German official said. "Those proclaiming strategic autonomy the loudest have no answer either. There is no unity of purpose, no unity of force and

not the numbers of capabilities."

"Behind this looms the power balance among Europeans," the official said. France and the UK have their own nuclear deterrents; Germany and Poland do not. Berlin is meant to be "the big land defender", which could make smaller European states uncomfortable. "The Europeans don't really trust each other very much. The great secret was that having the US as the dominant power removed European rivalries. That's why the Poles want American boots on the ground. The more you remove the Americans, the more intra-European rivalries come to the fore."

SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR UKRAINE

Ukraine would be unlikely to gain early entry to NATO even if it were able to drive Russian forces off its soil. Accession looks even less plausible if fighting ceases with Russian troops still occupying part of its territory. The divisions among allies that led to the flawed 2008 NATO summit decision to declare that Ukraine and Georgia would become members without saying either when or how are still present. France and Germany have not dropped their reluctance to admit Kyiv, diplomats say. The US does not want to broach the question now. And other splits have emerged more recently,

notably with Türkiye and Hungary, over the future shape of the alliance.

"It would be far worse to have another debate about letting in Ukraine and end up with deadlock than not to have the debate at all," said a NATO diplomat, explaining why the alliance had not responded to pressing requests from Zelensky and his foreign minister to speed up the accession process. [27]

As a result, Western governments and elder statesmen have begun intensive thinking about what alternative security arrangements – often misleadingly branded 'security guarantees' although they fall short of a mutual defence commitment – can be offered to Kyiv. It is unlikely that the US, which was unwilling to risk a direct conflict with Russia by putting boots on the ground to protect Ukraine before the invasion in 2022, would be more willing to do so once the war stops, given the likelihood of a further round of fighting at some stage. Without such a US commitment, individual European allies might also be reluctant to commit and pledges from Kyiv's firmest supporters, such as the UK and Poland, would carry less weight.

Instead, **the broad consensus is in favour of 'help to self-help'**, with intelligence sharing, capability-building, training and exercising, inter-operability with NATO

[27] Interview with the author, March 2023

forces, continued weapons supplies and support for Ukraine's own defence industry.

"That discussion is already going on and we all are looking at how we can have some sort of long-term partnership with Ukraine so that they can defend themselves and to ensure that Russia doesn't continue to chip away at European security," Stoltenberg said. "Then, of course, **NATO membership is a longer-term perspective**."

When the NATO chief visited Kyiv for the first time during the war in April 2023, Zelensky said: "We need something more than the current format of relations. We want to understand when Ukraine will be in NATO. We want security guarantees along the way. At the same time, we are not preparing an alternative to membership and do not consider it as a compromise." [28]

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has suggested that a security pact should be finalised at NATO's July 2023 Vilnius summit. But it may fall short of the

binding bilateral agreements between Kyiv and a group of major Western allies recommended by Rasmussen and Yermak.

Whatever arrangements NATO allies conclude, **without membership and the Article 5 mutual defence commitment, Ukraine will remain less secure than other European states**. In the words of Kyllike Sillaste-Elling, Under-Secretary for Political Affairs in the Estonian Foreign Ministry: "There's only one real security guarantee and that's NATO." [29]

* The Maginot Line, named after French Defence Minister André Maginot, was a chain of anti-tank fortifications that France built along its borders with Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland and Italy between 1928 and 1938, designed to stop a German invasion. The German army easily outflanked the French defences in May 1940 by launching its main offensive through western Belgium, where the fortifications were lightest. The term became a byword for static defence installations that create a false sense of security.

[28] Interfax, April 2023   [29] Interview with the author, April 2023

Aerial view of devastated residential neighbourhood in Bucha, outside Kyiv, in March 2022;
Source: Tykhanskyi Viacheslav/Shutterstock

Chapter 3:
A more geopolitical EU

EUROPE TRANSFORMED

When von der Leyen took office as the President of the European Commission in 2019, she declared that hers would be a "geopolitical Commission". [1] Yet until Russia launched its all-out invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, her chief priorities had been enacting the Green Deal programme to make Europe carbon neutral by 2050, digitalising Europe and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Russia's act of aggression against a neighbour jolted the EU into becoming more of a geopolitical actor, forcing it to demonstrate a degree of unity and purpose, which the fractious 27-nation bloc rarely achieves in quieter times. The EU and member states deployed a broad toolbox of measures to support Kyiv, assist Ukrainians, sanction Russia and reduce supply chain dependencies for food, energy, minerals and microchips. They also, for the first time, used collective funds to supply lethal weapons to a partner country under attack.

However, it cannot be assumed that the EU will remain so united on the reconstruction of Ukraine, its future relationship with the EU or the post-war sanctions regime against Russia. Big challenges lie ahead as the Union seeks to adapt its open market economy to a new era of great power rivalry with a far higher priority on defence, security and reducing external dependencies.

SANCTIONS, ARMS, TRAINING

Until the eve of the invasion, many west European leaders believed that Putin was bluffing – despite US intelligence briefings to the contrary – and that the Russian military build-up around Ukraine was intended to intimidate Zelensky into making concessions.

Instead of preparing for war on its doorstep, Brussels officials and diplomats were fretting about how the EU was sidelined from negotiations about European security arrangements by Putin's preference for

[1] European Commission, November 2019

talking directly to Biden, Macron and Scholz. The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, had been publicly humiliated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov during a visit to Moscow a year earlier, prompting recrimination in Brussels about his performance. Borrell did not respond as Lavrov branded the EU an "unreliable partner" and Russia expelled three European diplomats during his visit. [2]

While many EU capitals were still in denial, von der Leyen and her closest advisors were working quietly with the Biden administration on a package of sanctions to be implemented immediately if Russia attacked Ukraine. Scholz had indicated privately that in case of military action, Berlin would suspend the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline with Russia, which was awaiting final German regulatory clearance to begin operation. [3]

As a result, **the EU was able to announce within three days of the full-scale invasion a substantial package of economic and financial sanctions**,

including the freezing of Russian state reserves held in European banks, as well as proposals to release the first €500mn in military assistance for Ukraine from the European Peace Facility (EPF), an off-budget intergovernmental fund originally designed to provide security assistance to African partners. The sanctions were coordinated with the UK in the first practical diplomatic cooperation since the country's acrimonious withdrawal from the EU in 2020.

On the day of the invasion, the EU and NATO demonstrated political unity with von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel making a joint appearance with Stoltenberg at NATO headquarters to denounce the Russian aggression and declare support for Ukraine. [4] A few weeks earlier, the two Brussels-based organisations had issued a declaration expanding their cooperation into new fields to include "growing geostrategic competition, resilience issues, protection of critical infrastructures, emerging and disruptive technologies, space, the security implications of climate change, as well

[2] Politico, Febrary 2021
[3] According to EU officials and diplomats interviewed by the author, March 2023

[4] Reuters, YouTube, January 2023

as foreign information manipulation and interference." The EU and NATO negotiated the so-called Berlin Plus arrangements in 2003 for the EU to use NATO planning and assets for its own operations where needed. But the two bodies had no official relationship until an ice-breaking 2016 Warsaw joint declaration on cooperation. [5]

During the first year of the war, EU leaders allocated €3.5bn from the EPF to partially reimburse member states for arms and ammunition delivered to Ukraine. In March 2023, they approved a plan to jointly procure ammunition for Kyiv through the European Defence Agency (EDA) – a body created two decades earlier to promote armaments cooperation – and to ramp up the production capacity of the European defence industry. European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton toured armaments manufacturers across the EU to urge them to boost output immediately and expand capacity over time.

Estonian Prime Minister Kallas first proposed the ammunition initiative, modelling it on the Commission's collective purchase of COVID-19 vaccines. It has become a test case for whether the Union can successfully run a complex arms procurement programme at speed. "I wouldn't say this is make-or-break, but it's certainly a test of our credibility as a serious partner in defence," a senior EU official involved in the drive said. [6]

The EU also set up a Military Assistance Mission in November 2022, based in Poland, to train Ukrainian troops in multiple European countries, including Germany, Slovakia and France. The EPF-funded programme, which came on top of existing national military training schemes by NATO members for Ukraine, initially aimed to train 15,000 soldiers by mid-2023. That target was raised in February 2023 to 30,000 by the end of 2023. [7]

SHELTER, GAS, GRAIN, CASH

The EU and its member states deployed a range of other policies to support Ukraine, impose costs on Russia and shield the European economy from some of the war's effects.

They activated for the first time a 2001 law – the Temporary Protection Directive – requiring all member states to provide immediate shelter for Ukrainians fleeing the conflict, including the right to reside and work in the EU for up to three years initially. That facilitated the passage of some ten million Ukrainian refugees – mostly women and children – who fled to EU countries in 2022. Member states had not agreed to invoke the temporary protection provisions for the million mostly

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[5] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, January 2023

[6] Interview with the author, April 2023
[7] EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine, March 2023

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas; Source: Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock

Syrian refugees who entered Europe in 2015.

The Commission urged governments to diversify energy supplies as their countries reduced purchases of Russian oil and gas. Moscow gradually cut them off, ostensibly for refusing to pay in roubles. The EU executive proposed a voluntary 15% reduction in gas consumption, which led to a 19% reduction in consumption between August 2022 and January 2023. The cut was achieved through energy efficiency savings by industry and households,

and price pressure from soaring gas and electricity bills.

REPowerEU bundled together measures to boost gas storage, accelerate the construction of energy interconnectors to reduce vulnerabilities in the Baltic region and south-eastern Europe, as well as set targets and provide incentives to speed up the transition to renewable energy sources. [8]

Germany and Italy negotiated with alternative suppliers, notably the United

[8] European Commission, December 2022

States and Qatar for LNG, and Norway and Algeria for piped gas. A new scheme, AggregateEU, was approved to jointly purchase gas, notably for smaller EU countries. More than 50 companies signed up to use the scheme when it opened in April 2023, but Europe's energy majors hesitated, given their own long-term relationships with suppliers.

The principle of using the EU's collective leverage as a major customer for gas was inspired by the procurement of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic and the joint buying of ammunition.

After Russia blockaded Ukraine's coastline on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, **the EU put in place 'Green Lanes' to enable the export of about 20% of Ukrainian grain** by road and rail via the EU to world markets. Farmers in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania later complained that their home markets were being flooded and their prices undercut, prompting their governments to take unilateral measures to stop the flow in April 2023. The EU eventually renewed the tariff-free import with some limitations, but the incident foreshadowed future problems if Ukraine, a large and efficient agricultural producer, were to join the Union.

The EU also provided substantial macro-financial assistance to Kyiv to help the government to keep functioning and paying wages despite a 40% collapse in Ukrainian GDP due to the war. The Commission said in April 2023 that overall EU financial assistance to Ukraine since the start of the war amounted to €68bn. [9]

The Commission has also accelerated work in progress since the pandemic to reduce critical supply chain dependencies and adopt a more vigilant approach to Chinese investment in European technology and infrastructure. The EU adopted legislation to screen inward investment, notably by state-owned entities, and planned further moves to promote domestic production and diversify supply chains for critical minerals and key strategic components, such as microchips and batteries, while incentivising domestic production.

ENLARGEMENT REVIVAL?

Russia's war in Ukraine spurred an unexpected, if hesitant revival of the EU's enlargement process, which had long been stalled due to enlargement fatigue and persistent problems of state capture, corruption and the rule of law in candidate countries. The last country to join the EU was Croatia in 2013, and no other candidate is even close to completing accession negotiations.

Despite misgivings in many west European

[9] European Commission, April 2023

capitals, the EU acceded to Zelensky's pressing request and granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova in June 2022 and set conditions for Georgia to become a candidate. This decision was a triumph of geopolitics over the EU's strict rules and procedures for enlargement.

It may have been more symbolic than real as it is likely to take decades before Ukraine becomes a member of the Union. **Ukraine is far from meeting EU norms and standards**, and the EU is far from ready to absorb such a large and poor country, which in 2021 just before the invasion had a population of 41mn – larger than Poland's – and a GDP per capita of about €4,500 compared to the EU average of €32,500.

The EU's Copenhagen criteria state: "Membership requires that candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union." [10]

Some EU officials believe Ukraine's

administration and rule of law are too weak, with too much state capture by oligarchs and organised crime, to become a member on merit in the foreseeable future. Moreover, Kyiv does not currently control some 20% of its territory. Between the lines, the Commission's 2022 opinion makes clear that Ukraine is too big, poor and agrarian to be absorbed under current EU policies without busting the agricultural and regional subsidy systems and turning some of its most fervent central European supporters from the main beneficiaries of the EU budget into net contributors. Those countries had to wait ten years after accession before receiving their full share of farm payments. For Ukraine, the phasing-in could be even longer. [11]

Ukrainian membership would alter the political balance in the EU, tilting it further towards a hard line towards Russia. As the fourth-largest member state, Ukraine would receive roughly the same voting weight and the same number of European Parliament members as Poland, which would likely remain its closest ally. Kyiv and Warsaw together would have the same voting power as Germany in EU decision-making and more than France. [12]

"It's a pretty dizzying commitment we are making," said Celine Bayou, a lecturer in geopolitics and Editor-in-Chief of *Regards sur l'Est*, a French periodical specialised in eastern Europe. "When we come down to

[10] Interview with the author, March 2023

[11] European Commission, June 2022
[12] See also: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July 2022

Buildings in the city of Bakhmut in October 2022 following Russian bombardment;
Source: Jose HERNANDEZ Camera 51 / Shutterstock

earth, it would completely change the EU. Yet there's a moral commitment." [13]

The political imperative to support and reward Ukraine will remain strong, and the EU is likely to accede to Zelensky's request to start accession negotiations at the end of 2023. "The machine will say that there's only one accession process, and that speed is determined by progress in meeting the benchmarks. But like everything else, there is a political component," another senior EU official said. "Von der Leyen saw the geopolitical imperative and backed Ukraine to the hilt. That will translate into a faster process than would happen purely on merit, until the moment when we have to really take a decision on whether we take them in." [14]

Largely due to perceived geopolitical necessity, the EU also moved forward the long-stalled enlargement process for existing candidate countries and aspirants in the Western Balkans, who were first given a 'European perspective' at a 2003 EU summit in Thessaloniki, Greece. Their progress had been held up by conflicts over minorities and borders, state capture and corruption, as well as scepticism, about further enlargement in some western member states.

Since the Russian invasion, the EU has opened long-blocked accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia; granted candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina; agreed to extend visa-free travel rights to Kosovo and received a membership application from Kosovo, whose independence is still not recognised by five EU states; and brokered an agreement on normalising relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which remains to be implemented amid persistent tensions. Progress with Serbia has been obstructed by its refusal to join EU sanctions against Russia and its open door for Russian citizens and money.

WIDER POLITICAL COMMUNITY

The enlargement process remains a slow-moving exercise whatever political momentum may have been injected by the realisation that Europe's magnetic pull in the region is contested by Russia and in different ways by China, Türkiye and Gulf Arab states. The EU will have to maintain the political momentum to sustain hope in the Western Balkans and counter cynicism and malign influences in the region, and those countries need to seize this second chance by finally making progress with EU-mandated reforms. [15]

The revival of the enlargement process does not stretch as far as NATO member Türkiye, a longstanding candidate for

[13] Interview with the author, April 2023
[14] Interview with the author, March 2023

[15] See also: Friends of Europe, December 2022

EU membership, which opened entry negotiations in 2005. Ankara's backsliding on human rights, the rule of law and freedom of expression, alongside the EU's cold feet about further expansion and fears of mass migration, have led to the suspension of its accession talks. Yet neither side is willing to risk a complete rupture by ending the process. The EU still needs Türkiye as its gatekeeper, preventing – in return for payments from Brussels – a flood of asylum seekers from crossing into Europe, as they did in 2015.

Türkiye's balancing act over the war in Ukraine has further strained relations with the EU, as have President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's assertive challenges with offshore gas drilling protected by gunboats in the internationally recognised exclusive economic zones of Greece and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Ankara is providing arms to Kyiv and acting as a conduit for some Russian imports embargoed by the West. Like Serbia, it has not sanctioned Moscow or closed its door to Russians. Highly dependent on Russian gas and financial support for its balance of payments, Türkiye has sought to position itself as a neutral mediator, notably brokering a deal to allow Ukraine to export some grain through the Black Sea, despite Russia's naval blockade of its coastline.

Hungary's obstruction of some EU decision-making on sanctions and the renewed debate about enlargement have prompted calls, notably from Germany and France, for an end to the EU's unanimity rule on foreign policy and taxation decisions, as well as a shift to majority voting. Berlin and Paris have suggested that such a switch – opposed by many small and medium-sized countries – is a condition before the bloc can admit new members. While this reform is necessary in the long term to make an EU of potentially 36 members able to take decisions, it would be wrong to hold the fate of candidate countries hostage.

With the long-term enlargement horizon still clouded by uncertainty and the OSCE paralysed by Russia's veto, **the EU created a new informal pan-European forum at Macron's initiative to bring together the wider European family without Russia and its vassal Belarus**. Held in Prague in October 2022, the European Political Community's (EPC) first meeting of 47 countries was intended to demonstrate unity in opposition to Moscow's aggression against Ukraine and to create a venue for cooperation on issues such as peace and security, energy, climate and migration.

The leaders of the 27 EU members plus the six Western Balkans countries, Ukraine, Moldova, the UK, Norway, Switzerland, Türkiye, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and three micro-states – Andorra, Monaco and San Marino – came together for what was

more than a photo opportunity but less than a new institution. There was no joint declaration and the EPC has no secretariat, budget or staff so far.

The Prague meeting provided an opportunity for separate EU-brokered meetings on the sidelines between the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo, and of Armenia and Azerbaijan to try to resolve long-running conflicts that endanger stability in the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus. A second meeting was held in Moldova in June 2023.

Macron sought to allay widespread suspicions by declaring that the EPC was not intended as a substitute for EU enlargement, which France and the Netherlands have long sought to brake, but rather as a chance to meet at the highest level with leaders of all European nations that shared the same 'European values'. How far that definition applies to authoritarian Azerbaijan or to Türkiye under Erdoğan was open to dispute.

Whether the EPC turns into something more substantial and durable will largely depend on whether it fosters real political and economic cooperation that non-EU members find useful.

STRATEGIC COMPASS

One month into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, EU leaders adopted their first Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. The long-term policy framework was a counterpart to NATO's Strategic Concept, which was updated in July 2022. Designed to make the Global Strategy approved in 2016 operational in security and defence, the EU document incorporated a first common threat assessment; an action plan to develop a rapid reaction capability, including a 5,000-strong force; a strategy for combating hybrid threats, disinformation and cyber-attacks; and an investment plan to develop strategic enablers and next-generation defence capabilities.

For the first time, the EU designated Russia as a threat and an aggressor, departing from previous diplomatic formulas that avoided naming any country. The Compass highlighted the importance of working in partnerships with NATO, the UN and the African Union but barely mentions the UK, Europe's other major military power alongside France. It has since been flanked by an updated EU maritime strategy and a proposed space defence strategy. [16]

The maritime strategy spells out a new level of ambition on naval capabilities, emphasising strengthening abilities to

[16] European Union
[17] Friends of Europe, March 2023

achieve EU "surface dominance, power projection at sea, underwater control, and contributions to air defence." Chris Kremidas-Courtney, Senior Fellow at Friends of Europe, said that while "the headlines on European defence always speak of an EU army, it's an EU navy that has quietly been emerging." [17]

Borrell acknowledged in a foreword to the Strategic Compass that "the history of European integration is full of plans and initiatives to strengthen the EU's security and defence policy. Most have come and gone." As far back as 1999, in the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars, the then 15-nation bloc agreed to create a Rapid Reaction Force of 60,000 soldiers capable of deployment within 60 days. It never materialised. But the war in Ukraine and fast-rising global geopolitical tensions have created a new sense of urgency.

The immediate response to the Russian invasion among many European countries, scrambling for protection from the United States and NATO, suggested the EU goal of achieving "a sufficient degree of strategic autonomy" inscribed in the Global Strategy had been sidelined by reality. Poland, which with its eastern allies has long rejected the French-led drive as undermining the transatlantic security link, was quick to declare that NATO was now the only game in town.

France's critics turned Macron's jibe about NATO on its head. "This shows that it is strategic autonomy that is 'brain dead'," said Saryusz-Wolski. "Hard defence is irreplaceably the job of NATO. No reasonable person could think otherwise."

Even French strategic thinkers acknowledge that the term itself has become so divisive as to be counterproductive, although they stand by the objective. "It has become a rather toxic expression," said Grand. "Ten Europeans have ten different definitions of strategic autonomy, ranging from a French conspiracy to destroy NATO, to making Europeans more capable and able to act. President Macron has now shifted to talking of reinforcing the European pillar of NATO, which is a long way from saying NATO is 'brain dead'."

Borrell and French leaders are not alone in arguing that the EU needs to develop its own military capabilities both to contribute more to NATO's collective defence and to be able to act in situations where the US and NATO choose not to get involved. This might involve responding to security contingencies in Africa, peacekeeping missions or handling humanitarian or migration crises further afield.

In the back of many Europeans' minds is the risk of a return of Trump, or another

[18] Interview with the author, March 2023

Republican isolationist, to the White House in 2025, leading to reduced support for Ukraine and for international institutions such as the UN and possibly NATO.

"There will be a moment where we have to carry out operations outside NATO territory, like in Libya, where the US will not be involved," said Rob de Wijk, Founder of The Hague Institute for Strategic Studies and a former Dutch defence planner. "The EU-NATO working relationship gets better and better. We should really stop the ideological debates about whether we have duplication. We should be relatively autonomous in the EU to make us less dependent on the US. The problem is that this debate is full of ideology." [18]

EU-NATO COOPERATION AND RIVALRY

EU-NATO cooperation has reached an unprecedented intensity since the Russian invasion, both at the political level, with joint statements and regular consultations, and in daily staff work on a range of issues including sanctions, cyber-security, counter-terrorism, strategic communication, countering disinformation, protecting critical infrastructure and building resilience.

The relationship works better in practice

than it does in theory. Although the two organisations now have 22 members in common, political obstacles still prevent the sharing of defence secrets, chiefly due to the unresolved dispute between Türkiye and Cyprus. France, for its part, is a stickler for the strict delineation of NATO and EU responsibilities, even where they overlap, and has long sought to limit NATO's role to its core military collective defence function.

"There is no security agreement that would allow for exchange of classified information," said Jiří Šedivý, a former Czech defence minister and NATO defence planning chief who is now Chief Executive of the EDA. "At the same time, we do everything to try to have reciprocal visibility." The EDA was in frequent contact with NATO, particularly over the joint purchase of ammunition for Ukraine, he said. [19]

"What is the comparative advantage of the EU in this respect? We have funds, while NATO does not have common funding for this kind of procurement for third parties," Šedivý said.

Despite a series of joint declarations and the reality of ever more intense practical collaboration, political friction over the EU's defence ambitions persists. While hailing their unprecedented cooperation, Stoltenberg underlined in the interview

[19] Interview with the author, March 2023

[20] For a recent discussion of the military mobility project, see: Finabel, February 2023

that non-EU countries contribute both 80% of NATO defence spending and 80% of military assistance to Ukraine and that NATO too ran collective armaments purchasing through its NATO Support and Procurement Agency.

"One of the lessons of the war – and I welcome what the EU does – but at the same time, is that the EU efforts on defence [...] cannot replace NATO," he insisted.

There is legitimate frustration at NATO headquarters at the slow pace of the EU's military mobility initiative to make it easier to move personnel and equipment across European borders. This is a classic example of an area in which EU regulation and investment can make NATO's defence of the continent more efficient. The programme involves cutting red tape, customs formalities and notification requirements for moving soldiers, vehicles, aircraft and weapons across internal EU borders, as well as standardising and building roads, railways, airstrips and bridges to permit more seamless transportation and reception of heavy military equipment. EU leaders cut back common funding for this key project under Dutch leadership to a mere €1.69bn in the 2021-27 budget from the original proposal of €6.5bn. [20]

Šedivý said the war in Ukraine had shown that EU states needed to build stocks of ammunition and accelerate work in cyber-defence, electronic warfare, air and missile defences and ground combat systems. At the same time, they had to prepare for "future tasks that will be EU-only – stabilisation and out-of-area operations". Robust rapid reaction forces would be needed for possible scenarios in North Africa or the Sahel. Those capabilities were fully aligned with NATO priorities and would be interoperable with NATO allies. "We are already faced with instabilities where NATO and the US will not be involved, which don't come under Article 5, where the US will not provide strategic enablers and Europe must be able to operate autonomously," he said.

In its Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), which some at NATO headquarters see as an unnecessary duplication of NATO's defence planning process, the EDA highlighted five focus areas where European capabilities were urgently needed. These included main battle tanks, space defence systems, soldiers' equipment and weapons to counter Russia's so-called anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) hubs – concentrations of missiles, air and sea power – aimed at shutting Western forces out of contested areas, such as the Black Sea from Crimea, the Baltic Sea from Kaliningrad, the High North from the Kola Peninsula or the Eastern Mediterranean from Russian bases in Syria.

Russian military presence in Africa in 2022

Source: BBC
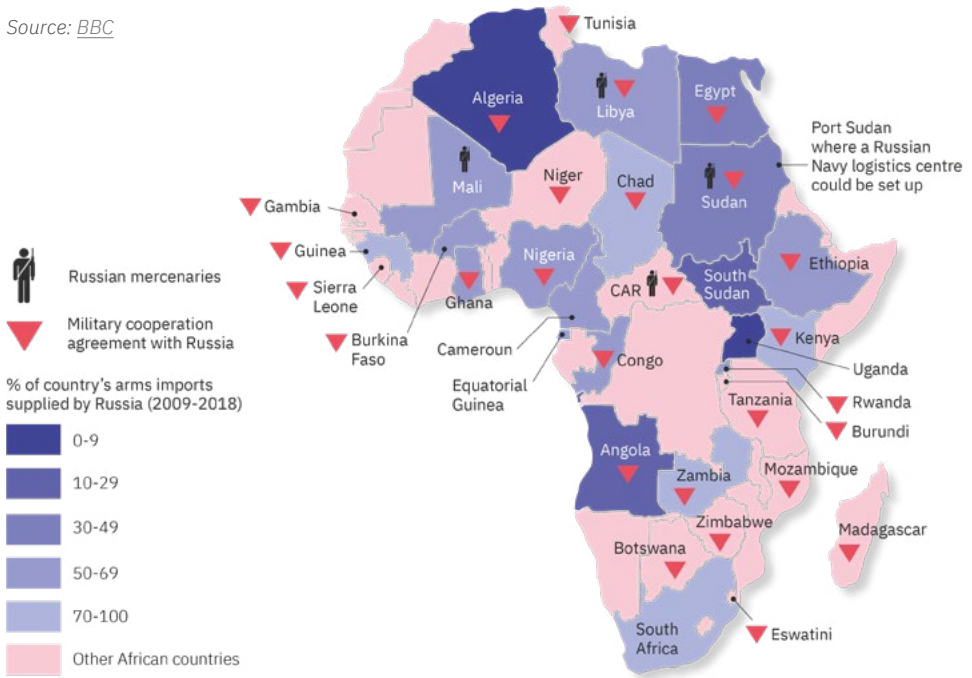
"At the moment, the main focus is on the east, collective defence and deterrence, support for Ukraine. That is clearly for NATO," Šedivý said. "But at the same time, we should look 360 degrees and not forget that there are other parts of the world and the neighbourhood of the EU, especially to the south of the Mediterranean, where we can see a fast aggregation of various negative features – impacts of climate change, weak states, conflicts for resources, migration pressures – and we have seen in some regions how those conflicts are manipulated by Russia against us."

DIVISION OF LABOUR

This raises the question of the division of labour between NATO and the EU

Chinese military influence in Africa in 2021

Established Chinese base

Possible site for new base

Comparative debt to China

Most debt

Least debt

No data

Possible site for new base

Countries with Chinese-backed power stations

Potential sites for new naval base

Djibouti
Opened: 2017
Troops: Up to 2,000
Vehicles: Armoured tropp carries, mobile guns, patrol boats
Features: Helicopter landing pads, piers to dock aircraft carries and warships

Kenya

Tanzania

Angola

Seychelles

Source: Daily Mail

in handling security tasks. The EU has gradually extended its toolbox beyond the 'soft power' instruments of trade, aid, regulatory convergence and diplomacy to more 'hard power' tools, such as border guards, maritime patrolling, peacekeeping and stabilisation operations, but not combat. EU maritime forces are patrolling the Mediterranean and the Horn of Africa to combat piracy, arms smuggling and human trafficking. EU countries have a

coordinated maritime presence in the Gulf of Guinea and a maritime awareness mission in the Strait of Hormuz.

It would be tempting to suggest that while NATO handles the collective defence of the Euro-Atlantic area, the EU should handle security challenges in Africa. However, the Mediterranean is part of NATO's area of responsibility, Russia is present there militarily and China has begun to show a

naval as well as an economic presence. Both strategic rivals are active in Africa, with Russian Wagner Group mercenaries engaged in Mali, the Central African Republic, Libya and elsewhere.

Both NATO and the EU have partnership agreements with Mediterranean and Middle Eastern states. Besides, EU countries lack key capabilities to sustain military operations in Africa or the Middle East without US assistance for the foreseeable future. When France and the UK decided to spearhead an international military intervention in Libya in 2011, they turned to NATO and had to request US air support and supplies after running out of air-to-ground missiles in the first week of operations. Likewise, France could not have staged its 2013 intervention in Mali and its subsequent counter-insurgency operations in the Sahel region without US support in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, airlift and air-to-air refuelling. So, **a strictly geographical east-south NATO-EU division would not work**.

On the European periphery of the NATO area, maintaining stability in the Western Balkans 24 years after the end of the Yugoslav Wars still requires a US presence under the NATO flag in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, although most of the peacekeepers in the region are Europeans.

A more plausible division of labour between the EU and NATO might be functional, based on which organisation is best equipped to handle tasks as they arise, and how the two institutions can bring their combined instruments to bear on security problems. For example, NATO may set military guidelines for the resilience of critical infrastructure, but it is the EU that enacts legislation for energy and digital network owners and operators.

"EUROPE'S DEFENCE MOMENT"

The EDA has existed for 20 years but for most of that time, EU countries have been loath to cooperate on arms projects, preferring either strictly national procurement or quick purchases from mostly US suppliers. Those acquisitions were often motivated at least in part by the belief that buying American gave countries an additional layer of bilateral insurance above and beyond NATO's mutual defence clause. [21]

"Don't forget that defence has always been the most tightly guarded prerogative of national governments," said an EU official involved in devising recent financial incentives to nudge member states into cooperating in defence research and joint arms development and production.

[21] Not much has changed since I published this study: Friends of Europe, January 2020

"The European Commission can only provide incentives. It doesn't have real power. Defence is in the hands of the member states," said Nathalie Loiseau, who chairs the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence. [22]

Since Russia's initial land grab in Crimea and the Donbas region in 2014, EU countries have begun to reverse 30 years of gradual disarmament with increases in defence spending worth approximately €200bn, according to Borrell. However, comparing actual spending with NATO's target of 2% of GDP per year, he estimated the shortfall in European defence spending between 2006 and 2020 as €1tn.

"After the Cold War, we shrunk our forces to bonsai armies," Borrell said. "If each European state just increases its military capabilities according to their announcements since the start of the war in Ukraine, the result will be a big waste of resources. We'll just have 27 bigger bonsais." [23]

Borrell and Breton have been trying to coax EU governments into allocating defence expenditure increases in a coordinated, collaborative way to avoid duplication, ensure interoperability and build a stronger, more competitive European military industry. EDA figures show only 18% of member states' equipment budgets went on collaborative procurement in 2021, an increase from a mere 11% the previous year, but far below the agreed EU target of 35%. [24] Past cooperative projects have often proved complicated, slow and costly in programmes such as the A400M military transport aircraft, the NH90 helicopter or the Tornado/Eurofighter combat aircraft.

The EU has created some new tools to encourage cross-border collaboration with the European Defence Fund for research and technology projects involving at least three member states. But the fund has only €8bn for the 2021-27 budget period compared to the €13bn originally proposed. That is hardly enough to trigger a fundamental cultural change in Europe's overwhelmingly national defence procurement. Another planned incentive, the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), which would subsidise joint purchases of weapons developed in the EU, is working its way through the legislative process but only carries €500mn in initial funding.

In the longer term, the Commission plans a European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP) to aggregate orders from several countries and trigger the investment signal that industry needs.

However, the risk is that because of the urgent need to bolster the armed forces on

[22] Comments from panel on defence at Quo Vadis Europa conference, Santander, Spain: European External Action Service (EEAS), YouTube, August 2022

[23] Borrell speech to same conference

[24] European Defence Agency, December 2022

Europe's eastern flank and to reconstruct hollow armies in western Europe, EU countries will buy off-the-shelf from US and South Korean manufacturers who can supply equipment quickly.

Germany has so far allocated the largest amounts from its special €100bn defence fund established after the Russian invasion to buy US F-35 fighters and US P8 maritime surveillance planes. It insists those purchases do not undermine plans to build a sixth-generation Future Combat Air System and a submarine-hunting Maritime Airborne Warning System jointly with France. But Paris has its doubts. Poland has placed a $14.3bn order for tanks, howitzers and light fighter planes from South Korea. [25]

"Insofar as Europe's defence moment translates into greater spending on non-European defence capacities, the main malady of European defence – fragmentation – risks being exacerbated, with short-term uncoordinated national procurement decisions having long-term impacts on the composition of the armed forces," lamented Nathalie Tocci, Director of the Italian Institute for International Affairs (IAI) and co-author of the EU's Global Strategy. "Europe's defense moment is not necessarily strengthening European defense either in terms of industry or operational capacity. There is a serious risk that the opposite will occur in the form

of a weakening of the European defense industrial and technological base and the reduction of European responsibility and risk-taking in their troubled neighborhood to the east and south. European strategic autonomy on defense remains an ever-distant chimera." [26]

The European defence industry's main concern is to secure long-term contracts, which would make it commercially viable to open new production lines and factories. **Even in peacetime, the challenge of keeping the European defence industry competitive was tough**, said Jan Pie, Secretary-General of the Aerospace, Security and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD), which represents some 3,000 companies in the sector. "You can't just pour money down into the system and expect that production will increase in the same way," Pie said. "There is a huge gap in almost all countries between the political declarations of increasing defence spending and the day you actually have a signature on a contract." [27]

The EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) provides a framework for groups of countries to launch collaborative defence projects with one nation coordinating, ranging from the Dutch-led effort to ease military mobility, to a Lithuanian-led initiative to create cyber rapid response teams,

[25] Reuters, July 2022; Reuters, December 2022; Defense News, September 2021

[26] Texas National Security Review, Winter 2022/2023
[27] Interview with the author, March 2023

pooling national experts to help countries to cope with cyber-incidents. The flexible format created in 2017 has so far led to the initiation of 60 projects from training to maritime, air and land systems and joint enablers. PESCO is open to non-EU partners that ask to join specific projects. For example, the US, UK, Norway and Canada have joined the military mobility group, and Canada recently joined a German-led team on networking logistics hubs. Since most of the projects are long-term endeavours, it is too early to judge the output. [28]

MIND-SHIFT

Moving societies and economies to a higher level of defence vigilance and long-term support for Ukraine is a political leadership challenge for Europe that goes well beyond the defence industries. It requires a mind-shift that has occurred in the states that share borders with Russia, Belarus or Ukraine. This mental *Zeitenwende* has not really happened in western Europe, where despite the influx of refugees or the surge in fuel and food prices, governments are in a business-as-usual mode and many citizens are only dimly aware of the conflict. After a few months of war headlines in the media, domestic issues have largely resumed top billing in the news.

This raises questions about whether European governments will be able to sustain public support for higher defence spending and greater resilience when politicians have to make hard choices between guns and butter or between financing the green energy transition and building common defence capabilities. The UK and Germany have experienced strikes over pay and the cost-of-living, while France has had months of labour unrest over pension reform.

Ricketts, the former UK national security advisor, said that in his experience, the most difficult challenge was to persuade politicians to spend money on something that might never happen but would have disastrous consequences if it did. Even though the 2010 UK national security strategy identified pandemics as a Tier One risk, it was impossible to convince the government to invest in stockpiling medicines and items such as respirators and personal protective equipment for health professionals. [29]

Ricketts is not alone in having doubts about the durability of European political leaders' commitment to defence investments, given other pressing priorities. "The real question is whether everyone breathes a sigh of relief in a few months' time or whether we can set up a durable arms industry to bring back into our zone the vital tools we need to support operations," said Admiral Henri Schrick, who was

[28] Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)

[29] Interview with the author, March 2023; see also Ricketts P., Hard Choices: What Britain Does Next, Atlantic Books, London, 2021

Iranian-made Shahed 136 drone used by Russian forces shot down near the town of Kupiansk, in Ukraine's Kharkiv region, in September 2022; Source: The Strategic Communications Directorate of the Ukrainian Armed Forces/Wikimedia Commons

France's Military Representative to NATO and the EU until late 2022. [30]

For the EU's eastern and Nordic members, defence spending is about survival. For France and the UK, with their imperial history, UN Security Council permanent seats and nuclear weapons, it is about being able to project power and secure interests internationally. For many west European governments, it has been seen since the end of the Cold War as at most an insurance policy.

Putin's aggression has boosted defence awareness in Europe, providing an opening for the Brussels trio of von der Leyen, Breton and Borrell to expand the EU's role. However, **it remains to be seen to what extent the new energy that has been injected into European defence efforts will survive a possible cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, the pressures of inflation and social unrest, and the 2024 electoral cycles in Europe and the United States**. As we shall see in the next chapter, the main threats that Europe already faces are hybrid attacks below the threshold of armed conflict, which require a higher level of societal and technical resilience.

[30] Interview with the author, March 2023

Chapter 4:
Building European resilience

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

In an age of hybrid warfare, in which almost everything can be weaponised below the threshold of armed conflict, keeping the lights on, computers running, reliable information flowing and financial transactions working has become a central security challenge.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has illustrated the vital importance of building resilience before a conflict and sustaining it in wartime. It has also yielded some striking examples of best practice, both from Ukraine and from new NATO member Finland and candidate Sweden.

Europe cannot flourish if it is undermined by malign external influences, loss of critical infrastructure, supply chain disruptions, confusing actions aimed at decision-makers and disinformation campaigns, which divide and weaken their societies. Russia, in particular, is actively fanning the fires of populism, racism and conflict in Western countries through social media manipulation, support for nationalist groups and attempts to weaponise migration. The objective is to undermine trust in democratic institutions and weaken social cohesion.

Resilience is a buzzword often bandied around with little clear definition. But the war in Ukraine has shown just how important it is to make our societies, communications, critical infrastructure and energy supplies robust enough to withstand shocks and recover quickly. European societies need to be better prepared for emergencies, and able to adapt and respond fast, as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted.

These are typically areas that require a whole-of-society approach and cannot be handled only by governments or organisations such as NATO or the EU. In a major war, governments control most of the levers of power: economic and industrial, as well as information and mobilisation of the population. However, most critical infrastructure in Europe

nowadays is in private ownership, so protecting it and making it survivable requires extensive peacetime planning and cooperation between the public administration, the private sector and civil society.

Tackling these issues may require new rules and procedures in some European countries for periods where we are not at war or facing an acute emergency but need to be in a state of heightened security alert, while safeguarding civil liberties. That is the kind of hybrid warfare environment that we are already experiencing and are likely to live in for the foreseeable future. The risks will be amplified by the new AI and XR technologies.

Most European states have legislation that grants special powers to the executive for limited periods in a state of emergency or natural disaster, typically requiring either parliamentary approval or ex-post authorisation and supervision by the legislature. However, legislation often distinguishes between peacetime and wartime or emergency with little provision

for the grey zone between those conditions, in which hybrid warfare prospers. [1]

JUST IN TIME

NATO defines resilience as a national responsibility and a collective commitment. Its policy was built for another age and struggles to take account of the way economies and societies have changed in the last seven decades.

"In 1949 when we [NATO] said logistics is a national responsibility, airliners were owned by the governments, train companies were owned by the governments, the roads were government-owned, the harbours, the telecom company, so everything that needed to be beefed up or slowed down was controlled by the government," said Bauer, who chairs NATO's Military Committee.

"Now as a result of this 'just-in-time, just-enough' efficiency thinking, we sold all those capabilities to the market, and as a result, it is demand-driven based on

[1] For a useful study on how EU countries used emergency powers during the first wave of COVID-19, see this study by the European Parliament Research Service: European Parliament, December 2020

average demand and not on peak demand as we now see in a war or in the pandemic with medical supplies," he said.

"Even airspace is run by private companies. Airspace is owned by the government still but there's a private company that does air traffic control. So, when you tell an air traffic control company that earns its money in directing air traffic that the Supreme Allied Commander wants you to prepare to hand over that airspace to the military, they will say: 'If it's not war, go away because you disrupt my business model'," Bauer added.

Airspace is only one example of the potential clash between economic priorities and military or security requirements in situations of heightened security vigilance. The same applies to the control, use and protection of roads and railways, electricity grids and energy pipelines, digital cables and telecoms masts, the seabed and outer space. European governments awoke belatedly to potential vulnerabilities in their telecoms networks from incorporating Chinese technology from companies, such as Huawei and ZTE, into sensitive infrastructure. A better upstream dialogue between the security services, regulators, government ministries and private sector telecom operators might have avoided some of those problems.

Friends of Europe has run a series of tabletop exercises since 2019 on plausible hybrid warfare scenarios, bringing together senior figures in industry, politics, government, NATO, the EU, health authorities, emergency services, civil society organisations and the media. They consistently highlight the lack of sufficient regular contact, relationship-building and cooperation between public and private sector actors, civilians and the military to prepare for potential attacks or catastrophic service disruptions. The most frequent comment from participants is that they wished they had taken the time to get to know their counterparts in other sectors before disaster struck. [2]

Ukraine has provided some extraordinary examples of how a society at war can remain resilient and keep its economy, education system, energy supplies, public services, communications and armed forces going under prolonged massive attack on its civilian infrastructure. **These lessons must be learned systematically by European countries both close to the frontline and far from the conflict zone.** They apply to the continuity of business and normal life everywhere in an era characterised by cyber and hybrid attacks by states and non-state actors, as well as terrorism risks.

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[2] For reports and recommendations from those exercises, see: Friends of Europe, November 2019; Friends of Europe, July 2021; Friends of Europe, July 2022

UNDERWATER VULNERABILITIES

Dramatic events far from the Ukrainian war-front have highlighted some of the risks to Europe at large. The underwater sabotage bombing of the two major Nord Stream gas pipelines beneath the Baltic Sea between Russia and Germany in September 2022 showed the vulnerability of all of Europe's largely unguarded and unmonitored critical infrastructure. Two apparently synchronised acts of sabotage severing fibre optic communications cables, used by Germany's rail network in different parts of the country, in October 2022 caused extensive traffic disruption and costly damage. [3] The attacks required detailed intelligence, making it likely that a state actor was involved.

Other suspicious activities around critical infrastructure since the start of the war have included the presence of underwater drones near crucial data links and offshore electricity cables beneath the North Sea, reported by Dutch intelligence; drone overflights of offshore oil and gas drilling platforms off northern Norway, reported by state energy company Equinor; and a Russian spy ship that turned off its transmitter when sailing close to UK offshore wind farms.

Western intelligence agencies believe

Russia is involved in the large-scale mapping of Europe's underwater critical infrastructure with a view to preparing for attacks in crisis or wartime. [4] An investigation by Nordic public broadcasters found that Russia has a fleet of suspected spy ships operating in Nordic waters as part of a programme for the potential sabotage of underwater cables and wind farms in the region. [5]

This effort dates back to long before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 or the annexation of Crimea in 2014. But NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence and Security, David Cattler, said Russian activity was greater now and "taking more risks" in the North Sea and the Baltic than at any time since the end of the Cold War. After the Nord Stream blasts, NATO established a cell at its Brussels headquarters to coordinate efforts to protect undersea infrastructure. [6]

According to the joint investigation by the public broadcasters of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, Russian vessels have been systematically sailing near military training areas, important oil and gas fields, small airports, deep-water quays and strategic hubs of the Norwegian Armed Forces. Russian ships have also popped up suddenly following NATO exercises.

The broadcasters used data analysis, intercepted radio communications and

[3] Deutsche Welle, August 2022

[4] Geopolitical Intelligence Services, February 2023
[5] The Independent, April 2023
[6] Politico, May 2023

intelligence sources to show how around 50 boats had been gathering intelligence for the past ten years, using underwater surveillance equipment to map key sites for potential sabotage or wartime attack.

Nearly 99% of global digital communications flow through a network of submarine cables on which the world's economy and digital services depend. Currently, 95% of international internet traffic is secured via around 200 large submarine cables – each of which can transmit about 200 terabytes per second – and some 340 further main cables. The longest cable is over 40,000km and has dozens of landing points from Germany to Singapore and Australia, across several oceans and connecting several continents. These 1.3mn km of cables permit an estimated $10tn of financial transactions every day. They are linked to each other in just ten inherently vulnerable locations. [7]

NATO's approach to securing underwater infrastructure combines remote monitoring, wherever possible; information sharing, including with the private sector; and demonstrating a military presence more frequently to deter sabotage. However, NATO officials acknowledge they cannot protect every inch of cable.

In January 2023, NATO and the EU agreed to collaborate more closely in security and defence policies, including through the creation of a joint task force on resilience and critical infrastructure. Officials involved say that despite institutional goodwill, it is often difficult to persuade European countries to share sensitive details of the location and protection of their pipelines, cables and networks or of incidents involving nuclear power plants with each other or the United States. [8]

REGULATION IN THE WORKS

The EU has proposed or is working on new regulations, directives and networked security concepts to respond to heightened hybrid warfare against Europe and transatlantic underwater internet cables. To make underwater infrastructure more resilient, European countries will be pressed to build up a strategic reserve of sufficient internet, communication and power cables, as well as ships for their quick repair.

NATO members agreed in 2016 on seven Baseline Requirements of National Resilience, against which allies can measure their level of preparedness. These provide guidelines and evaluation criteria for countries to conduct assessments of their resilience, aligned with the NATO Defence Planning Process. In 2021, NATO leaders endorsed a Strengthened Resilience Commitment, reinforcing the

[7] Submarine Cable Map   [8] Interviews with the author, February/March 2023

importance of national and collective resilience against conventional, non-conventional and hybrid threats and activities of adversaries. The NATO 2030 agenda and the 2022 Strategic Concept also provided guidance for resilience-related work at NATO.

NATO has no enforcement powers, but it does have a strong and active assistance, exercise and expert consultation programme to support the resilience commitment, which was long on good intentions but short on specifics.

"We will step up efforts to secure and diversify our supply chains, as well as to ensure the resilience of our critical infrastructure (on land, at sea, in space and in cyberspace) and key industries, including by protecting them from harmful economic activities," the allies declared. "We will build on our work to address the impact of emerging technologies, to secure next-generation communications systems and to protect technology and intellectual property. We will bolster our efforts to meet challenges to our energy security, and to deal with the impact of natural hazards that are being exacerbated by climate change." [9]

The EU, for its part, brought into force the Critical Entities Resilience Directive, known as NIS2, in January 2023, which must be turned into national law by October 2024.

The Commission proposed the EU Cyber Resilience Act in 2022, which is working its way through the legislative procedure. The EU enacted a Digital Operational Resilience Act (DORA) in January 2023, setting new resilience and service continuity obligations for the financial sector. The Commission recommended EU disaster resilience goals on civil protection in a 2023 document.

As part of the Strategic Compass, the EU is developing a Hybrid Toolbox intended to gather all civilian and military instruments that can be employed to counter hybrid attacks. The EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the Hybrid Centre of Excellence (Hybrid CoE), an independent intergovernmental body hosted by Finland and supported by the EU and NATO, have jointly produced a Comprehensive Resilience Ecosystem (CORE) model – an analytical framework for policymakers to decide which resources, tools and measures to mobilise in the face of hostile activities at the EU, national or local level. [10]

The EU has also developed a series of resilience dashboards intended to identify key weaknesses and track member countries' progress in reducing vulnerabilities. The tables assess socio-economic, green and digital, as well as geopolitical, resilience. However, the complex methodology and tabulation

[9] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 2021

[10] Joint Research Centre, April 2023

make it difficult to draw practical conclusions, except that the poorest EU countries – Romania and Bulgaria – are most vulnerable in most categories and have the lowest capacity to cope with shocks. [11]

Pandemics, disinformation, cyber-attacks, power outages and extreme weather events often do not stay confined within national boundaries. **We are only as resilient and secure as neighbouring countries** – whether they are EU members or not. For this reason, the EU should take the initiative of using the nascent EPC as a forum for 'whole-of-Europe' resilience. That would engage the UK, Norway, Switzerland, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Western Balkan states in a broader web collectively resisting systemic shocks and providing mutual support.

INFORMATION WARFARE, ELECTION MANIPULATION

Since 2015, the European External Action Service's (EEAS) Strategic Communication Division has built up a counter-disinformation unit with its own platform that has been debunking fake news and disinformation, directed by actors such as Russia, China and Iran not only at EU citizens but also at other countries, notably in Africa. [12] The EEAS published a first

detailed analysis on foreign information manipulation and interference in February 2023, highlighting the extent to which Moscow and Beijing collude to 'distract and distort' attention from their actions. [13] NATO officials say counter-disinformation and strategic communication are two areas where they are working hand-in-hand with the EU daily.

A European Parliament investigation into foreign election interference called for coordinated action by EU and national authorities to protect the integrity of the 2024 European Parliament elections from disinformation and manipulation by hostile powers. [14] There have been several examples of Russian interference in election and referendum campaigns in Europe, both through funding of parties or campaigns and through manipulation of information, for example, with the release of alleged private emails from Macron shortly before the 2017 French presidential election.

More controversially, the EU and its member states are wrestling with how to preserve and promote media pluralism and independence, and counter malign foreign disinformation and manipulation of civil society. They must take care not to mirror illiberal measures, such as foreign-agent registration legislation, which they condemned when Russia implemented it and Georgia sought to enact it. Such

[11] European Commission, November 2021
[12] EUvsDisinfo, May 2023

[13] Joint Research Centre, April 2023
[14] Euractiv, April 2023

restrictions already exist in EU member Hungary, which has drifted furthest from European norms.

The European Media Freedom Act, proposed by the Commission in September 2022, aims to protect journalists from political interference and surveillance, to prevent public service media being turned into partisan propaganda channels, to ensure pluralism and transparency in media ownership and to ensure non-discriminatory allocation of state advertising revenue. [15]

However, press organisations and civil liberties groups have criticised the proposed watering down by the European Parliament of key elements, such as guarantees of editorial independence and mandatory national media plurality assessments. In addition, legal scholars have warned that the proposed law contains potentially sweeping powers to ban foreign media, along with vague legal definitions that may make it almost impossible to enforce. [16]

Arguably more important than traditional broadcasting and print media in terms of influence are social media, which are the biggest vector of disinformation on politics, geopolitics and issues such as public health and pandemics. The EU has used legislation to try to force mostly US-based online platforms to filter their content, remove hate speech, racism and disinformation rapidly and close fake accounts used by so-called bots and troll factories. It has also pressed companies to change search engine algorithms to make verified news content more visible.

This is an uphill struggle because of the volume of content that needs to be sifted and the difficulty of weighing freedom of speech against dangers to society and avoiding censorship of citizens' opinions. It will become still harder with the growing use of generative AI to produce look-alike fake news content and with the spread of XR that hooks young people into spending many of their waking hours in the metaverse – a parallel reality. ChatGPT and other generative AI applications that interact with users in a conversational way and create seemingly authoritative content are potent potential tools for disinformation. **Technology is racing ahead of regulation in these areas with alarming potential consequences not only for fighting scams and disinformation but also for protecting basic privacy rights and human agency.** [17]

Faced with such risks to democracy and European values, the best response may lie in integrating media literacy into school curricula from an early age, as is done in Finland, to educate young people on how to evaluate information and recognise fake news, scams and manipulation. Additional

[15] European Commission, September 2022
[16] For criticisms, see notably: European Centre for Press & Media Freedom, April 2023; The London School of Economics and Political Science, May 2023

[17] Friends of Europe, March 2023; Friends of Europe, April 2023

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky; Source: Dmytro Larin / Shutterstock

civic education efforts are also necessary to protect elderly or less tech-savvy citizens from disinformation and scams.

THE UKRAINIAN MODEL

Ukraine has probably been subjected to the most intense cyber and hybrid warfare of any European country in the past decade, beginning before the 2014 pro-EU Maidan uprising that toppled pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych and triggered Russia's seizure and annexation of Crimea. A 2015 cyber-attack attributed to Russian hackers used malware to damage the electricity grid in western Ukraine and cause power outages.

At the start of its all-out invasion in 2022, Russian cyber-attackers took down the ViaSat satellite computer network providing communications to the Ukrainian armed forces and other users in Europe by hacking into a ground-based network. The strike initially disrupted Ukrainian defences until Elon Musk's Starlink provided satellite reception terminals that enabled Kyiv to keep its forces networked during the fighting. It was the most visible example of a cyberwar that has mostly been fought in the shadows.

Starlink was vital not only for Ukrainian military communications and civilian internet connections but also to enable Zelensky and his ministers to communicate with citizens and take their message to the outside world. Keeping Zelensky online and on screen globally was key to securing and retaining international support and assistance.

Since 2014, Ukraine has received substantial capacity-building assistance from the EU, NATO and the US on cyber and energy resilience with annual tabletop exercises to put them through their paces. **Kyiv's cyber and energy resilience in the war so far testifies not only to their ingenuity but also to the success of those capacity-building programmes.**

Ukraine had anticipated and prepared for cyber-conflict. It recruited an IT army of volunteers at home and abroad, including the notorious US hacktivist group Anonymous, to help defend the country's internet connections and computer networks and to attack enemy cyber-targets. Some spectacular actions, such as denial of service attacks on the Russian Defence Ministry's website and on banks' IT portals in Moscow, were reported in the first month of the war. Many more were kept secret by both sides.

Valeriya Ionan, Deputy Minister for European Integration at the Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Transformation, said Ukraine had recruited an IT army of some

300,000 cyber-specialists working to defend the country's digital infrastructure and attack Russian government portals. "This is the first cyberwar," she told a Friends of Europe summit in November 2022. "Starlink, in many cases, changed the course of the war." [18]

Cattler, the NATO official in charge of intelligence, said the relative lack of impact of most Russian cyber-attacks should not lead to the erroneous conclusion that Moscow's cyber-forces had been largely absent. "On the day the invasion began, Russian cyber units successfully deployed more destructive malware—including against conventional military targets such as civilian communications infrastructure and military command and control centers—than the rest of the world's cyber powers combined typically use in a given year," he wrote in the *Foreign Affairs* journal. In the first hours of the war, cyber-attacks knocked out the computer systems of multiple government, military and critical infrastructure sectors. Forensic analysis by Microsoft, the cyber-security company Symantec and the Slovak firm ESET found that these attacks affected numerous government agencies, military institutions, civil emergency services and a range of other critical infrastructure sectors, such as defence industry manufacturers, IT services and energy companies, directly relevant to Ukraine's military capacity. [19]

It was not a lack of Russian cyber-attacks but the extraordinary resourcefulness of Ukraine's resistance that enabled the country to withstand the initial assault; repair, diversify and restore its military, intelligence and police communications; and innovate rapidly to leapfrog the setback.

Keeping Ukraine resilient has involved a whole-of-society effort mobilising civilians, companies and NGOs to keep restoring electrical power, charge cellphones, manage bomb shelters, distribute food and medicines, assist the wounded and war invalids and keep public services such as education running despite the destruction of many schools, power stations and logistical centres.

Perhaps the most striking success has been the exponential expansion and multiple uses of the DIIA e-government mobile application, which had more than 18mn users by late 2022. The app enables everything from crowdsourcing citizen intelligence on enemy positions, to receiving identity cards and 13 other official documents, registering companies, and calculating and paying taxes, as well as taking online courses, including in digital literacy, AI and other skills. A NATO official admiringly calls the Ukrainian crowdsourced intelligence function a sort of "Uber for artillery." DIIA features an "educational Netflix" of learning

[18] Friends of Europe, YouTube, November 2022
[19] Foreign Affairs, April 2022

programmes. People can make donations to the army, seek information about displaced or missing persons and apply for compensation for damaged property using the app. DIIA has become the brand of Ukraine's remarkable wartime digital state. [20]

Ukraine has also managed to keep electricity supply running despite frequent Russian missile and drone attacks on power stations, sub-stations and networks, especially over the winter. Several factors help explain the resilience of the Ukrainian grid. According to the electricity transmission system operator Ukrenergo, damaged power lines were quickly repaired, often at the risk of expert workers' lives. The protection of Ukrainian airspace by air defence systems was also of great importance. In addition, the state energy supplier worked together with grid operators to develop new methods for reacting to attacks by Russian rockets and drones.

"One method is to take the load off the energy system in the period before the attacks, thus maintaining its integrity," Volodymyr Omelchenko, Director for Energy Programmes at the Rasumkov research centre in Kyiv, told *Deutsche Welle*. This unloading – stopping the operation of individual block units at a power station ahead of possible rocket attacks – makes it possible to minimise the damage to

the energy system if they are destroyed, thus allowing the faster restoration of lost energy. The Ukrainian Energy Ministry said several non-traditional technical methods were used to help stabilise the grid but declined to give details. [21]

The rest of Europe will certainly have plenty to learn from studying Ukraine's resilience, innovation and improvisation during the war. But it can also learn much from Finland's peacetime total defence system.

THE FINNISH MODEL

Finland is a small nation of 5.5mn with a long memory of war with its giant eastern neighbour, with which it shares a 1,350km border. The country was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1939 and lost substantial territory in the south-east, which it reconquered in a second war between 1941 and 1944, only to lose it again at the end, when it was forced to accept a subservient neutrality and to refuse US Marshall Plan aid.

The harrowing experiences of the Winter War and the Continuation War, as they are known in Finland, led the country to develop a whole-of-society defence and resilience culture that has endured until today and been perpetuated despite the

[20] DIIA (in Ukrainian)

[21] Deutsche Welle, March 2023

end of the Cold War and membership in the EU. Finland is one of the few European countries to have maintained compulsory military service for all men and annual reserve duty. The reserve force comprises about 900,000 soldiers on top of the regular army's wartime strength of 240,000.

"Nearly 16% of the Finnish population served in the armed forces in the Continuation War. Almost one-third of the budget went on defence. We saw the whole of society needed to protect the country," said Toveri.

"Since we have conscription, 90% of people in boardrooms, executives and mayors will be reserve officers. They do 6 to 12 months of national service, with a year in any leadership position. We have the maximum amount of refreshers through the reserve days you have to do. It creates a network of people who know each other," he said.

Two key policy documents, regularly reviewed, drive Finland's resilience: the Comprehensive Security Model and the Security Strategy for Society.

Twice a year, local defence forces, police, fire, rescue and emergency services practise together, notably in responding to hybrid, cyber and special forces threats. "We have this national strategy for how to safeguard the vital functions of society, updated every three to four years. The whole government looks at threats such as pandemics, a mass wave of refugees, a cyber-attack, hybrid attacks. Our strategy spells out who is responsible for what. We still build shelters in every block of flats. In Helsinki, we have a shelter for every one of the 600,000 population and 400,000 spare," Toveri said.

"We have seen in Ukraine how important it is to protect the population. A lot is about legislation – for example, our tech companies by law have to be able to have service continuity. They have to accept a degree of redundancy," he said.

Public support for the military is strong since every family has a connection. A senior defence official said the government systematically engages the private sector leadership and civil society through voluntary defence organisations. "We've always thought major war was very possible and we need to be prepared. That's why we have bomb shelters. We need resilience for all, not just the military," the official said.

Stockpiles of raw materials, medicines, fuel and vaccines are mandated by law. A special organisation, the National Emergency Supply Agency (NESA), runs the stocks in partnership with the private sector. Critical infrastructure companies

are obliged by law to have redundant capacity, resilience of electricity supplies and distribution, and continuity of telecoms networks. The state subsidises armaments producers to maintain idle spare capacity. Even Finland's big grocery store chains have a role to play in keeping the country fed during a crisis – with plans to share their coveted logistics systems with each other in extremis.

"We invite the political, industrial and commercial elite of the country to go for a four-week course run by the defence forces. We've been doing this for 60 years, so all the Finnish elite has gone through these courses. We are constantly refitting and fine-tuning the conscription system to take account of people and the society," the defence official said.

Sweden has since 1961 distributed an 18-page resilience manual, entitled 'If crisis or war comes', to every household in the land with practical advice on what to do in an emergency, terrorist attack or wartime, how to recognise false information, how to prepare at home for a crisis and how to recognise official warnings. [22]

France is the other EU country that has a similar system for sharing defence consciousness across societal elites. The Institute for Higher National Defence Studies (IHEDN) runs year-long, part-time courses for mid-career civil servants, business executives, politicians, civil society organisers, academics, journalists, trade unionists and religious leaders, praised by participants as a master class in whole-of-society strategic thinking. In a society often riven by bitter social and political conflicts, it is a rare example of building support for collective defence and resilience. The IHEDN also runs similar courses for European and international opinion leaders. [23]

Finland's immediate neighbours are studying the Finnish example and Sweden's similar system with increasing intensity since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. **There is much to learn for the rest of Europe in terms of long-term strategic planning for resilience, public-private and civilian-military partnerships and building what is sometimes called a 'hedgehog' system of defence – making a country prickly and unattractive to attack**.

[22] Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, December 2022

[23] Institute for Higher National Defence Studies, April 2023; Institute for Higher National Defence Studies

Chapter 5:
Conclusions & recommendations

CONCLUSIONS – THE LONG HAUL

However the war in Ukraine ends, **Europe and the West will face a sustained threat from an angry and vengeful Russia**, which is becoming increasingly dependent on an assertive China. Even if Ukraine were to force all Russian forces off its soil, which looks unlikely, and Putin were to fall, Europe's Russia problem would not disappear. Europe is more likely to face frequent hybrid threats and continued destabilisation efforts on its periphery than direct military confrontation, not least because it will take years to rebuild Russian land forces.

Focusing on deterrence, defence and resilience will be Europe's new normal for the next decade at least. The long-haul commitment that is necessary will demand strong political leadership in the face of competing spending priorities and geographically diverse senses of threat. But it can also yield economic benefits if money is invested in a rational, coordinated way and promotes a stronger European defence technological and industrial base.

To what extent are Europeans prepared to take more responsibility for their own defence in light of Russia's war in Ukraine? And how can NATO and the EU strengthen their capabilities and cooperate to achieve that objective?

Pan-European opinion polls in November 2022 and January 2023 conducted for NATO and the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) suggested a high degree of support for continued assistance to Ukraine (69%) and significant, if not overwhelming, public backing for increased defence spending (35%). Importantly, support for great military expenditure was strongest in France (46%) and Germany (45%). However, the survey also found that in most NATO countries the cost of living, economic crisis, climate change, poverty and inequality were greater public concerns than the risk of war or terrorism. Only in Poland and the Baltic states did more than 40% of respondents cite war as their greatest concern. [1]

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[1] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022; European Council on Foreign Relations, March 2023

These trends suggest a permissive environment for boosting European defence efforts, at least in the short term. But the economic worries of many constituents may resonate more strongly with politicians than the support for military spending, and there are some warning signals in the data. For example, 25% of Italians think their government should spend less on defence than the current 1.5% of GDP, and 38% of Spaniards oppose their government's assistance to Ukraine.

Focus groups of 102 Europeans aged 18 to 40, asked a series of questions on defence and the war in Ukraine by Friends of Europe's Debating Europe citizen engagement platform, illustrated wide geographical differences in public opinion. While all were aware of the war, the impacts on inflation and energy prices were most frequently cited and only those living in countries closest to Ukraine felt threatened by Russia. Most supported increasing defence spending to 2% of GDP and a handful up to 5%. Almost none of the participants favoured conscription. A

small minority expressed willingness to do social or community service or some form of European military service. While they differed on the EU's effectiveness as an international actor, they agreed that the EU's global standing hinges on Ukraine prevailing with European help against Russia. All considered NATO to be the main actor in the defence of Europe, even if some favoured deeper defence integration between EU countries and less dependence on the US. A summary of their views is annexed to this report.

Europe's defence renaissance hinges on Germany, the continent's largest economy. Despite Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech, Berlin's sustained commitment to a greater defence effort cannot be taken for granted. That is partly due to in-fighting within a three-party coalition in which many Social Democrats still hanker after east-west detente, the Free Democrats care most about curbing public spending and the Greens come from a pacifist tradition. A revival of a 1980s-style leftist-pacifist 'peace movement' cannot be ruled out, and that possibility may weigh on

government decisions.

Several other constraints on a stronger and more resilient Europe need to be overcome. They include the innate **short-termism** of politicians who care most about the next election, ingrained **resistance in national defence establishments to cross-border arms cooperation**, long-standing rivalries among some of the continent's leading defence companies reluctant to share technology with each other and a **propensity to trust the US more than fellow Europeans**.

The United States has played the decisive role in supporting Ukraine with military, political and financial assistance, as well as in galvanising European support for Kyiv. While the US will remain engaged in Europe after the war – given their crucial economic relationship – the scale of its presence is bound to change, whoever is in the White House from 2025.

Washington will continue to extend nuclear deterrence and keep substantial air and naval power in Europe, but the next president is likely to draw down some land forces and focus increasingly on the 21st-century strategic challenge from China. European NATO members will have to pick up the slack, especially if there is a crisis over Taiwan. The more we do to support Ukraine and invest in deterrence and resilience in Europe, the stronger the

message it sends to China.

Just as it has adopted a 'Fit for 55' package to reduce carbon emissions by 55% by 2030, **the EU needs to adopt a 'Fit for 25' approach to support Ukraine for the long haul and invest in its own defence capabilities** to be ready for potential political change in Washington, especially if Trump or another Republican nationalist were to return to the White House in 2025.

Ukraine would likely be the first casualty of a Trump victory, since he and like-minded Republicans have said they would cut aid to Kyiv and press for an early peace deal. That is one reason why **it is important to put in place long-term security arrangements for Ukraine before the 2024 US election**. A coordinated drive to improve European countries' defences would be an incentive for the US to stay, rather than an excuse for it to leave.

Russian President Vladimir Putin; Source: Frederic Legrand / Shutterstock

RECOMMENDATIONS

To NATO

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reaffirmed NATO's indispensable central role in the defence of Europe. While a direct Russian attack on NATO territory remains unlikely, **the alliance will need a more robust forward presence along the eastern flank** than the current light, rotating forces to deter any Russian aggression and reassure eastern allies. **It should, however, stop short of large permanent land deployments** and rather focus on building infrastructure and pre-positioning materiel for rapid reinforcement through designated forces, with more frequent exercises, and an EU-led drive to remove red tape and improve roads, bridges, railways, ports and airfields for military mobility.

Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are unlikely to join NATO soon after the war. That prospect will be even more improbable if there is no formal peace agreement and Russian troops are still on Ukrainian, as well as Moldovan and Georgian, soil. **Interim security arrangements involving a coalition of willing major Western allies will be needed, along with a framework for Ukraine to prepare itself for eventual NATO membership**. The coalition should involve at a minimum the US, UK, Canada, Poland, Germany and France to make it harder for Russia to divide the West. Key allies should commit to equip and train Ukrainian forces and help rebuild Kyiv's defence industry to defend the country against any future attack. It would make sense to have some rotating presence of coalition trainers and military advisors in Ukraine after the war for reassurance.

Russia's extensive use of missiles and drones against civilian and military targets has shown that **boosting Europe's weak air and missile defences is a priority**. The German-led European Sky Shield initiative can be helpful provided it is integrated through NATO and incorporates all European allies and the best of European technology. Precision-guided munitions and conventional missile stocks must also be reinforced.

NATO should beware of preparing to fight another 20th-century, heavy metal war when Ukraine's defensive

campaign has demonstrated the value of well-commanded lighter, more agile, more decentralised and connected forces. The alliance will still need to repair and strengthen its armoured forces and artillery, but it should draw lessons from the fact that drones and anti-tank missiles have so far had a better war than tanks or aircraft in Ukraine.

Among the early lessons of the war are that satellite intelligence, including from commercial sources, as well as drone reconnaissance and crowdsourced real-time positioning data – all connected to fire-control and assisted by AI and distributed computing, precision-guided munitions and swarms of attack drones – will likely be more useful for territorial defence in Europe than expensive platforms, such as aircraft carriers, tanks and sixth-generation combat aircraft with elephantine development cycles. The coming Ukrainian counter-offensive may offer further lessons.

To bolster NATO air power, **European air forces should augment their squadrons with fighter drones**, which cost barely one-tenth of a manned fighter aircraft.

NATO will need to maintain its naval power to guard against Russian, and potentially Chinese, challenges in the High North, the North Atlantic, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. European naval capabilities will be increasingly needed outside NATO's area of responsibility to protect trade and energy routes off the coasts of Africa, in the Persian Gulf region and in the Indian Ocean. A larger European presence in the Indo-Pacific will mostly be maritime.

A regional division of labour is already emerging with Poland and the Baltic states likely to provide the first land forces in any crisis on the eastern flank and Germany providing crucial follow-on armoured brigades before US and other European reinforcements arrive. The Nordic countries are building a substantial air capability, as well as their territorial defence strength. The UK, the Netherlands and Denmark should protect the maritime sea approaches while France

and Italy provide strong naval forces in the Mediterranean and further afield. The UK, France and southern European countries also need to maintain expeditionary forces for contingencies in Africa and beyond where NATO and the US are not involved. France has Europe's strongest space capabilities, which should be augmented by EU common capabilities, such as the planned Infrastructure for Resilience, Interconnectivity and Security by Satellite (IRIS2) secure satcom constellation.

Although Western interventionism is unpopular with voters and policymakers following the failures in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Sahel, **European allies will likely have to handle crisis management, and peace and security challenges in Africa and the Middle East, preferably with but, if necessary, without US military help**. However, the EU should give priority to training, equipping and mentoring local forces, institution-building and development partnerships over military interventions.

To the EU

Born as a peace project, the EU is gradually embracing a role in security and defence, although not as a military power in its own right.

Beyond NATO's hard security tools, the war has highlighted the many roles that the EU can play in funding and facilitating arms supplies to Kyiv, training Ukrainian forces, imposing and enforcing sanctions, steering the reorientation of Europe's energy supplies and helping accelerate the transition to renewable energy sources, working to connect eastern partners to EU energy grids, and mapping and monitoring critical infrastructure.

The future security of Europe also depends on EU regulation and investment to secure robust supply chains, resilient critical infrastructure, as well as energy diversification.

The EU's declared objective of strategic autonomy is not dead. It remains a valid goal to enable Europeans to do more for their own defence, primarily as the European pillar of NATO but also to be able to decide and act in crises when NATO and the US are not engaged. Strategic autonomy also encompasses making European supply chains resilient, reducing dependencies and diversifying sources of energy, key industrial components and strategic minerals.

The EU must focus on strengthening its defence industries and producing new capabilities, not on building new institutions and command structures. If it makes a success of the collective purchase of ammunition for Ukraine, **it should go further and fund the joint purchase of strategic enablers**, such as airlift, air-to-air refuelling tankers, drones and space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems. This will ultimately require greater mutualisation of European nations' sovereign capabilities in these areas.

Moving towards "a war economy mode", to use Breton's term, cannot be done solely out of current expenditure and has historically entailed both higher taxes and exceptional borrowing. **The EU should consider issuing common debt, as it did for the NextGenerationEU pandemic recovery fund, to finance a European defence investment programme**, which cannot be adequately funded merely by repurposing untapped money from other EU budget lines. This will face opposition in frugal northern countries, but it offers a way to get more bang for the euro and assuage fears of an over-mighty Germany. Expanding the role of the intergovernmental EPF may be the most practical option, although it is not subject to scrutiny by the European Parliament.

The EU should take the lead role in funding the reconstruction of Ukraine, linking financial support to the achievement of key benchmarks in the reforms needed to prepare for eventual EU membership. Reconstruction will require funding from international financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and European Investment Bank. The EU should seek legal ways to seize frozen Russian state assets – chiefly central bank reserves held overseas – and allocate them towards reconstruction. While that will not pay the whole bill, it will provide a sense of justice and set a precedent.

European integration is Ukraine's exit strategy from the war. **The EU should adopt a new staged integration approach for the Western Balkans and Ukraine, Moldova and eventually Georgia**, so they are involved at a political level in EU policy formation and receive more benefits of accession before joining.

On resilience

Ukraine has shown the high value of morale, professional, decentralised command, whole-of-society defence and good logistics. **Europe can make itself less vulnerable to hybrid warfare and cyber-attacks by following Ukraine's example** in e-governance; decentralising and backing up public and private sector data; and involving the whole of society in resilience.

Finland and Sweden will bring to NATO not only crucial forces and strategic depth in the Baltic region but also a culture of total defence involving the whole of society, with traditions of reserve duty, resilience and conscription that offer examples across the eastern flank.

Other European countries should follow Finland's example of organising the whole of society for defence and resilience by conducting regular civil defence exercises, conferences and training. Governments should engage the private sector, local authorities, emergency services and civil society organisations in a permanent dialogue about how to ensure continuity of critical services and sufficient redundant capacity for backup in case of cyber-attacks on power, telecoms and digital networks, as well as climate-related natural disasters.

EU countries should increase the amounts allocated to the PESCO project on military mobility, and review and revise legislation where necessary to ease the transit of armed forces, equipment and ammunition in peacetime and crisis situations.

Governments cannot solve everything by regulation and should seek to win the cooperation of private actors by listening and learning, as well as appropriate regulation. Much of the responsibility for resilience lies with companies and local communities.

To respond to the growing challenge of disinformation, **governments and education authorities should incorporate media literacy into school curriculums** from an early age. **Local authorities should identify and connect 'information first responders' in their communities** to whom citizens can turn for trusted information. During the COVID-19 pandemic, such figures were often doctors or pharmacists, but in other situations, mayors, local elected officials, teachers and postal workers may be best placed to disseminate verified information.

To the UK

The UK has taken a large role in supporting Ukraine both politically and militarily. It has provided valuable training to Ukrainian forces before and during the war. It has also galvanised defence efforts in northern Europe with its Joint Expeditionary Force initiative and given security guarantees to Sweden and Finland in the period between their application to join NATO and their eventual membership.

However, having left the EU and chosen not to negotiate any structured relationship with Brussels on defence and foreign policy, London has forfeited the influence it once wielded over European policies on issues ranging from enlargement to energy, trade and sanctions. The EU, for its part, has been able to advance in areas that the UK might previously have blocked – from collective vaccine purchases to joint borrowing and joint ammunition procurement. However, it has lost significant geopolitical weight with the departure of one of Europe's two biggest military and diplomatic hitters – a nuclear power and permanent UN Security Council member.

The war in Ukraine, the fall of Prime Minister Boris Johnson – a leading Brexit campaigner and EU-baiter – and the arrival of pragmatic Prime Minister Sunak offer an opportunity to **start rebuilding EU-UK cooperation on defence to the benefit of Europe and NATO**. This should include an administrative agreement with the EDA, agreements with the EU on handling confidential information and maximising opportunities to include UK defence companies and research institutes in the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB).

Despite post-Brexit rhetoric and diplomacy centred on the idea of 'global Britain', the UK remains primarily a European power. Its national security interests depend above all on peace, stability and prosperity on the continent. The EU remains by far its biggest trade partner.

It can play a substantial role in keeping Europe safe after the war in Ukraine. It should do this not only through NATO and in bilateral ties with key continental states, including Ukraine, but also by starting to develop a constructive relationship on defence with the EU.

To the US

The United States needs a stronger, more self-reliant and self-confident Europe as a global security partner and to free it up to focus more of its defence resources on the challenge of containing China's growing power. The Biden administration has understood this and done a lot to encourage autonomous EU defence efforts, rather than setting red lines or publicly berating Europeans over their deficient spending, as past administrations have done. This is the first US administration to engage with the EU as an entity on defence.

It is ironic that the US is now more supportive of European strategic autonomy than some European governments are. For example, Washington has concluded an agreement to cooperate with the EDA, whereas the UK has so far refused to enter into any institutional defence cooperation with the EU.

An enlightened US government must understand that **public support for greater European defence spending and capabilities can only be sustained if it benefits European industry** and creates jobs in Europe. The US should hence resist pressure from its own defence industries to press NATO allies to buy American in the name of efficiency, interoperability or superior quality. It should encourage joint procurement by EU partners. A stronger European defence industry is in the interest of NATO and the US.

Beyond that, **the US should encourage allies to form integrated multinational brigades and divisions under NATO's New Force Model**. Such units could serve as first reinforcements for NATO in a crisis on the eastern flank and be able to operate flexibly under European command in operations outside Europe when the US and NATO were not engaged.

Turkish-made Bayraktar drone delivered to Lithuania for handover to Ukraine;
Source: Karolis Kavolelis / Shutterstock

Annex:

INTRODUCTION

Debating Europe, the citizen engagement and democracy unit of Friends of Europe, launched a focus group series, entitled 'The Future of Europe defence, security and transatlantic relations', in March 2023.

Throughout this focus group series, Debating Europe engaged with over 100 Europeans to collect their opinions around the following questions:

- Has the war in Ukraine affected your life? How so?
- Has this one-year-long armed conflict and war rhetoric across the continent changed your perception of European security and solidarity?
- How will the European Union's relations with key players like Russia, the US and China develop in the future?
- What can the EU and NATO do to make our continent a safer place, if anything?

METHODOLOGY AND PRESENTATION OF PARTICIPANTS

Debating Europe conducted 11 online focus groups, each lasting one hour. The focus groups were led by an experienced moderator and ranged in size from 4 to 12 participants, with different political views.

In all, there were 102 participants (born between 1982 and 2005) from 27 different European (EU and beyond) countries (Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain).

Citizens' input on 'The Future of Europe defence, security & transatlantic relations'

RESULTS OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

The Russian invasion of Ukraine

All participants felt affected by the war, but mostly indirectly with, for instance, inflation and the rise of energy prices. They all shared uncertainty about the future of Europe, whether it concerns security in the region, economic prosperity or energy prices. Hans from the Netherlands expressed his concerns regarding the consequences of the invasion for the European security structure: "When will this conflict end? What will happen with weapons and para-military groups once the war is over? And how will relations with Russia look like after the war?"

The location of participants tended to influence their feelings regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, central and eastern European participants, living closer to Russia, tended to be more worried about the threat of a Russian invasion of their own country, especially if Ukraine does not succeed in defeating Russia.

Mirjam from Estonia said: "Estonia is the country that donated the most per GDP in terms of military support to Ukraine. If Ukraine falls, Estonia could be next."

Gheorghe from Moldova voiced similar sentiments, saying that Moldova could be the next country invaded by Russia. "Coming from Moldova, for me it was a big shock when the war started. It has a great impact on the Moldovan people because we are the next hotspot, no matter if Ukraine wins or not, we are next on the list. The war might not affect Moldova directly, but all the people feel affected anyway."

The defence of Europe, the EU and NATO

Participants were divided on whether the EU or NATO should have primacy to ensure

the defence of Europe. Some differentiated between NATO's hard security role, being able to intervene militarily, and the EU, which could provide political and socio-economic support, for instance, with sanctions. They saw NATO as the key actor to defend Europe and their countries from a military standpoint. Rodrigo from Portugal underlined that NATO is irreplaceable for now: "If I was in Ukraine right now, I would definitely want to be in NATO [...] At EU level, we don't have any other military power that could come to our rescue. So, at the moment NATO is irreplaceable. That is not to say it couldn't change in the future. But right now, NATO cannot be replaced."

Others were critical of NATO, citing the dominant role of the United States and arguing that the EU should be the key actor of Europe's defence. Hans, a Dutch national, would rather "have the EU play a larger role compared to NATO if the Netherlands were invaded. Do we need to depend on the US? I'd rather welcome a European neighbour than someone from far away, like the US, to come here and help."

However, those participants said there was currently no alternative to the transatlantic military alliance, due to the lack of defence integration among EU countries. Most would prefer a collective EU military alliance as they recognised that most EU countries would not be able to defend

themselves individually in case of a war. Mark from Hungary remarked that the EU was not ready to establish a military alliance: "I genuinely don't think that it is in Europe's long-term interest to rely too much on the US. But I have to acknowledge that currently NATO is the only option to address our security problems [...] This really is the time to rely less on the US and formulate our very own European foreign and security policy. Definitely, defence policy cannot work without an army. So, in the long term, this should be the way for the EU to take."

Arek from Poland underlined the need for greater integration of defence policy among EU member states in order to have an independent EU: "I don't want the European Union to be relying on the United States. Because the alliance has big problems. What would happen if Donald Trump were still president? [...] I think it would be actually a terrible situation right now. But I think that with our current structures, Europe was not prepared to react by itself [to the invasion of Ukraine]. Something has to change in that way. We should be able to make it on our own."

Defence budget

Most participants were worried about the use of resources dedicated to defence. Most did not want to increase defence

spending beyond the NATO target of 2% of GDP and some argued that higher spending on defence should not be the top priority. Yoann from France said: "The USA spends 3.46% of their GDP on the military [...] and in comparison, we know how little is provided for the population with regard to healthcare, education and pensions."

Nevertheless, a few participants advocated for higher spending on security and defence in the national budget of EU member states. Sophie, a Belgian national, said: "Defence and security is one of the most expensive areas. If you want to prepare properly, you need to have weapons, tanks. And since we are in a Union, we do need to support others as well. I think security and defence goes way beyond just combat. To me, it should be at least 20% of the national budget."

Europe's future role in the world

The participants were divided on the future outlook for Europe's role in the world.

Some argued that the EU could emerge as a huge contributor towards Ukraine's victory and reconstruction, thus reinforcing its image in the international arena. Julia from Germany summed up this point of view: "Once the war in Ukraine is over, however far away that may be, the EU will be stronger. In the history of the EU, crises have always led to more integration and therefore making the community more able to react to future crises." She added: "Defence was always a field in which the EU was seen as a toothless tiger in the world," while now "we are seeing some incredible advances in a very short time. So, I'm confident that this, too, is a crisis that will help us get stronger in the world." Indeed, some citizens also pointed to the need for the EU to reinforce its common security and defence policy and strategic autonomy. "For bad or good, a country or a union in the case of EU can make itself heard only with a strong military presence," said Fotios, a Greek national.

Other participants were more pessimistic concerning the EU's power and influence in global affairs, like German citizen Bernadette, who said the EU was incapable of becoming a truly global actor and "will return to its daily chaotic business where politicians will not find compromises and will block each other from finding [fast] solutions." In the eyes of the pessimists, the EU will gradually decline and other players, notably in Asia, will step up.

To summarise, most participants felt that the outcome of the war in Ukraine would determine Europe's standing in the future. Generally, they wanted Europe to be more proactive and less reactive towards global affairs and events, and to help Ukraine's reconstruction. As Cristian from Romania

put it: "We as Europeans need to show solidarity towards Ukraine and help its reconstruction."

Compulsory military service

Most participants opposed compulsory military service for a variety of reasons. Some identified as pacifists and would not want to carry a weapon or fight, while others pointed to the injustices of war saying that "those who die are usually not those responsible for causing it". Hans, a Dutch citizen, argued that "no person should have an obligation to serve an armed force since a conflict/war means a complete failure of your government to protect your dignity and human rights and that of others."

Another argument was that compulsory military service would neither help increase the capabilities of European armies nor their acceptance in societies. Lukas from Germany said: "I don't see the benefit of forcing this debate. It will not help the military to fight but will create a division in society."

If there were compulsory national service, some participants would prefer to have community civilian service instead of military duty. A few even suggested EU-wide conscription instead of a national service within EU countries. Gregorio from Italy and France said: "I'd welcome an EU-wide conscription, not a national one, for example, with an EU service day which could also contribute to strengthen the European identity."

CONCLUSION

European young people care about the war in Ukraine. They feel the effects of the war through rising energy prices and inflation.

When it comes to security, Europeans generally regard NATO as the key actor that ensures the defence of Europe, even though some citizens would prefer a more EU-focused defence alliance that is less dependent on the United States than NATO. The findings underline support for deeper integration in defence among EU member states to make better use of increased defence spending in individual national budgets.

Regarding the EU's role in the future of global affairs, citizens are divided. Some argue that the EU is losing influence in international relations, especially as other actors such as China and India emerge. However, others believe that the EU is perceived as one of the main supporters of Ukraine and will be strengthened by contributing to its victory and reconstruction.

Theatre in Mariupol, destroyed by Russian bombing, in which Ukrainian civilians were reportedly sheltering inside, in April 2022; Source: Wikimedia Commons Lirhan 2016

Shopping mall damaged in shelling on 21 March 2022 by a Russian attack in Kyiv, where emergency services say at least six people died; Source: Drop of Light / Shutterstock

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