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Summary

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, transatlantic allies demonstrated remarkable unity and resolve. The discussions at the Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC, highlighted the need to build on this transatlantic momentum and develop joint responses to Russia and a multitude of other threats. To turn the tide on the crises of the “Zeitenwende,” maintaining unity, investing in the strength of democracies, and deepening global partnerships will be vital.

From May 9 to 11, 2022, the Munich Security Conference (MSC) hosted a Munich Leaders Meeting (MLM) in Washington, DC, that brought together around 80 high-level decision-makers and senior experts from both sides of the Atlantic, including heads of state and government, cabinet ministers, and members of parliament. Around 20 discussion sessions took place at the Hay-Adams Hotel, the German ambassador’s residence, and – at the invitation of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi – the US Capitol. While the debates were held under Chatham House rule, the MSC was given permission to cite individual comments.

Confronted with a multitude of mutually reinforcing crises, transatlantic leaders at the MLM tirelessly stressed the importance of maintaining and further deepening transatlantic bonds. As the systemic competition with autocracies hardens, a common chorus of the debates was the need for transatlantic allies to strengthen their positions, including by bolstering defense, economic competitiveness, and societal resilience. To assume credible global leadership and build partnerships in the Global South, discussions concluded that commitment to good governance and the rule of law must be the leitmotif of the domestic and foreign policies of the transatlantic partners.

Over the three days of the MLM, a long, ambitious “transatlantic to-do list” emerged from the discussions. This list can serve as benchmark for building a future-proof transatlantic partnership – and will be followed up on by the MSC in the months ahead.

Building a Transatlantic To-Do List

After the remarkable level of transatlantic unity on display at the Munich Security Conference 2022,¹ the Munich Leaders Meeting (MLM) from May 9 to 11 reconvened transatlantic decision-makers and experts in Washington, DC, to build on the foundation laid in February. In the intervening months, Russian President Vladimir Putin's murderous war against Ukraine put that transatlantic unity to a test and led German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to proclaim a "*Zeitenwende*" – a watershed moment – for Germany and Europe.²

However, as jarring a breach of our civilizational norms as Russia's attack was, the *Zeitenwende*, in fact, is a broader phenomenon. Germany and the world have in fact been facing a situation in which foundational certainties are eroding and long-held principles of foreign policy are called into question.³ At the same time, multiple mutually reinforcing crises are building up to a tidal wave. Challenges including an intractable pandemic, accelerating climate change, constant technological disruptions, and humanitarian crises of various types are a hallmark of this new era. So are the glaring inequalities and vulnerabilities resulting from globalization and interconnectedness. Exacerbating them is the intensifying contest between liberal and illiberal forces both within democratic nations and on the international stage. The fronts in the systemic competition between democracies and autocracies are only hardening as China gives cover to Russia's aggressive revisionism. This wave of compounding crises seems to have crested just as the MSC 2022 convened in February.

Fortunately, transatlantic partners held together as the wave broke in the form of Russia's attack on Ukraine. The United States once again stepped into a leading role in support of Ukraine and in coordinating the transatlantic response vis-à-vis Russia. Germany, with Chancellor Scholz's historic speech days after the Russian invasion, announced a flurry of foreign policy about-faces, including a massive boost to defense spending.⁴ Finland and Sweden have decided to join NATO. The transatlantic allies together, albeit with some latecomers and holdouts, have placed uniquely harsh sanctions on Moscow while marshalling military, financial, and humanitarian support worth more than 70 billion US dollars for Kyiv.⁵

Now, the question is whether the transatlantic partnership can go from weathering the storm to "turning the tide," as the Munich Security Report



“We have to create a democratic center of gravity, using our political, economic and military power.”

Tytti Tuppurainen, Finnish Minister for European Affairs and Ownership Steering, Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC, May 10, 2022

2022 urges.⁶ At the Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC, from May 9 to 11, transatlantic leaders were charged with taking stock of where they stand at the *Zeitenwende* on various challenges and articulating ways to shape the short- and long-term future. Over three days, the MLM convened current and former heads of state and government, several cabinet ministers, members of parliament, and around 80 other senior figures from governments, armed forces, business, and research institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. Meetings took place at the Hay-Adams Hotel overlooking the White House, the German ambassador’s residence, and – at the invitation of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi – the US Capitol.

On the agenda were around 20 discussion sessions under Chatham House rule; the MSC was given express permission to quote individual statements. The topics ran the gamut from relations with Russia and China to global challenges in areas like food and health security, energy, and technology. Across the board, the discussions stressed a need to maintain unity and deepen cooperation. Democracies would need to strengthen their positions in a variety of areas, including defense, economic competitiveness, societal resilience, as well as through their commitment to good governance and the rule of law. Particularly the latter was seen as indispensable for the transatlantic partners to take credible global leadership and broaden cooperation beyond the traditional “West.” At the end of the three days, the discussions had brought forward a multitude of wide-ranging and ambitious action items for the transatlantic partners to pursue – a “transatlantic to-do list.”

Russia and European Security

With Russia’s war against Ukraine nearing the three-month mark, Russian aggression and its implications for Ukraine and European and international security were front and center of the discussions at the MLM. Transatlantic leaders largely described the invasion as a major “strategic failure” for Russia – militarily, but also economically and politically. Since Ukraine succeeded in repelling forces near Kyiv and largely halting Russian offensives across the rest of the country, the Kremlin has been forced to shrink its ambition from gaining control of all Ukraine to consolidating its position in the East and South. The participants agreed that – against Putin’s expectations – the transatlantic alliance had demonstrated remarkable levels of unity and resolve, activating the full range of military, economic, and political support for Ukraine. Rather than driving NATO apart, the Russian aggression had reinvigorated the alliance and even galvanized Finland and Sweden to officially apply for membership.



“We will be living next to a North Korea, maybe for the long term.”

Kersti Kaljulaid, former Estonian President, Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC, May 10, 2022

At the same time, transatlantic leaders at the MLM called for “preparing for the long haul,” maintaining unity and further stepping up support for Ukraine. In addition to expanding the supply of ammunition and heavy weapons and broadening the scope of sanctions, participants pointed to the need to further scale up humanitarian aid, and support Ukraine in tracing and prosecuting war crimes. “To make ‘Never Again’ a reality, we need justice and accountability for the war crimes committed by Putin,” highlighted President of Kosovo Vjosa Osmani.

A Putin-led Russia will persist in trying to destabilize Euro-Atlantic security, pursuing a highly revisionist, militarized foreign policy for the years to come. Transatlantic allies must prepare to safeguard “every inch of territory of NATO countries” – as vowed by US President Joe Biden in his State of the Union Speech in March⁷ – and beyond, as Russia’s belligerence extends to outer space, as well as the cyber and information space. This requires, participants agreed, bolstering NATO’s deterrence and defense posture. They highlighted the need for more ready and capable forces and repeatedly underlined that Europe needs to further increase and sustain heightened levels of defense spending. “We took peace for granted. And now we have learned that it is neither guaranteed nor for free,” reflected Norbert Röttgen, Member of the German Bundestag. Another participant concluded that “the key challenge for transatlantic leaders is to make the *Zeitenwende* permanent.” In this context, several speakers called for further deepening NATO-EU cooperation. As NATO and EU membership are set to increasingly overlap, a common chorus was that EU security and defense capabilities “are complementary, not competing” with NATO.

A recurring theme was the need to reduce the attack surface for Russian influence and hybrid warfare. Participants repeatedly referred to three key dimensions. First, Europe needs to tackle dependency on Russian fossil fuel imports and scale up efforts to promote “security-proof” energy diversification. Given infrastructure and supply constraints, however, it will be an uphill battle. With energy prices set to remain high and volatile, participants stressed clearly communicating to the public about the costs and importance of weaning Europe off Russian energy imports. Second, transatlantic partners need to further cut into Russian kleptocratic networks and “take a hard look at themselves,” tackling enablers of corruption in their own ranks. Third, pointing to the “battle of narratives” and the Kremlin’s large-scale disinformation campaigns, speakers argued that transatlantic allies need to enhance efforts to counter Russian propaganda and reach more people –



including inside Russia – with more accurate information.

As Russia's war against Ukraine illustrates the global trend of expanding authoritarianism, the theme of fortifying democracies carried over into discussions about systemic competition, especially with China. Participants stressed the importance of learning the right lessons from the current situation about how to deal with China and its motives and tactics.

China and Systemic Competition

As the discussions made clear, Russia and China pose very different challenges with respect to their approaches to shaping global affairs and their economic power and interconnectedness. At the same time, Moscow's and Beijing's shared ambition to push international norms compatible with their authoritarian rule and establish spheres of influence increasingly poses a joint challenge. The discussion highlighted the significance of Chinese President Xi Jinping's denunciation of NATO in his February 4 statement with President Putin.⁸ The friendship with "no limits" pronounced in the joint statement has been put to the test by Russia's attack on Ukraine, but it is still holding. Participants discussed the Chinese leadership's rationale for standing by Moscow, with Beijing's increasingly zero-sum view of relations with the US a focal point. Still, China is not comfortable with the current situation. It miscalculated how the war would drag on and now, as a self-proclaimed advocate for national sovereignty, faces reputational costs for tacitly backing Russia's invasion. From Beijing's viewpoint, it may be a net gain if Russia becomes more isolated and thus more dependent – a "gas station for China," as one speaker, reminiscent of John McCain's famous dictum, put it. However, there is also a point where Russian weakness becomes a liability. Some argued for driving a wedge between Putin and Xi, but few were sanguine about the prospects of dividing the "axis of authoritarianism."



"It's a loss for China that the West has become aware of what dependency means."

Norbert Röttgen, Member of the German Parliament, Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC, May 11, 2022

In any case, though, the course the war in Ukraine has taken and the transatlantic response have made an impression on Beijing. First, participants agreed that Chinese leaders were taken aback by the strength of international sanctions and worried about their own economy's exposure. Second, some surmised that Russia's military misadventure may give China pause regarding its ability to capture Taiwan rapidly enough to avoid the sting of such sanctions.

Participants were also clear on how to tackle the "China challenge" in the wake of the war in Ukraine. Less than a year ago, the Munich Security

Conference co-published a report by a group of transatlantic experts premised on the idea that despite significant convergence, a “gap” exists between European and North American views of China based on “differences in basic approaches to foreign, economic, and security policy,” economic and financial exposure, security interests, and defense commitments.⁹ In Washington, DC, participants agreed that recent events had heightened that convergence, particularly by sparking recognition of economic vulnerabilities. Consequently, the discussions chiefly distilled economic action items for the transatlantic partners. First, transatlantic trade and investment should be strengthened. Second, transatlantic partners should step up joint measures in the areas of export controls, investment screening, and intellectual property protection to maintain technological advantages over China. A prominent issue in this context was that of semiconductors, where discussions urgently called for transatlantic cooperation on supply chain resilience.

Participants also recognized that bolstering democracy and the liberal international order against authoritarian influence could not be a purely transatlantic project. Transatlantic partners would have to build partnerships in the Indo-Pacific in particular, but also in Latin America and Africa, where Beijing is seeking to expand its influence. The US and Europe, as many pointed out, had too long underestimated China’s “game” in the Global South. As a consequence, they must counter China’s corresponding influence over narratives and decisions in the UN and other international fora. However, the discussions also acknowledged that making up for lost time and past missteps in the Global South would not be an easy task.

Global Challenges

Many participants pointed to the transatlantic partners’ lack of credibility in the Global South as a major problem. One consequence is that the transatlantic partners’ response to Russia’s war against Ukraine lacks buy-in. International solidarity “is not as strong as it seems,”¹⁰ as evidenced by 35 abstentions, including some weighty countries’, on the UN General Assembly vote to condemn Russia’s aggression. Four recommendations to foster trust and allow for closer global partnerships emerged prominently from the discussions: transatlantic partners should strengthen the rule of law domestically and adhere to it as a leitmotif of foreign policy, address charges of hypocrisy and double standards, live up to commitments made to developing countries, for instance in the field of climate and health, and counter Russian and Chinese narratives about the war and Western sanctions.

Transatlantic To-Do List

based on discussions held at the Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC, May 9–11, 2022

Continue adaptation of NATO's deterrence and defense posture	1	Defense and Security
Deepen and expand EU-NATO cooperation and relevant EU-US dialogues	2	
Sustain defense spending of at least two percent of GDP and jointly enhance capabilities	3	
Advance military hardware interoperability and data sharing	4	
Accelerate pipeline from commercial to military innovation and facilitate technology adoption in defense	5	
Fortify space assets and enhance transatlantic operational capabilities in space	6	
Intensify cooperation between transatlantic intelligence services and aim to expand the "Five Eyes" standard	7	
Quickly ratify Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership applications	8	
Establish a formalized NATO-Ukraine dialogue	9	
Increase coordinated engagement in the Western Balkans and Caucasus	10	
Facilitate transatlantic trade, market access, and investment, including by ratifying CETA	11	Economy and Technology
Increase frequency of meetings and institutionalization of the Trade and Technology Council	12	
Align and security-proof norm-setting and regulation, especially in economic and technology policy	13	
Reduce dependencies on autocratic states by diversifying strategic supply chains	14	
Strengthen centrality of Europe and the US in the global financial system and deepen cooperation on regulation and supervision	15	
Set up a transatlantic "Article 5" mechanism for responding to economic coercion	16	
Align technology export controls	17	
Secure critical infrastructure, including by aligning investment screening mechanisms	18	
Strengthen government-industry and multilateral coordination on semiconductor policy	19	
Strengthen democracy, human rights, and the rule of law domestically and internationally	20	Democracy and the Rule of Law
Enhance efforts to track and seek accountability for war crimes	21	
Cooperate against threats to social cohesion, including hybrid threats and disinformation	22	
Deepen cooperation and intelligence-sharing on tracing and prosecuting corruption, kleptocracy, and illicit flows	23	
Close loopholes and increase resources to hold enablers of corruption to account, including financial and legal services	24	
Improve transparency including on the ownership of companies and real estate	25	
Cooperate on banning imports from products made with forced labor	26	
Strengthen intellectual property protection, including in scientific and academic cooperation	27	Relations with China
Coordinate diplomacy vis-à-vis China, including at the UN and other international fora	28	
Create greater opportunities for engagement with Taiwan	29	
Increase transatlantic coordination and European engagement in the Indo-Pacific	30	

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| Relations with Russia | 31 | Further deepen support for Ukraine and intensify sanctions against Russia |
| | 32 | Clearly communicate the purpose, costs, and limits of sanctions to the transatlantic public |
| | 33 | Promote European energy diversification, including by building on the EU-US LNG agreement |
| | 34 | Track Russian war crimes and seek accountability |
| | 35 | Identify and freeze assets of Russian kleptocrats and prevent evasion of sanctions |
| | 36 | Comprehensively map out and address vulnerabilities to Russian influence |
| | 37 | Increase efforts to engage with the Russian public and counter state propaganda |
| | 38 | Recalibrate engagement on Arctic security, including in the Arctic Council, to reflect new geopolitical realities |
| Relations with the Global South | 39 | Foster trade and investment ties with countries in the Global South |
| | 40 | Fulfil promises made to Global South countries, including on vaccines and climate finance |
| | 41 | Offer debt relief and make additional funding available to developing countries |
| | 42 | Increase investment in cultural diplomacy towards the Global South |
| | 43 | Foster domestic support by clearly communicating the purpose and benefits of development aid to transatlantic publics |
| | 44 | Counter Russian and Chinese narratives, including on the war in Ukraine and its global effects |
| Health Security | 45 | Invest in distributed regional manufacturing and delivery systems for vaccines in low- and middle-income countries |
| | 46 | Promote healthcare workforce development, exchange, and mobility |
| | 47 | Align and strengthen global pandemic surveillance systems |
| | 48 | Promote sustained investments in pandemic preparedness and response, including through a Financial Intermediary Fund |
| Food Security | 49 | Scale up short-term food assistance and emergency relief |
| | 50 | Work together to get Ukrainian grain onto the markets |
| | 51 | Promote the "Global Alliance for Food Security" through the G7 |
| | 52 | Ensure that the World Food Programme and other aid organizations are fully funded |
| | 53 | Invest in the long-term transformation and resilience of the global food system |
| Climate | 54 | Harmonize the EU and US green agendas and manage socio-economic repercussions |
| | 55 | Support the green transition in developing countries, including by fostering climate finance and transfers of clean energy |
| | 56 | Cooperate to make the use of LNG more sustainable |
| | 57 | Agree on a common narrative on the strategic opportunities of climate adaptation and mitigation efforts |
| | 58 | Align policies on the management and protection of global commons like the international seabed |

This to-do list is neither intended as a ranking of priorities nor an exhaustive list, but an overview which the Munich Security Conference aims to follow up and build on at its upcoming meetings.

Since “globally, more people are blaming the sanctions for rising food prices than are blaming the invasion,” as former British foreign minister and President of the International Rescue Committee David Miliband posited, transatlantic partners need to address such disinformation and scale up efforts to tackle the very real threat of hunger. Already at the MSC 2022 in February, David Beasley, Director of the World Food Programme, warned that the dire effects of Covid-19 and climate change severely exacerbated global food insecurity, with “285 million people marching towards starvation and 810 million facing chronic hunger.”¹¹ At the MLM, participants stressed that these numbers are rapidly rising as both Ukraine and Russia are major food exporters and prices for energy and fertilizers are surging. To address the food emergency, speakers called for a “Global Alliance for Food Security” – as proposed by the German Ministry for Cooperation and Development.¹² While highlighting that emergency food assistance, together with fiscal support and debt relief, must be a “top priority,” speakers emphasized that efforts must be coupled with long-term measures to build up more resilient food systems.¹³

The need to combine short- and long-term efforts was also a recurrent theme. As the Covid-19 pandemic is “far from over” and the target of a 70-percent vaccination coverage in every country far from fulfilled,¹⁴ discussions highlighted the need to address vaccine inequality. Yet, speakers underlined that, at the same time, transatlantic leaders must promote sustained investments in pandemic preparedness and response to mitigate future global health emergencies. Some voiced concerns that the war in Ukraine dilutes attention for Covid-19. That reduces “political will and financial clout” to address the current health crisis and invest in the global health system in order to be prepared for the next one.



“The energy crisis is a story of two tales: over-dependence on Russia and overdependence on fossil fuels. We have to tell both stories simultaneously.”

Sergey Lagodinsky, Member of the European Parliament, Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC, May 10, 2022

Possible ripple effects of Russia’s war against Ukraine were also a central point of discussion with regard to another global challenge, climate change. As tackling the energy crisis and reducing fossil fuel imports from Russia is set to increase US oil and gas production, speakers warned against a corresponding increase in greenhouse gas emissions. Rather, transatlantic partners should use the momentum to further deepen climate cooperation, for example by aligning efforts to “green” LNG. In addition to advancing green agendas at home, discussants underlined that the transatlantic partners need to increase support for the energy transition of developing countries, including by delivering on their climate finance promises and providing low-carbon technology and know-how.



Participants repeatedly pointed out that pandemics, food insecurity, and climate change are strongly interlinked and are further accelerating conflict dynamics. Thus, addressing these global challenges must become part of far-sighted, human-centered security policy.

A Transatlantic To-Do List

As geopolitical tensions and systemic competition increasingly hamstringing the work of international organizations, transatlantic leadership and outreach becomes ever more important. To lead effectively, the transatlantic partners must maintain unity, strengthen their own democratic societies, and make them more defensible. As the discussions in Washington, DC, concluded, that encompasses investing in security and defense, reducing dependencies and attack surfaces, promoting economic competitiveness, and bolstering societal resilience. Across all these areas, strong political leadership and clear communication are key to secure support among transatlantic publics.

Yet, as MSC Chairman Christoph Heusgen pointed out in his concluding remarks at the MLM, “transatlantic unity is key, but it is not enough.” To turn the tide on the crises of the *Zeitenwende*, deepening global partnerships will be essential. That goes especially for countries “on the fence” about closer alignment with the transatlantic community. To do so, transatlantic partners need to adopt an approach that will enable them to lead credibly. That means putting universal principles like the rule of law and accountability at the center of foreign policy, fulfilling outstanding promises regarding equity in pandemic and climate relief, and telling a more convincing narrative than their authoritarian rivals.



“There is no global issue that could not benefit from deepened transatlantic cooperation.”

Amanda Sloat, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European Affairs, US National Security Council, Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington DC, May 11, 2022

The “transatlantic to-do list” that can be drawn from the three days’ discussions at the Munich Leaders Meeting is long, ambitious, and yet – due to the vast breadth of challenges facing the world – incomplete. But it is a benchmark for a transatlantic partnership that has been reinvigorated by the current crisis. Over the next months, the Munich Security Conference will use its upcoming meetings on a wide range of issue areas to fill in the gaps and continue to remind transatlantic leaders of the goals they need to set themselves.





Key Points

- 1 Recognizing the need to meet the challenges of a “Zeitenwende,” transatlantic decision-makers showed remarkable unity and ambition at the Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, DC.
- 2 Transatlantic partners need to maintain their resolve in supporting Ukraine and opposing Russia, reprioritize defense investment, tighten sanctions, and reduce attack surface for Russia.
- 3 To meet the challenge of China, they must bolster their economic security and competitiveness, as well as build closer partnerships outside the transatlantic community.
- 4 To deepen partnerships in the Global South, transatlantic partners have to strengthen their credibility by upholding the rule of law and fulfilling outstanding promises in areas like food and health security.
- 5 Addressing the challenges posed by Russia, China, and many global crises and disruptions, both short- and long-term, amounts to a complex and ambitious “transatlantic to-do list” to be followed up on at coming Munich Security Conference events.

Endnotes

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