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Special Issue | MSC 2025

Getting Europe's Defense Right

FOR A STRONG EUROPE

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German air force servicemen in Lativa

Masthead

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Editor's Note

For Europe, defense is key. This is the message the Polish EU presidency is sending with its slogan "Security, Europe!" It is what is animating European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's second term. It is what NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte means when he calls for a "shift to a wartime mindset." Now European states, including the United Kingdom, need to make it happen—and fast. While NATO allies were debating which percentage of GDP would be adequate for defense spending, Russia increased its defense expenditure by 42 percent from 2023 to 2024 (see p. 15).

IPQ is delighted to publish this special issue on the occasion of the Munich Security Conference 2025, focused on European defense. It is, of course, not the only topic shaping the global security debate, but given what's at stake, it is a crucial one.—*Henning Hoff*

How to Talk About European Security

The tradition of discussing European security in ways that befuddle bystanders is long-standing. This guide will help you navigate the debates that will inevitably take place at this year's MSC.

By Jörg Lau

Autonomy (*as in "European strategic autonomy"*) Integral part of French political folklore when addressing Europe's future. It rarely catches on elsewhere, however, with the exception of German coalition agreements, where it is mandatory to overuse it. Calls for it are never followed up by concrete steps that would help to enable it, such as giving up the permanent French UN Security Council seat for the EU, or Europeanizing the French nuclear deterrent.

Deterrence Long neglected, it is making a comeback in European debates—because there is reason to fear that deterrence is continuously deteriorating under the pressure of Russia and China's "hybrid attacks." Getting rid of nuclear sharing used to be a staple of German election campaigns. No more. Keeping the US nuclear umbrella extended over Europe's skies is a consensus now, thanks to Putin's permanent nuclear signaling.

Diplomacy The term "diplomatic solution" is often used emphatically in contrast to military or other means of coercion (like sanctions)—ignoring that diplomacy without any backing of force is unlikely to settle violent conflicts. Diplomacy is misrepresented as an alternative to power politics, not as one political tool that can only work in combination with others.

Escalation This is something Ukraine or Ukraine's supporters do. It is not something Russia does, or those enabling Russia's war against Ukraine.

European army An expression of European helplessness. Calling for the establishment of a European army is most commonly found in political party platforms across the continent.

Global South A term of yearning used in Europe to describe the aim of creating a more just world in terms of the economic and political order. Speaking of the Global South often means Europeans are failing to recognize the many and growing differences between those countries once described as "emerging market economies." A few are actively enabling Russia's continued war against Ukraine; one is co-fighting it (North Korea).

Multipolar world A pseudo-descriptive term used to speak about today's (or tomorrow's) world, pretending it is a statement of fact. It was first introduced by the Russian (a certain Sergey Lavrov) and Chinese UN ambassadors in 1997, in a letter to the UN General Assembly. They argued against "Western hegemony" after the end of the Cold War and described the aim of a new order of autocratic states in "Eurasia"—geared against Washington and Brussels and shielded by the principle of non-intervention.

Realism Camouflage term for calling on Ukrainians to give up their fight against Russian aggression. Used by those in Europe who argue against continued support for Ukraine. Their argument: Great nuclear powers such as Russia cannot be defeated and have a sort of "natural right" to their spheres of influence. Ironically, the realists' assessment of Russia is unrealistic—as would an attempt to base a future world order on the law of the jungle.

Security guarantees The more it becomes clear that the only real guarantee—NATO membership—is off the table for Ukraine, the more the debate about security guarantees takes off. The best the Ukrainians can hope for is continued support for their self-defense, which is what the pompous term "security guarantees" actually means.

Snooze button (*as in "hitting the snooze button"*) A phrase to describe the default European response to any adverse development affecting the continent's security.

Wake-up call Rhetorical device used when something bad happens to Europe that was neither unforeseen nor surprising but Europeans previously found too uncomfortable to address. Does not normally lead Europeans to take action (cf. snooze button).

Jörg Lau's column "Around the World in 80 Phrases" appears regularly in German in *Internationale Politik*. A collection will be published as a book in March 2025. **Henning Hoff** contributed to this A to Z.

"The Response Can Only Be: A Stronger Europe"

European countries haven't done enough to improve their defense forces, says the chairman of the Munich Security Conference, **Christoph Heusgen**.

© Andreas Pein/laif

Christoph Heusgen served as Chancellor Angela Merkel's foreign policy advisor from 2005 to 2017, followed by a stint as Germany's permanent representative at the UN (2017 to 2021). In 2022, he took over as chairman of the Munich Security Conference.

Ambassador Heusgen, the reelection of Donald Trump as US president is widely seen as a sea change. Do you agree?

Yes, we did wake up in a new world. However, I think we have some idea what this world looks like. We have the experience of his first administration. I was Chancellor Angela Merkel's foreign policy advisor at the time. My first meeting with Trump's advisor and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, in February 2017 has guided me in my assessment of President Trump and his politics since then. I explained to Jared that I come from a country that has a very strong transatlantic background, that we owe our sovereignty to the United States with the Berlin Airlift 1948-49, with President John F. Kennedy insisting on the independence of West Berlin before and after the building of the Berlin Wall, with Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush being committed to German unity, and that therefore transatlantic relations with a strong military basis in Germany is the foundation of my country. He replied that they were businessmen. And in business, one day you're a friend and the next day, you're an opponent.

Is this the "new normal"?

I think so. The administration of President Joe Biden was the exception—a reminder of what many people consider the "good old days." And there's an element of continuity in what we are seeing now. After her first encounters with President Trump, Chancellor Merkel already said something which I think now needs to be pursued even more vigorously ...

... in the "beer tent speech" in May 2017 near Munich, when she said that Europe needed to take its fate into its own hands "to some extent"?
Exactly. She made clear that we'll not always be able to rely on the US and have to build up a stronger Europe. The outgoing government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz was right to invest a lot in transatlantic relations. What we have failed to do, however, is to work much harder on European defense.

Which means that Europe is unprepared?
At least Europe is sending the right signals. In Ursula von der Leyen, the European Union has a very strong president of the European Commission who clearly says: We have to have a strong Europe, defense is key. For the first time in the history of the EU we have a former prime minister as high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Kaja Kallas, who is one of the most gifted, talented top politicians we have in Europe. We have for the first time a defense commissioner, Andrius Kubilius, also an experienced former prime minister. So, Europe is ready, Brussels has done its homework, and it's now up to member states to actually support this.

What's lacking?
Particularly in Germany, but also in many other countries, we have to overcome this way of thinking: National defense is the core of national sovereignty, we are not ready to empower Europe. If that prevails, we'll miss a chance. Some countries have understood that. I'm really impressed by how the Nordic and Baltic states, the NB8—Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden—have organized themselves. They understand that Russia is a real threat, while we in Germany are still partly living in our version of cloud cuckoo land.

What would be an adequate German response?
We finally have to understand that Vladimir Putin is serious. Russia's president means what he says. Therefore, we have to stop this half-hearted support for Ukraine, and this half-hearted build-up of our defense, and do it more seriously. This, of course, calls for very tough decisions; it calls for leadership. But if we continue to believe that just by going on like this, we will be able to solve the challenges, then we are mistaken.

Chancellor Scholz has called plans to spend 3.5 percent of GDP on defense "half-baked"...
I would recommend the chancellor to talk to his defense minister, who has requested more funds, but has been turned down. The chancellor himself personally agreed at NATO's Vilnius Summit in 2023 that 2 percent is the minimum.

What is lacking the most when it comes to rebuilding Germany's armed forces?
We need everything. We have to invest more to make the Bundeswehr more attractive—and again the defense minister has some ideas there—and we need to recruit more people. We also need more capabilities. So, when we talk about spending figures of 2 or 3.5 percent of GDP, there is a certain degree of arbitrariness in this. You remember that three years ago, the head of the army said, "*Wir stehen blank da*," meaning "We are empty-handed." This has improved, but of course there is a lot more to do.

The leader of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and likely next chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has brought up again the question of establishing a National Security Council. Would that be helpful, too, tying together military and political expertise?
I think we do need to either establish a National Security Council or build structures that correspond to an NSC. We have to have a comprehensive view of the security threats we are faced with. Russia is clearly conducting a hybrid war against Germany and Europe; we just don't realize it. But if you look at what's being done with regard to first the attack on Ukraine, then the attack on infrastructure—in the Baltic Sea, but also on land—with regard to the attempts to influence social media, and also the fact that Putin doesn't even have a problem with killing people right under the nose of the government in Berlin, then you see he is in an undeclared hybrid war with Germany. We have to realize that and to reflect that in our structures.

WE HAVE TO HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF THE SECURITY THREATS WE ARE FACED WITH. RUSSIA IS CLEARLY CONDUCTING A HYBRID WAR.

CHRISTOPH HEUSGEN

You've also advocated for the merging of the Foreign Office and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in the past.
Economically, Germany is again being called "the sick

man of Europe." In the past, we relied on cheap energy from Russia and on exports to and investment in China. This doesn't work anymore, so we have to diversify—and to look at other Asian countries, to African countries, to Latin American countries. Taken as a whole, Africa for instance is the second fastest growing economy worldwide. And Germany is hardly present there.

So, you're saying Berlin needs to connect the dots?
For a country that is under the kind of strain that we are, I find it absurd that we don't have a comprehensive strategy that combines foreign policy, economic relations, and development policy. Germany is one of the last countries that still has separate foreign and economic development ministries. You don't need to have a merger, you can still have two ministers, but the structures have to be linked much more closely. When I started out as a diplomat in 1980, we had two-thirds of our personnel working around the world, in our missions. Today it's two-thirds working in Berlin. We have to change that again. If you go to an African country, you have two or three German diplomats in their mission, and across the street you have 100 Chinese ones. No wonder they are more effective than we are.

Aren't you worried about Germany and Europe's ability to survive in this new world, which even the US is approaching in a more transactional way?
We have to have the right responses—to Russia, to China, and to the second Trump administration. On foreign and security policy, the response can only be: a stronger and more unified Europe.

Do you see the danger of Washington doing a deal with Moscow over the heads of the Europeans?
The US administration is likely to do a deal with Russia, and then they'll tell us what our role will be in this.

Could it entail European forces being permanently stationed in Ukraine?
Possibly. It's clear that the US is not willing to give Ukraine the guarantee the Ukrainians want, and that is NATO membership. Biden was not ready; Trump will not be ready—so what are the alternatives? You have to provide Ukraine with the weapons it needs, and possibly European or other troops, to raise the price for Russia attacking again, and of course this is on the cards.

What role will this year's MSC play?
The MSC's motto is "peace through dialogue." We want to get as many parties to Munich as possible. US-China relations are critical. Also, we have to address various regional conflicts. When we talk about "peace through dialogue" we do this on a solid basis and that is the rule of law, the charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is why during my three years as chairman I invited all the major UN players.

Will the new US administration be there, too?
I am confident that we'll have a strong US presence. Last year we had then-US Vice President, Kamala Harris and JD Vance, who now holds that office. And the EU institutions will be represented well, too. It's Europe's hour, really. Then, as I said earlier with reference to Germany's economic woes, we'll only grow again if we reach out to countries from the Global South. One quarter of MSC speakers will be from the Global South. This is something I achieved during my three years as MSC chairman, and I will continue advocating for it. And we take a comprehensive view of security: We will speak about defense and deterrence, but we'll also talk about climate policy, cyber security, and disinformation through social media. One last point is that I deeply believe in the need to have gender balance. Last year for the first time in the MSC's history more than 50 percent of those on the podiums were women.

> **WHEN WE TALK ABOUT "PEACE THROUGH DIALOGUE" WE DO THIS ON THE BASIS OF THE RULE OF LAW.**
> CHRISTOPH HEUSGEN

So, the MSC is reflecting a changing world order?
We aim to foster a discussion reflecting diverse views. But no matter how much the world order is changing, peace through dialogue needs to be based on the rules-based international order, anchored in the UN Charter. The rule of law is key, and unfortunately we often underestimate what we have achieved in Europe in this respect. We have to secure this, also in the face of countries that challenge the rule of law. I don't see an alternative. Too often, when people talk about a new world order, there are no new substantive elements, but only a reliance on the rule of the strongest.

Will the second Trump administration be an ally when it comes to upholding international law?
Perhaps the current US administration will not wake up every morning thinking about how to strengthen international law. But that should be no reason to give up on it. Germany's first postwar chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, said that for him the rule of law was the most important. This was the conclusion of the founding fathers and mothers of West Germany and the European Union after World War II. And this remains true today!

America First Does Not Mean Europe Alone

There is a chance for renewing the transatlantic relationship under the second Trump administration.

By Nadia Schadlow

© REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

President Donald Trump arrives at the 2018 NATO summit in Brussels.

There is a widespread view in Europe and beyond that the United States, led by a new Trump administration, will work against the rest of the world—and Europe in particular. (Indeed, when *Internationale Politik Quarterly* first approached me to write the scene setter for this issue, the initial placeholder title for this article was "The United States vs. the World: The Second Trump Administration and the Future of Transatlantic Relations.")

THE RENEWAL OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP AS A RECIPROCAL ARRANGEMENT IS POSSIBLE. EUROPE MUST FIRST TAKE STEPS TO ADDRESS ITS MYRIAD PROBLEMS.

NADIA SCHADLOW

Many American progressives, some European leaders, and a range of international observers appear to hold this view, believing that President Donald Trump is inherently hostile to Europe as a result of his "America First" focus. Such beliefs manifested in the many pre-election conversations about the need to "Trump-proof" transatlantic institutions, especially NATO.

Indeed, Trump does not see the United States as the world's "indispensable defender" (as *The Economist* put it in January), and he is unlikely to accept the status quo in Europe—or in much of the rest of the world. But neither should Europeans. Trump's identification of key problems in the transatlantic relationship should be seen as a first step toward making progress on them—together—and benefiting from a renewed transatlantic relationship.

This renewal will occur within the context of the Trump administration's America First policy approach.

Taking Security Seriously First, as he did during his first term, President Trump will continue to ask Europeans to take security seriously and to step up. He has not been the only president to voice concerns about Europe's minimal dedication to self-defense. Decades before Trump's election, American leaders made the same point in different terms. For instance, in 2016, then-President Barack Obama stated that "Europe has sometimes been complacent about its own defense."

Similarly, in 2008, then-President George W. Bush urged his European allies to "increase their defense investments to support both NATO and EU operations." In recent years, some European leaders have begun heeding these calls: In April 2024, while announcing a gradual increase in the United Kingdom's defense spending, then-Prime Minster Rishi Sunak warned that Europeans "cannot keep expecting America to pay any price or bear any burden if we ourselves are unwilling to make greater sacrifices for our own security."

A recent European Commission report completed by Finland's former President Sauli Niinstö stated in October 2024 that Europe must tend to the "new reality" it faces. This new reality is best exemplified by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which underlined "Putin's long-held perception that the West and Western people are weak." Niinistö urged Europeans to prioritize security in a very clear way, stating that "security is the foundation of everything we hold dear. Security is a public good—the most important thing that everyone needs. It is the precondition for maintaining our values, as well as being a necessity for our economic success and competitiveness. If we lose security, it takes with it our well-being and our plans for the future."

These insights are the perfect foundation for working with the new Trump team on both the military capabilities and operational concepts that can improve security in Europe. And these conversations should also consider how the private sector from both sides of the Atlantic can contribute to and shape this environment. There's a lot to work on.

Enhancing Energy Security Second, Trump is likely to continue to emphasize the geopolitical risks of Europe's energy policies. He sparked a lot of criticism in his first term for criticizing Germany (in particular) for its dependence on Russian gas. While that has changed since Russia's invasion—the Bruegel think tank reported that between 2022 and the end of 2023, the EU slashed its imports of Russian fossil fuels by 94 percent—Trump is likely to point out that Europe still depends on Russian liquified natural gas (LNG), which is not sanctioned. He is also likely to agree with European energy analyst Ana Maria Jaller-Makarewicz, who pointed out last December in the *Financial Times* that it was indeed "surprising" that EU imports of LNG from Russia reached an all-time high in 2024 and that overall, "instead of gradually reducing Russian LNG imports, [Europe is] increasing them."

Trump will almost certainly seek arrangements that favor the increase of US LNG—a theme that he repeated consistently throughout his first term and his most recent campaign. He will have support among some Europeans. Mario Draghi, the former president of the European Central Bank, in his now famous report from September 2024 observed that Europe has "the highest energy prices: EU companies face electricity prices that are two to three times higher than those in the United States and in China."

Energy costs will also impact the development of Europe's tech sector, which is already lagging behind the United States and China. Only four of the world's top 50 tech companies are European. And while the reasons for this gap are many, high energy prices will continue to be a drag on reform and innovation—which in turn could impact aspects of the transatlantic relationship.

EUROPEANS MUST BEGIN TO DEMAND AS MUCH FROM THEMSELVES AS THEY DEMAND FROM THE UNITED STATES.

NADIA SCHADLOW

Alignment on China Policy Third, Trump will likely seek European alignment with US efforts to oppose China's increasing political, economic, and military aggression. He recognizes that the best way for that to happen is for Europe to first help itself by breaking free of its deep dependencies on China. This process of continent-wide self-help requires that Europeans engage with Trump in good faith when he points out legitimate and pressing problems that are originating from Beijing.

As just one example, by rushing to abandon fossil fuels in pursuit of net-zero emissions, Europe has made its energy infrastructure and supply reliant on green technology supply chains that are almost entirely dominated by China. Relatedly, Beijing is purposefully flooding European markets with cheap, subsidized goods—including, among other things, solar panels and electric vehicles—that prevent European firms from being able to profitably compete, thereby positioning China to be a sole supplier. In the absence of policy reversals, as my Hudson Institute colleague Peter Rough has noted, the Chinese Communist Party has more opportunities to entrench itself in European electronic systems, steal intellectual property, and consolidate its influence in a private sector establishment that is addicted to Chinese capital and resources.

Through his America First policy agenda, particularly his push for greater US manufacturing independence, Trump has demonstrated his view that economic and material dependencies eventually lead to an erosion of political autonomy. On the basis of this understanding, he wants Europe to reclaim its status as a capable and reliable US partner by asserting greater independence across a variety of areas. Only then will the collective West be able to resist Chinese revisionism.

This process can start, as previously mentioned, with expanded US-European energy cooperation—which will give Europe a solid foundation on which to rebuild its economic-industrial base and diminish Chinese leverage over European decision-making.

A Strong Position Vis-à-Vis Russia Fourth, regarding Ukraine, while there is a common perception that the new US president will prioritize a "friendly" relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, his statements so far tell a different story. During a phone call between President-elect Trump and Putin to discuss the ongoing war in Ukraine soon after his reelection, Trump purportedly warned the Russian president against escalating the war, while reminding him of the US military's significant presence in Europe. The Kremlin subsequently denied that this interaction occurred, lending credence to the initial reporting.

The interaction is one example that, as Trump's former national security advisor Robert O'Brien observed, the second Trump administration will take seriously the mantra of preserving "peace through strength." Shortly after the conversation with Putin, Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris ahead of the Notre-Dame Cathedral's reopening ceremony. During the meeting, Trump voiced his hope for a strong post-war Ukraine—the security of which, in his view, should be guaranteed and supported by Europe, possibly with the placement of European troops within the recovering country. Additionally, he urged his counterparts to pressure Beijing into forcing Moscow to end the conflict, potentially by using tariffs on China as a motivator.

The next day, Trump called for an "immediate ceasefire" in the Russo-Ukrainian War—writing on social media that "Zelensky and Ukraine would like to make a deal and stop the madness." In the same message, he also prodded Putin by noting that "close to 600,000 Russian soldiers lay wounded or dead, in a war that should never have started, and could go on forever."

Trump is not content to blindly accept Russian propaganda and disinformation. His apparent willingness to defy Russian leadership, speak with European stakeholders about the conflict, and advocate for a managed conclusion to the war stands in opposition to the pre-election prognostications that he would

Russian LNG is not sanctioned. European imports of it reached an all-time high in 2024.

immediately abandon Ukraine and Europe upon his return to the White House. So far, he has worked to establish a process by which the war can be resolved.

Migration as a Common Concern There are, of course, more issues that the United States and Europe could work together on in the coming years. Trump will be receptive to discussions about how to combat the growing scourge of antisemitism in the United States and across Europe.

And there will be many opportunities to discuss the problems of mass migration and illegal immigration that continue to impact both sides of the Atlantic. Decades of development policies by the United States and Europe have failed. They have not produced the types of communities and societies in which people want to stay. Not only is it worth seriously rethinking development priorities and approaches, but it is also necessary to speak honestly about the problem of migration, which has had and will continue to have significant social and policy implications for the United States and Europe.

There must be a transatlantic consensus that the primary responsibility to our democracies is the stability of our nations' societal and economic fabric, something that will not be achieved by open borders, mass migration, or the growth of radical Islamism throughout Europe. Since shared values are a key part of the fabric of the transatlantic relationship, this matters.

The challenges and potential solutions are unfolding within the context of Trump's America First policy agenda. As he and many of those close to him have repeated, America First does not mean America alone. But it does mean that US policy must be concerned first and foremost with advancing the interests of the United States, with Europe working with us as a capable partner.

European countries must demonstrate that they are dependable allies by strengthening their national defense, securing their energy infrastructure, safeguarding their economic security, and standing up for the values that bind the United States and Europe together.

Europeans must begin to demand as much from themselves as they demand from the United States.

Some European leaders recognize this. Shortly after Trump's reelection, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni told other European leaders, "Don't ask what the US can do for you, ask what Europe should do for itself." Meloni has advocated for Europe to maintain a pragmatic, constructive, and open approach with the new Trump administration, focusing on areas of potential cooperation. Similarly, Macron warned, "We [in Europe] think that we should delegate our geopolitics to the United States of America, that we should delegate our growth debt to our Chinese clients, that we should delegate our technological innovation to the American hyper-scalers. That's not the best idea."

A Chance for Renewal The renewal of the transatlantic relationship as a *reciprocal* political-economic-security arrangement is possible. To ensure it evolves in positive directions, Europe must first recognize and take steps to resolve the myriad problems that are plaguing the continent. There are opportunities now, working with Washington, to address them.

Nadia Schadlow is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. In 2017, she was the primary architect of the first Trump administration's National Security Strategy.

Twenty-five years ago, British diplomat Robert Cooper published a short pamphlet called *The Postmodern State and the World Order.* Widely accepted as a strategy for the times, it argued that the "modern" geopolitical era in Europe was giving way as globalization and the collapse of the Soviet Union removed the need for the modern state. In its place, Cooper foresaw the emergence of a "postmodern bloc" of nations—largely coterminous with the European Union—which interfered with national laws, "right down to beer and sausages."

Cooper did not think the post-Cold War world would be without its troubles, however. Just as the collapse of the Soviet Union and globalization were removing the need for the modern state, they were also destabilizing a number of fragile countries, to the extent that "zones of chaos" were emerging around the world—and particularly in the former Yugoslavia. For Cooper, as for other leaders at the time, Europeans would need to do more to stabilize these countries, even mandating a kind of "liberal imperialism." Serving from 2002 to 2010 as director general of politico-military affairs at the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, Cooper helped shape the EU's 2003 European Security Strategy, and European strategic discourse more broadly.

Geostrategic Rethink

Securing the future defense of the Euro-Atlantic in an Indo-Pacific era will be critical for Europe. A robust strategy is needed to keep the CRINK states—China, Russia, Iran, North Korea—in check.

By James Rogers and Kevin Rowlands

Fast forward to 2025 and the world—*particularly* Europe—looks very different. A large, opportunistic state to the east of the continent, Russia, is waging war against another large European state, Ukraine, in a way that few analysts would have thought possible only a few years ago. Another powerful state to the northwest of the continent, the United Kingdom, has withdrawn from the EU, putting paid to one version of Cooper's vision of geopolitical postmodernity. And while NATO has welcomed some new members in Sweden and Finland, a number of both NATO and EU member states—from Hungary and Slovakia to Turkey and possibly Austria—have started to act like "cuckoos in the nest." They have flirted with the Kremlin or charted their own courses.

For all the talk of EU "strategic autonomy," it was British and American intellectual leadership, intelligence, and military-organizational muscle which informed Europe in late 2021 of Russia's intentions to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, shored up Ukraine in early 2022, and enhanced deterrence along NATO's eastern front. It was to the UK, not the EU, that Finland and Sweden looked to provide security assurances once they decided to abandon neutrality in the face of an imminent threat. In short, the "old world" is looking decidedly "modern" again, while the "new world," especially the United States, will no longer offer Europeans a free ride.

Geopolitics Intensifies So, what did early 21st century European strategists get so wrong? To be fair, they got a lot right. Cooper, for example, counselled that Europeans would still need strong defenses to deter rivals and subdue enemies, writing in 2000 in *The Postmodern State*: "Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we also must use the laws of the jungle. In the coming period of peace in Europe, there will be a temptation to neglect our defenses, both physical and psychological. This represents one of the great dangers for the postmodern state."

Unfortunately, the need for strong defenses was ignored, while geopolitics was largely dismissed as obsolete. Europeans treated countries such as Russia and China as "democracies to come," even when it became clear those countries had other plans. Far from becoming "responsible stakeholders" in the open international order, Moscow and Beijing became aggressive competitors and then hostile adversaries.

At the time of Cooper's writing, China was little more than a geopolitical minnow, having witnessed a near revolution in Tiananmen Square only 11 years before. After decades of economic growth and modernization, today China possesses the world's largest manufacturing capability, shipbuilding industry, and merchant marine. China is now being drawn into the world: The country secures energy from the Middle East and Western Africa, buys resources from Africa and South America for economic modernization, and sells its manufactured goods to consumers in Europe and North America. Indeed, those behind the so-called Belt and Road Initiative have their gaze fixed firmly on Western Europe.

Already in possession of the world's largest fleet, Beijing is developing the capacity to project power over extensive distances; it won't be long before Chinese vessels or even flotillas make frequent visits to European peripheries, adding to the continent's complicated maritime flanks. The Chinese navy, once a minnow, is now a shark.

Implications of the New Geopolitics British and continental European strategists have only recently started to realize how serious and entwined the implications of the new geopolitics are. Russia's war against Ukraine has drawn China, Iran, and North Korea into Europe. North Korean troops are thrown at Ukrainian positions, Iranian drones bomb Ukrainian targets, and Chinese economic, industrial, and technological support keeps Russia afloat.

True, China, Iran, and North Korea may have little direct interest in a Russian victory, but they see great danger in a Russian defeat. Should security in Europe improve, the UK and EU member states would be freer to project themselves into the Indo-Pacific. By distracting Europeans—and Americans—in Eastern Europe, Beijing, Tehran, and Pyongyang are reducing the Euro-Atlantic democracies' ability to constrain Chinese, Iranian, and North Korean interests in the South China Sea, in the Middle East, and the Korean peninsula, respectively.

So, while these so-called CRINK countries—China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea—may not like one another, they are all bound by a scorn for the democracies, and not only the US. Russia's war against Ukraine may be the first Indo-Pacific proxy struggle. Whisper it, but Europe is no longer the geographical pivot of history; it is now little more than a periphery of affairs in the Indo-Pacific.

STRATEGISTS HAVE ONLY RECENTLY STARTED TO REALIZE HOW SERIOUS THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW GEOPOLITICS ARE.

JAMES ROGERS AND KEVIN ROWLANDS

Sea Power and Europe's Maritime Flanks When considering geopolitical realities, it's often helpful to look at a map or, better still, a globe. Europe's front line against its nearest adversary—Russia—is certainly the land frontier to the east of the continent, but its northern and southern flanks are decidedly maritime. To hold a strong front, it should go without saying that Europeans need to protect their flanks. Not only should they guard against losing command over maritime regions such as the Arctic Ocean and the Baltic, Mediterranean, and Black Seas, but it is in these spaces where Europeans can seize the initiative and double-down on outflanking their rivals.

One of the most strategically important events of recent tumultuous months has been Russia's temporary, hopefully permanent, loss of a naval foothold in the Mediterranean (Tartus), with its consequent implications for the Kremlin's ability to project power and support client actors, particularly in Africa. For the first time in decades, there is no easy way for Russia to make its presence felt in the Mediterranean—Europe's "soft underbelly."

Meanwhile, in the north, the opening of new sea routes between east and west and the increasing accessibility of natural resources will, over time, be an economic game-changer. It is not in Europeans' interest to allow Russia to turn the Northern Sea Route into a "national toll road," nor allow the non-Arctic Chinese to become the High North's principal economic beneficiary. It is not only Russia's littoral zones that should spark European interest. There are sound geopolitical and security reasons for US President Donald Trump to make noises about Greenland and Canada.

Most importantly, Europe's economies, as they always have, depend on seaborne trade amongst themselves and their neighbors, but especially with the ever-growing Indo-Pacific markets. As map 1 shows, the military reinforcement of mainland Europe, should one be needed, will come by sea, as it did in World War I and II, as well as the Cold War. If non-state or proxy actors can effectively eject Russia from the Mediterranean or close a shipping channel key to global trade, it’s hard to conceive of the damage a more powerful rival could do.

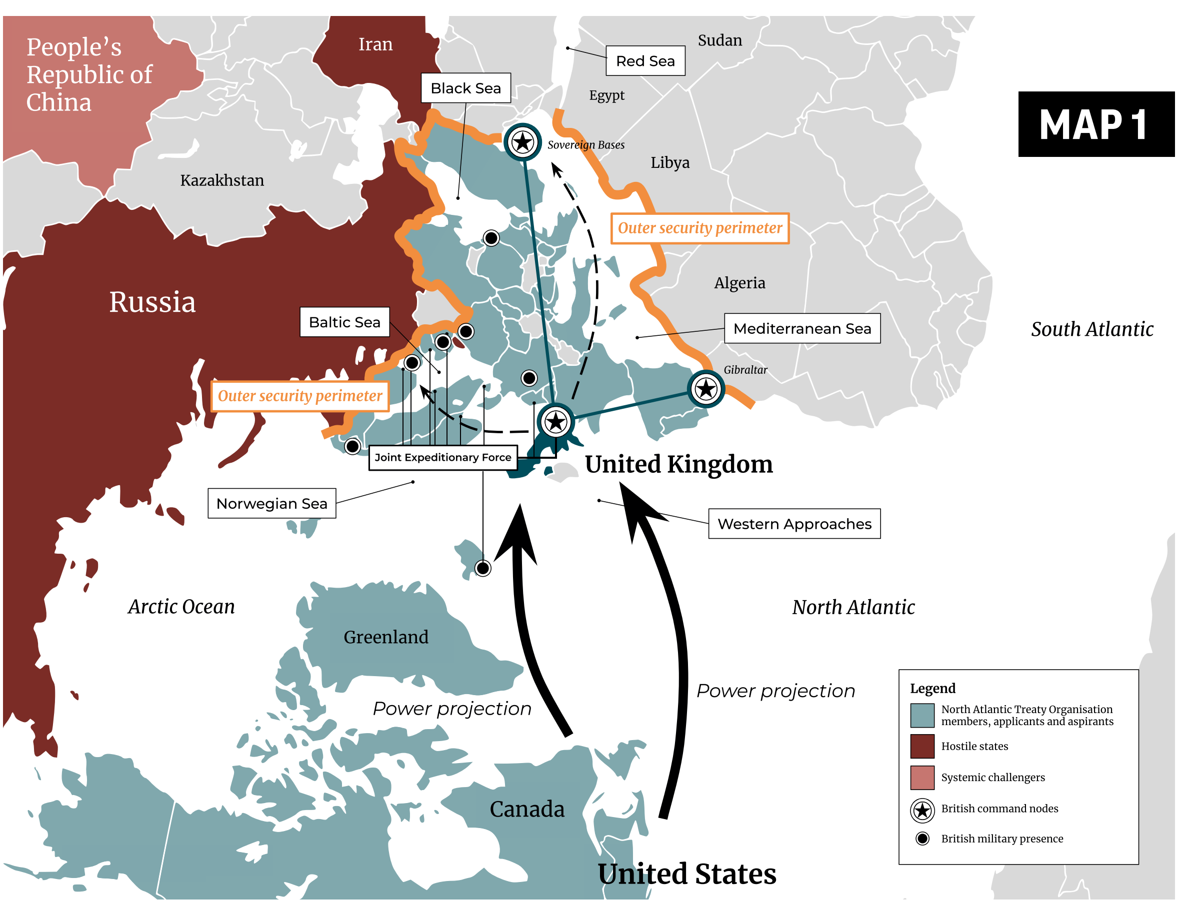
The Houthi actions in the Bab-el-Mandeb have done their damage, but at least there is an alternative route. Consider the economic implications of Iran closing the Strait of Hormuz, or of China imposing a blockade on Taiwan. Similarly, in the information age, it’s important to remember that the bulk of global data travels through subsea cables, cables susceptible to action as simple as a ship of the shadow fleet dragging its anchor for a few miles.

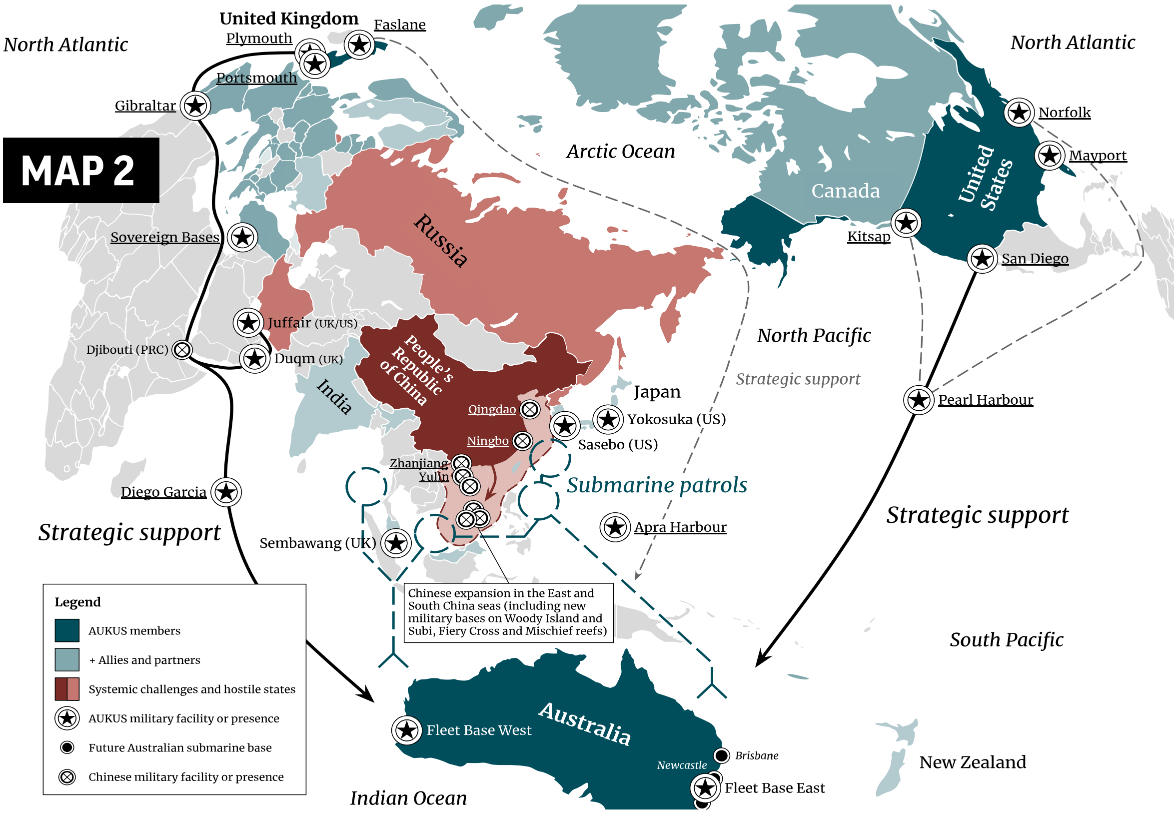
NATO’s name is no accident. The geographical reference in its title is an ocean; an ocean that bounds together the mutual interests of friends and allies. But with the eastward shift in the world’s economic center of gravity, the westward movement of China’s interests, climate change-driven alternatives to navigation, and technological advances, which both lower the barriers to entry for actors in the maritime environment and introduce new vulnerabilities, NATO allies can no longer limit their security concerns to a single geographical area.

A New Geostrategy to Respond to the CRINK In the new geopolitical age, it would be convenient to embrace the confection that Americans, Japanese, and Australians should tend the Indo-Pacific and Britons and other Europeans the Euro-Atlantic. But this would be intellectually lazy, not least because of the growing alignment between the CRINK countries, to which the democracies need an answer.

The UK’s “Integrated Review Refresh,” published in March 2023, was the first national strategy to publicly recognize that the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters are being drawn together. It was also the first to embrace deepening these linkages, especially between the leading democratic powers. Only by working together to uphold an international order based on openness, clear rules, and mutual interests can security be upheld and aggressors resisted. For all its might and power, the US cannot take on this burden alone, nor does it want to. Trump may not be an outlier, but instead representative of a new breed of American politician clear in the need to pursue the national interest—and in a narrower and more transactional sense.

The UK, Japan, and certain European countries are beginning to act, as shown on map 2. AUKUS, the seminal trilateral initiative by Australia, the UK, and the US to provide Canberra with nuclear-propelled





submarines and accelerate technological development in high-impact areas, and GCAP, the British, Japanese, and Italian sixth-generation fighter project, are the most obvious examples of new security ties designed to bridge both theaters. There are older connections, too, such as France's sovereign presence in the Indo-Pacific and the UK's historic links kept alive through defense pacts such as the Five Power Defense Arrangements, tying together Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK.

These links should be reinforced. The sequencing of Italian, French, and British carrier strike group deployments to the Indo-Pacific and national deployments—such as Germany's—should continue. The Royal Navy will deploy another carrier strike group as far east as Japan and South Korea in mid-2025, which will include at least two other European vessels (from Norway).

But this is not enough. To maximize their potential, the democracies—particularly in Western Europe—should invest more in defense. For the UK the average spending on defense from 1950 to 1990 was 6.4 percent of GDP, while it was 3.4 percent for (West) Germany, and 4.3 percent for France. This makes recent concern over the possibility of reaching 2.5 percent of GDP look like a debate over small change.

European NATO states on the continental frontline understand what is at stake—the Polish, Finnish, and Baltic focus on defense is to be applauded. Those maritime states working the flanks should do likewise. A serious increase in investment in defense can be realized; it just requires political leadership and a clear explanation to the public as to why it is needed. Trump, for his own reasons, is starting, once again, to shine a light on the issue. Germany, Italy, Spain, and France—even the UK—cannot continue to shirk. Without strong defenses, the CRINK will not be deterred, making the risk of war more, not less, likely.

Relearning the Art of Geopolitics In today's world, Europeans need to relearn the art of geopolitics. They have an existing advantage in their deep-rooted mutual interests and network of alliances, including the most successful military alliance ever—NATO. But this is not the time for complacency; threats and challenges come increasingly from the Indo-Pacific, be they from state, non-state, or economic quarters.

No single country can do it all alone, which is why even the US needs help. To prevent the CRINK from seizing the initiative in the 2030s, Europeans need to rebuild and expand their defenses. While the deterrence of aggressors along the continental front will remain central, the maritime approaches and flanks of Europe cannot be ignored.

James Rogers is co-founder of the Council on Geostrategy in London. **Kevin Rowlands** is head of the Royal Navy's Strategic Studies Centre and associate director of the Sea Power Laboratory at the Council on Geostrategy. He writes strictly in a personal capacity.

Europe's Defense Remains a Broad-Spectrum Task

The threat posed by Russia has spurred NATO and EU members to start rebuilding their military capabilities. Maintaining policy attention will be key.

By James Hackett

The year 2025 is shaping up to be another consequential one for European defense. Five weeks after US President Donald Trump's second inauguration, Russia's full-blown war against Ukraine will reach its third anniversary. European states are concerned about what the second Trump administration will mean for Ukraine's defense against Russia, and also about Washington's future commitment to NATO. Prompted by worries over Russia, Europeans are spending more on defense and have embarked on the long road to strengthening their military capabilities. And it is certain that Trump will press them to do still more, and faster.

One problem for European governments is that of timelines: whether their military readiness will have recovered enough by the time Russia's army has been rebuilt from its mauling in Ukraine to the stage whereby it can again pose a direct challenge to NATO. Estimates voiced by some European military professionals vary from five years to just two-to-three years. Another challenge for European governments is one of political focus: that they sustain policy attention—and funding—on defense even if today's proximate problems abate, particularly if there is some form of settlement in Ukraine.

Indeed, the defense challenge European governments face is not solely military, nor indeed one that emanates from Russia alone. An important development arising from the war in Ukraine has been the impact on European security of military capabilities from Asia and the Middle East, with North Korean troops now fighting in Russia and Russia's inventory boasting weapons from that country and Iran.

The developing "no-limits" partnership between Russia and China, with some of Moscow's military equipment reportedly featuring Chinese-origin components, is a further concern. And as some European states aim to quickly rebuild their military capability in response, they are looking beyond traditional suppliers to include, for instance, Israel and South Korea.

A further aspect has been a greater focus on security as an integral facet of defense, such as security of supply and security of critical infrastructure even if—similar to awareness of the military capabilities required to meet NATO obligations today and the investments needed for future military challenges—this is far from new.

Hybrid Threats Are Nothing New The December 26, 2024, announcement by authorities in Finland that they were investigating the disruption caused the day before to the Estlink-2 power connector between Finland and Estonia, and to telecommunications cables, was the most recent manifestation of threats to Europe's critical infrastructure.

Personnel from Finland's border guard and military boarded the *Eagle S*, a tanker registered in the Cook Islands but alleged to be part of Russia's "dark fleet," and moved the vessel to Finnish territorial waters. Finnish and Swedish investigators later raised an anchor from the seabed and conducted tests to determine whether it was from the *Eagle S*. They alleged that the cable damage had been caused by an anchor dragging. Indeed, there appeared to be a roughly 100-kilometer-long drag-track, and the *Eagle S* was missing one anchor.

This is only the most recent allegation that Russia-linked actors have been conducting activities directed against critical infrastructure targets in Europe, including that they have carried out reconnaissance as well as attacks or that attempts have been thwarted by law enforcement authorities. There have been maritime reconnaissance activities by Russian vessels, other pipeline and cable incidents, and, in the United Kingdom, charges of espionage and arson, leading Ken McCallum, the head of the UK's domestic intelligence agency, MI5, to say in October 2024 that Russian military intelligence (GRU) agents "had carried out 'arson, sabotage and more dangerous actions conducted with increasing recklessness' in Britain."

Allegations have also been made that Russia-linked actors have plotted to assassinate a leading German defense industrialist and carried out an arson attack against German missile manufacturer Diehl, while arrests have been reported across Europe of individuals suspected of espionage or sabotage operations linked to Russia, alongside episodes such as the attribution of malicious cyber activity to a specific Russian GRU unit.

These alleged attacks of course take place within the context of Western support for Ukraine, and to a degree it should perhaps be expected that Russia's security services would look to utilize levers available to them. Espionage and reconnaissance operations should not surprise, but there have been other deeply concerning activities that not only predate the current level of Western support for Ukraine, but also predate Russia's invasion itself, namely the chemical weapon attack in the UK on Sergei Skripal and his daughter, and the poisoning with a radioactive substance of Alexander Litvinenko.

Alongside allegations that Russian-linked vessels have damaged critical infrastructure in Europe, however, Chinese vessels have also come under scrutiny. In November 2024, a Chinese-flagged bulk carrier, the *Yi Peng 3*, was suspected of severing two fiber-optic cables in the Baltic Sea, while a month earlier the Hong Kong-flagged container ship *Newnew Polar Bear* damaged the Balticconnector gas pipeline.

Arctic Security at the MSC

China-Russia convergence on foreign and economic policy is visible in Russia's vast north—and in the Arctic. There is an increasing body of evidence that their cooperation also includes the security sphere, with Chinese and Russian vessels and planes engaging in coordinated activity in the Bering Sea region. At sea, the types of activity that are possible in and around the Arctic Ocean are changing rapidly. The **Arctic Security Roundtable** at the MSC will this year focus on these geoeconomic factors and ask how NATO and Western states should best respond.

More Complex Military Challenges China's support for Russia's war in Ukraine, albeit still limited, includes material useful for military purposes. In April 2024, then-US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said that "70 percent of the machine tools that Russia is getting from abroad [is] coming from China; 90 percent of the microelectronics." Further details were given by the former US deputy secretary of state, Kurt Campbell, in September 2024. "Chips, some design features, some capacities associated with the making of explosives" have supported Russian battlefield operations. He continued, "We see the role of UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones] and other capacities that are penetrating the Ukrainian airspace. Much of that has been supported surreptitiously by China."

Nonetheless, Russia has also reshaped its defense industry and economy to support its war, and its forces continue to receive new equipment. IISS analysis in *The Military Balance 2025* indicates that Russia's total military expenditure grew by nearly 42 percent in real terms between 2023 and 2024. Its defense industry is working around the clock to try to make good the materiel losses from the war, which for the ground forces at least still includes upgrading some old armor from storage sites—even if the available numbers there are dwindling. It is possible that an industry now operating at a relatively high tempo could shift to reconstituting the ground forces, if hostilities in Ukraine were to cease and plans were in place.

Meanwhile, deliveries of combat aircraft also continue. The Russian air force may have lost around 31 of its inventory of Su-34 *Fullbacks*, but around 27 new-build *Fullbacks* have been delivered and the air force has finally been introducing the new multi-role Su-57 fighter. And while ammunition and UAV shortfalls may have led to deliveries from Iran and North Korea, Russian manufacturers are still delivering. In particular, the country's use of cruise and ballistic missiles against Ukrainian targets constitutes a worrying portent of the capabilities that could face European states in a potential future conflict.

In November 2024, Russia's use against the Ukrainian city of Dnipro of what appeared to be an intermediate-range ballistic missile, employing multiple warheads, was perhaps designed more to focus minds among Ukraine's external supporters than it was to achieve battlefield effect. While President Vladimir Putin said this was a new system, dubbed *Oreshnik*, Western analysts thought it more likely a modified version of the developmental *Rubezh* (RS-SS-X-28) weapon.

However, some of the new systems announced by Putin in 2018 have started to enter the inventory. Little has been seen publicly of the *Burevestnik* nuclear-powered cruise missile and the *Poseidon* nuclear-powered long-range torpedo, but the *Avangard* hypersonic glide vehicle (RS-SS-19 mod 4 *Stiletto*) is currently in service with two Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) regiments, the *Kinzhal* (RS-AS-24 *Killjoy*) air-launched ballistic missile has been used against targets in Ukraine, and tests continue of the *Tsirkon* sea-launched hypersonic missile.

Russia's ground forces may have been mauled in Ukraine, but the country's military capability remains substantial. Russia's main naval formation, the Northern Fleet, has been virtually untouched by the conflict. It contains much of Russia's strategic nuclear capability in its ballistic missile submarines. And Russia has just commissioned the fourth *Yasen*-M guided-missile submarine (making five overall, including the prototype *Yasen*). Three *Yasen*/*Yasen*-M boats are now with the Northern Fleet.

Russia remains the immediate concern for many Western countries. At the same time, however, some countries are designing their military systems with an eye to the military developments taking place in China. An example is the UK-Italy-Japan Global Combat Air Programme, which is designed to produce a next-generation air platform to replace the British and Italian *Typhoon* combat aircraft and Japan's F-2 fighter. While Moscow may have been modernizing its military power, its ambitions have nonetheless suffered because of the war.

CHINA'S MILITARY SYSTEMS ARE BEING SOLD TO MORE INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMERS, MEANING THAT NATO OR EU MEMBER STATES' MILITARY FORCES DEPLOYED ABROAD COULD ENCOUNTER CHINESE-DESIGNED MILITARY EQUIPMENT.

JAMES HACKETT

China's Military Modernization There are no such wartime restraints on China's military modernization, and its visible progress has been striking—the air domain is a good example. At the end of 2024, China not only unveiled the J-35 variant designed for its air force, but it showed two previously publicly unknown combat aircraft designs.

It has long been known that China's military modernization is the "pacing challenge" for the US armed forces, against which it has been considering not only future equipment plans but also future force design and doctrine. For European nations looking to maintain high-end interoperability with US military systems, and for European defense industries looking to export advanced military systems to customers eyeing potentially demanding high-threat military scenarios, it may also make sense to design against these potential threat systems.

Beijing seems to hold ambitions to deploy its own forces further afield, certainly its maritime forces. But while its navy has been making periodic deployments to European waters since the beginning of this century, its ability to deploy at scale is probably still limited in the short term. However, the increasing co-operation between the Chinese and Russian navies will pose problems for NATO naval planners and worries about possible defense technology exchanges.

At the same time, China's military systems are being sold to more international customers, meaning that NATO or EU member states' military forces deployed abroad could encounter Chinese-designed military equipment. Moreover, advanced Chinese systems have already arrived in Europe: Serbia in early 2024 said it had completed fielding the Chinese FK-3 (HQ-22; CH-SA-20) air defense system.

Maintaining Long-term Attention In military terms, the challenge is stark. An important aspect of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine has been its use in the war of cruise and ballistic missiles and UAVs. These threats come high and low, fast and slow. Though Europe divested much of its air defense after the end of the Cold War, investments are again underway, with proximity to the threat proving an incentive for Baltic, Nordic, and East European states.

Elsewhere there seems less urgency, but the fact remains that Russia's cruise missiles—with 2,500-kilometer ranges—could put much of Europe at risk, not only those countries close to its borders. Procurements are underway of US-designed air defense systems, as are various initiatives to improve ground-based air defense with European solutions, but here it will be important to reconcile potentially differing military requirements and industrial expectations.

Air and missile defense is an example of where policies and priorities are changing. Ammunition

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Russian sailors march in columns during the Victory Day 2024 military parade in Moscow's Red Square.

production is another, as NATO and EU states have ramped up production to aid Ukraine's defense. Here the statistics are noteworthy, but so too are some of the challenges that are affecting European states' rearmament plans. The US maintained significant stockpiles of 155mm shells, many of which it has given to Ukraine. This stockpile gave America's industry time to ramp up production. But even so, US production had already dropped, with Reuters reporting in July 2024 that "from summer 2014 to fall 2015, the US added no new shells to its stockpile." More recently, in November 2024, Douglas Bush, then-US assistant secretary of the army, told the IISS Prague Defense Summit that the US has "a path to '100,000 a month in 2025'" with contracts "already in place."

In Europe, reduced production capacity has made rapid expansion harder and, while orders may give manufacturers the confidence to make investments, it will take time to reach the desired production levels as companies compete for skilled workers and materials. Nonetheless, investments by the German firm Rheinmetall, for example, have led it to emerge as the leading manufacturer of howitzer ammunition in Europe, and its production capacity is set to expand to 1 million shells per year globally by 2026.

European states de-prioritized defense after the end of the Cold War. Funding was reduced, forces and in-equipment shrank in number, stockpiles decreased, and industry contracted. Russia's war against Ukraine and worries about Moscow's military capability and intentions have spurred NATO and EU member states to increase funding, with European states now spending over 50 percent more in nominal terms than in 2014, and it is almost certain that President Trump will exhort European states to spend more.

There remains a long way to go in building back Europe's defense capacity. Key challenges will be enabling armed forces to regenerate and refill stockpiles where appropriate, and giving industry the certainty needed to restart or maintain production lines. However, none of this is new.

Another aspect that is not new is the need to focus once more on security and resilience, taking account of industrial and technological change, such as the raw materials now found in modern defense equipment, and vulnerabilities to cyber threats. Here there has been some progress, with task forces now focusing on critical infrastructure and greater attention paid to civilian resilience and security of supply, but again, responses vary.

Armed forces, too, need to be resilient, with societies better informed not only of security risks, but of the investments that are required. The decisions to reduce Europe's capabilities were political choices. The same applies now, but rebuilding Europe's defense capacity will also raise uncomfortable questions of prioritization. Sustained political attention and appropriate funding will be key.

James Hackett is head of defense and military analysis at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

Europe Needs a Ukraine Strategy The Trump administration is likely to change course on Ukraine. Their options limited, the Europeans need to prepare for "deal" and "no deal" scenarios.

By Claudia Major and Jana Puglierin

Since US President Donald Trump's re-election, Europeans have been uncertain about what US policy on Ukraine might now look like. They have taken some comfort in the nomination of retired General Keith Kellog as US special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, who wants to achieve "peace through strength," supports further arms deliveries to Ukraine, and is pushing for decisive American leadership to end the war. They fear the influence of Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr, or Vice President JD Vance, who are both pushing for peace through accommodation, which essentially means ending the war on Russian terms. It is said of Trump that he likes to surround himself with a "team of rivals," listening to their different views, and then relying on his instincts to form his opinion. Europeans should prepare for a high level of uncertainty, disruption, and volatility.

Shortly before taking office, the second Trump administration became more realistic about the challenges ahead. Kellog now talks about needing "100 days" to stop the war, rather than "24 hours" as Trump once suggested. Yet, Europeans cannot base their approach toward Ukraine on the hope that Trump does not want to look weak or naïve in front of Putin, or that he will follow European reasoning. They need to prepare for different scenarios. This starts with defining their interests, identifying the means and tools they have to shape the war's outcome, and deciding what they are willing to invest.

Europe's Limited Capacity to Act Alas, so far hope seems to be the strategy. Politically, Europeans are unable to agree among themselves on a sound Ukraine strategy, and militarily they lack the capabilities and industrial capacities that would put them in a position to offer Ukraine a different trajectory than the one the US might propose.

Until now, the US has provided two core elements of support to Ukraine. First, it has shaped political unity and kept the Ukraine supporters together, such as in the Ramstein format and in NATO. Second, it has delivered the bulk of the military support for Ukraine and offered unique assistance in sensitive areas like intelligence, targeting, and military advice. There was criticism of US President Joe Biden's "slow-cooking the frog" approach—but ultimately the US has proved necessary to maintain the Western response to Russia's invasion.

While Europeans have now overtaken the US in financial support for Ukraine, this does not mean that they can replace the US—neither in quantity nor in quality. The European Union is promising a lot but is still slow in delivery. Out of the announced €241 billion, only €125 billion have actually been allocated. Perhaps most importantly, the US is providing the overall security umbrella for Europe that ultimately deters Russia from attacking NATO territory. Were the US to reduce its commitment to Ukraine and to condition future support on fulfilling certain requests, the Europeans would not be in a position to quickly fill all the gaps.

Thus, the Europeans may have no choice but to live with any deal Trump strikes on Ukraine, even if it goes against their own interests. If the US were to make its military engagement in Europe conditional on European political support for a deal, the European NATO allies would probably fall in line. They would hardly endanger their own life insurance to support Ukraine.

Yet, failing Ukraine is likely to embolden Russia, thus aggravating Europe's security situation and putting additional pressure on NATO—without the Europeans knowing whether the Americans will eventually honor their Article 5 commitment. Currently, it is not clear how Trump's desire to reduce the US security commitment to Europe will translate into practice. Yet Europeans are clearly vulnerable, and this is limiting their choices when it comes to Ukraine.

Deal or No Deal: Scenarios to Prepare For The war could continue on its current trajectory. For Putin, it is going quite well, despite heavy losses. He is convinced that he can outlast the West. As long as Putin believes that he is more likely to achieve his war aims through military means than through diplomacy, he is unlikely to come to the negotiating table.

In one version of this scenario, Putin would feign engagement in the US-brokered talks while continuing fighting, which would wear down Ukraine and likely divide Europeans. Some might be tempted to reduce their support, because Russia's tactical negotiations could be misunderstood as a real path to peace that should not be undermined by further "military escalation." If the US administration fails to strike a deal, there is a risk that Trump will become annoyed and blame Kyiv. He might then significantly reduce or even cut off support and leave the mess to Europe.

Over time, both a continuation of the war on its current trajectory and a "failed deal" scenario carry a high risk of a Ukrainian defeat through exhaustion. Europeans would be left to deal with the possible socio/politico-economic consequences, ranging from waves of migration to a breakdown of government in Kyiv and internal turmoil—as well as the military fallout. In parallel, the US might then signal less commitment to NATO, leaving the Europeans under even more pressure abroad and at home.

To avoid such a development, Europeans would need to not only continue their current support for Ukraine, but to scale it up significantly and make it sustainable. They would need to find ways to narrow Putin's options to ensure that he changes his cost-benefit calculation and engages in real negotiations. An immediate priority would be to stop Russia's advance on the battlefield. Given that the necessary increase in support to achieve this has not yet materialized (with the US still on board), the chances of the Europeans making a quantum leap soon are slim.

A second scenario would be a US-brokered deal. If the Trump administration were to accommodate the Russians' requests, such as recognizing Russian territorial gains, neutrality for Ukraine, no NATO membership, and no Western military presence in the country, Ukraine's survival as a sovereign state would be at risk. Russia would be emboldened, the chances for another war in Europe would increase, and European weakness would become clear to everyone. A bad deal for Ukraine could also drive massive wedges between the Europeans, because some, like Poland or Sweden, would blame this failure on insufficient support from others.

In another version of this scenario, Putin's lack of commitment or excessive demands could offend Trump and, in the desire to not be accused of weakness, he could opt for peace through strength. By increasing economic pressure through sanctions and military pressure through weapons delivery, Trump could send a signal that he will not accept a dictated peace on Russian terms. If Putin were to realize that his strategy was not working, this might lead him to make some real concessions.

Given their limited options, instead of opposing Trump's deal, Europeans should look for ways to influence and shape it. To do that, they would have to agree among themselves (and with Kyiv) on a common line. They would need to convince Trump that it is in his personal interest and that of the US that Ukraine emerges from the war as a strong sovereign state, even if it fails to fully restore its territorial integrity. If successful, Europeans would have to provide much more of the military, financial, and political resources themselves, but could hope for continued, albeit limited US support.

What to Do? In light of these constraints, Europeans should focus on three avenues to improve their capacity to act:

First, present a coordinated long-term plan to improve European military capabilities as outlined in the NATO plans, supported by credible financing schemes. Second, forge unity among Europeans and try to work with and not against the Trump administration for the best possible deal for Ukraine and Europe, also by involving European leaders that Trump might listen to (like Giorgia Meloni). Third, offer plans on how to secure a deal, which includes monitoring a potential ceasefire, as well as on how to maintain Ukraine's long-term sovereignty by deterring Russia not only at NATO's Eastern border but in Ukraine.

Currently, Europeans are deeply divided on those issues. As long as Europeans fail to agree, however, the risk of the next war in Europe will increase.

A Ukrainian serviceman is fighting back in the Zaporizhzhia region.

Claudia Major, starting in March, is senior vice president of the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF). **Jana Puglierin** leads the European Council on Foreign Relations' (ECFR) Berlin office.

Scaling up Weapons Production, Integrating Armed Forces

Europe needs to deepen its defense industrial base. And closer cooperation would enhance the continent's defense posture, too. **By Aylin Matlé**

The re-election of Donald Trump has significant implications for European security. Given that his first time in office was marked by his skepticism toward NATO, coupled with calls for increased defense spending on the part of European NATO member states (and Canada), his return to the White House has caused heightened nervousness in Europe. Rather than being awestruck by the prospect of how Trump's second administration might impact the continent's security, however, European NATO states must act swiftly. They need to acknowledge that they can no longer lean on the United States to disproportionately carry the burden of transatlantic defense provisions—coupled with, and compounded by, the fact that a revisionist Russia is here to stay.

Thus, European NATO states must more intensely scale up the continent's weapons production capabilities and further foster (deeper) integration among their respective armed forces. Pursuing this two-pronged avenue, Europe could master weaning itself off its overreliance on the US, while investing in its defense requirements that are direly needed considering the upended security landscape in Europe and beyond.

Scaling Up Weapons Production Considering the expectations that many inside and outside Germany attach to the country's so-called *Zeitenwende*, turning itself into a more reliable and active actor on behalf of European security, it makes sense to start by reviewing Berlin's attitude toward its own as well as Europe's defense industry.

In the past, state regulations posed significant challenges for German arms companies when it came to adapting to an increased level of demand. The government frequently renegotiates prices for armaments, creating an unstable market environment. Bureaucratic requirements further complicate the establishment and expansion of production and storage capacities. Moreover, the state has proven to be an unreliable partner due to a lack of financial resources, with new production lines only being established in conjunction with long-term purchase guarantees.

Current procurement processes are unnecessarily costly, as orders are typically placed in rather small quantities, leading to higher unit prices compared to bulk orders. However, a concerning lack of ambition and stable funding persists in Germany and beyond. Notably, Russia has significantly ramped up its production capabilities, and is said to now be able to produce the entire stock of the Bundeswehr within just six months.

To overcome the current hurdles and to address the ensuing challenges, the German government put forward a National Security and Defense Industry Strategy in December 2024. In it, among other things, the government examines "to what extent advance orders for the armed forces … for the next 10 years and beyond can be enabled to increase production." Furthermore, the strategy mentions the consideration of fixed purchase quantities as well as advance payments. What also stands out is the government's support of "strengthening the role of the European Investment Bank (EIB) in the area of security and defense while ensuring the refinancing capability of the bank."

If implemented, these proposals alone could considerably help Germany to increase its ability to act. Hence, the next German government should commit to the implementation of the suggestions. In addition to the national level, the European dimension of the strategy must not be disregarded either, especially the creation of a "European market for defense goods and services"—a task whose realization has seen little success thus far.

Overcoming German Opposition To underline the importance of the further development of a European industrial base that truly deserves that label, Andrius Kubilius has been appointed as the EU's defense commissioner—a position introduced for the first time by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for her second commission, further emphasizing the necessity to move ahead in this policy field. Kubilius' task is to focus on removing obstacles to European armaments projects and increasing investments in the sector. His primary objective is to establish a European Defense Union, potentially involving the incurrence of common debt—a proposal facing significant opposition, particularly from Germany.

To advance this agenda, the European Defense Industrial Program, proposed by the European Commission, is supposed to be further developed. It should include the provision of additional funds to help promote joint procurement and create a single market for defense equipment. Accordingly, by 2030, the aim is to have member states jointly purchase at least 40 percent of their respective defense equipment and allocate at least half of their procurement budgets to products manufactured within Europe.

To raise further funds to buttress the proposals put forward by the commission, EU member states must seriously consider how to finance joint procurement initiatives, which in turn could help scale up the production of capabilities that are needed not only for further supporting Ukraine, but equally important, for NATO's deterrence and defense provisions. One way forward would be the issuance of so-called defense bonds, which would open the door for joint borrowing—meaning the accumulation of debt—to ramp up common defense industry production.

Germany in particular stands out as an opponent to this approach. This is a stance the next government in Berlin should revise, along with Germany's debt brake regulations, as spending more money on defense provisions might prove to be too difficult to achieve otherwise. Berlin could follow Paris' example in terms of making concessions for the common and greater good—France has recently abandoned its persistent opposition to allowing EU-funded incentives for Europe's defense industry to be extended to non-EU companies.

THERE PERSISTS A LACK OF AMBITION IN GERMANY AND BEYOND. NOTABLY, RUSSIA HAS RAMPED UP ITS PRODUCTION CAPACITY AND IS SAID TO BE ABLE TO PRODUCE THE ENTIRE STOCK OF THE BUNDESWEHR IN JUST SIX MONTHS.

AYLIN MATLÉ

The Goal of Operational Readiness The other big effort Europeans should undertake is the advancement of integrating forces across EU and NATO member states. Such initiatives are anything but new. Yet, so far at least, the endeavors of different European nations attempting to integrate their forces have rarely been tested in terms of operational readiness, i.e., actual deployments—which clearly should be the level of ambition. Future force integration should be organized in permanent multinational formations, with national brigades serving as foundational units that regularly train and operate jointly. This approach offers substantial benefits, including the gradual harmonization of doctrine and equipment across participating national brigades. Taking such steps would be in line with NATO's Force Model (NFM), which was introduced in June 2022 in reaction to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The driving rationale behind the NFM is to establish a pool of 300,000 troops to be deployed at short notice, in conjunction with pre-assigning them to regional defense plans, which the transatlantic alliance has been working on for the past three years.

To strengthen and complement this approach, Germany should work toward ensuring that European allies take joint actions to close the strategic capability gaps in European defense that are currently covered by the United States. These include airlift capabilities, reconnaissance aircraft, air-to-air refueling, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms. Germany should advocate for a more active use of the Framework Nation Concept (FNC) to acquire these critical capabilities as quickly as possible.

Initially established in 2013 by Germany and later integrated into NATO, the FNC was designed to enable smaller states to collaborate with a larger ones to jointly develop complementary capabilities. This approach is well-suited to offset potential reductions in US contributions to European defense. Given Germany's role in creating and promoting the FNC, it is logical for the next German government to spearhead efforts to enhance its functionality in line with further integrating national armed forces within NATO Europe.

Reducing Europe's Overreliance By pursuing this double-tracked approach—creating the conditions to scale up arms production and integrating Europe's militaries further and better—Europe could successfully counter its overreliance on the US while confronting an evolving security landscape. Consequently, Europeans could enhance their ability to act in a rapidly changing geopolitical era.

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How European Defense Bonds Could Work

Common EU debt issuance does not create an off-the-shelf bazooka. Making bonds work implies inevitable trade-offs and requires real tax revenues. **By Sander Tordoir**

The debate on using common debt for European defense is intensifying, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, where governments fear they will bear an outsized share of military costs. The proliferation of threats has already led Europeans to increase their defense budgets substantially in recent years. Some European Union member states, Poland in particular, are rapidly ramping up their defense spending. However, underinvestment over the past three decades mean that it will take many years to fill the capability gaps that Europeans face in a range of areas from ammunition to precision-strike weapons.

At the same time, there is a growing emphasis on spending in a more coordinated way, to improve the interoperability of military equipment and to address the fragmentation of Europe's defense industrial base, which remains largely organized nationally and therefore hinders economies of scale. European defense innovation is also lacking: As the recent report by former Italian Prime Minister and European Central Bank President Mario Draghi highlights, EU member states spent only 4.5 percent of their defense budgets on R&D in 2023, totaling $11.8 billion, while the United States spent $138.9 billion the same year, amounting to 16 percent of its $847 billion budget.

A Poor Image Funding European defense is a major challenge. Private financing is scarce in a sector that has long suffered from a poor image amongst investors, although the tide may be turning. Valuations of publicly traded European defense companies, as measured by an index of aerospace and defense stocks, have approximately doubled since February 2022, far outstripping the performance of the broader European market. But these valuations, and the availability of private credit for defense more generally, will be contingent on demand for defense capabilities, which will always remain driven by governments.

Public financing is therefore essential to boost the EU's defense capabilities. But some EU member states already carry a high public debt burden. And in many member states, it is unclear whether political consensus for raising defense budgets in inflation-adjusted terms will be sustained in the future. Voters are unlikely to support higher defense expenditures if these are perceived to cause higher taxes or come at the expense of lower spending on other priorities.

Borrow and Spend There are good reasons to borrow to swiftly increase European defense spending. US President Donald Trump has been threatening to withdraw America's NATO security guarantee unless European countries spend 3 or even 5 percent of GDP on defense—a tall order, as only 23 out of the 32 NATO member states met or exceeded the 2-percent spending goal in 2024, according to the alliance's estimates. Meanwhile, the EU and the United Kingdom are scrambling to support Ukraine as it loses ground against Russia. Rapid tax hikes would be a way to generate funds, but taking on greater public debt could actually make the burden more manageable.

There are also advantages to borrowing jointly. The EU's aggregate debt levels are lower than that of the US, as are its borrowing costs. Europe's supranational issuers—the EU, the European Stability Mechanism (or ESM, the eurozone's bailout fund), and the European Investment Bank—are all triple-A rated. The EU's pandemic recovery fund first made large-scale common EU borrowing a reality. To follow this up with a significant EU bond issuance for defense seems feasible. A €500 billion fund issued at around 3 percent would imply an annual interest rate burden of €15 billion.

Common debt could offer other benefits. If access to the funds is part of a quid pro quo that forces Europeans to coordinate their expenditures, it could improve efficiency in military spending by reducing duplication of military equipment, enabling pooled investments, and generating economies of scale. Since everyone would be on the hook to repay the debt, it could also reduce countries free-riding on the defense capabilities of rapidly ramping-up peers like Poland.

Facing Trade-Offs However, the Europeans must face up to the real trade-offs involved. First, defense spending will have to be financed by taxes, sooner or later. Whether done by underwriting joint debt or issuing nationally, the money will ultimately come from the same tax base as other government expenditures.

Europe can ease, but not escape, the "guns or butter" dilemma. Also, if the EU wants to issue additional bonds for defense, member states will have to provide new national guarantees. Alternatively, they will have to amend the EU's own resource decision by unanimity—essentially committing more resources to the EU to guarantee the issuance of additional EU debt.

Re-directing existing EU spending programs is not a solution. The EU's budget is nearly impossible to overhaul politically. Funds in other programs, such as the pandemic recovery fund, are not intended for this purpose. Moreover, the new EU budget will not take effect until 2027, the same year the Chinese military is expected to be ready to invade Taiwan.

Second, member states underwriting the EU with more guarantees to enable it to provide loans offers an alternative that does not require tax revenues, but will ultimately prove ineffective. Spending will expand the stock of military hardware and personnel that, ideally, Europe will never need to deploy. So, no productive asset is created to generate returns for repaying debt. That mostly excludes using loans, let alone leveraging private capital.

One exception is providing cheap EU loans to high-debt countries that may underinvest in defense due to the higher borrowing costs they face. But this only has modest upsides. For example, the €300 billion loan portion of the EU's recovery fund lowered borrowing costs for member states that used it by just €6 billion.

Similarly, providing public guarantees to EU defense firms may help derisk their investments in new production capabilities, but will only marginally improve their balance sheets. Defense firms' main customers are governments. Without demand, funded by actual government expenditures, they will not scale up production. The EU, a cash-strapped superpower, has a history of pretending that a handful of public guarantees can trigger implausibly high levels of investment. The continent would be even more poorly served with an army of imaginary tanks and planes based on a false promise of crowding-in private investment.

Third, Europe cannot escape a third trade-off between "coalitions of the willing" and relying on already existing mechanisms. One seemingly appealing option is to forge ahead on defense bonds with a coalition of willing European military powers. This should ideally include the UK, but exclude certain EU member states, like Hungary, that may choose to side with the Kremlin rather than defend states bordering Russia. That could work for coordinating their national spending, but not for issuing joint bonds.

The reason is that only existing federalized institutions such as the EU or the ESM can issue debt in their own name, and using them to launch a batch of defense bonds requires unanimous approval from member states. A new ad hoc special-purpose fund from a select coalition of countries could bypass a veto by Viktor Orbán, Hungary's pro-Russia prime minister, but would not necessarily secure a triple-A rating.

The guarantees to capitalize the fund could also be taken into account by statistical authorities when calculating the debt levels of participating countries, as was the case with the ESM's predecessor, the European Financial and Stability Facility. This means that if a participating country taps the fund, it would be counted to its debt level twice: first, for the loan it owes to the fund, and second, for (its share of) the guarantees to capitalize the special purpose vehicle.

An IRIS-T air defence system at Todendorf barracks, Germany

A Hard-Nosed Debate Most importantly, Europe's leaders need to have a hard-nosed debate about what they want to spend any new defense money on, and how to spend it well. If Europe does more joint defense procurement, it should avoid giving handouts to poorer regions and focus on purchasing critical military kit, which will benefit wealthier western member states, because that is where most of the industry is. The governance to manage the spending also needs to be built first. France alone has 10,500 military procurers, and the European Defense Agency currently works with 200.

The growing emphasis on coordinating EU defense spending, combined with constraints on national budgets, has sparked a search for other forms of funding. Defense bonds can accelerate the remilitarization of Europe, improve co-ordination, and create more bang-for-your-buck in military spending. But they are not a magic wand. What Europe needs is an honest debate about the trade-offs involved.

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BERLIN CABLE

What Will Germany Do Next?

By Henning Hoff

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The so-called "traffic light" coalition government of Olaf Scholz, combining the chancellor's Social Democrats (SPD) with the Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats (FDP), lasted less than three years. It may "only" have been a "transitional government," as former Green leader Omid Nouripour (a foreign policy expert) described it in late summer 2024. At that time, the writing of an early end was already on the wall, and the self-chosen moniker of a "coalition for progress" sounded hollow.

It is likely that Nouripour will prove even more correct in retrospect. The question, however, that most political parties are trying to avoid during Germany's strange election campaign is: transition to where? With the notable exceptions of the Greens, whose leader Robert Habeck has openly suggested that defense spending of 3.5 percent of GDP will be necessary henceforth, where exactly Germany is heading has remained quite vague.

When it comes to the area of foreign and security policy, Germany has certainly made progress of sorts under Scholz. The most important step was the multifaceted, if often hesitant, reaction to Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and his attempted wholesale reversion of Europe's security order. Key here was the immediate establishment of the €100 billion "special fund" for the Bundeswehr, Germany's armed forces. The signal was clear: After all the ducking and dodging during the long reign of Angela Merkel, Germany would now finally pull its weight and add a military dimension to its foreign policy.

And thanks to the surprising political talent that is 64-year-old Boris Pistorius—practically unknown previously—who took over as defense minister in January 2023 after his hapless predecessor left the scene, the rebuilding of the Bundeswehr has started in earnest. Without his "can-do" leadership, Germany may well have been procrastinating about whether or not it is really able to permanently station a brigade of 5,000 soldiers in Lithuania in order to make Putin think twice before he attacks NATO allies in the Baltic. Pistorius is the first German defense minister in living memory who has so far not only been scandal-free, but is also the country's most popular politician.

Something Special The German term for "special fund," *Sondervermögen*, sounds impressive. What it means, though, is debt running outside the official budget. The Scholz government has been unable to explain what exactly will happen after the special fund is depleted (by 2027 at the latest). The uncertainty this entails has hampered efforts to scale up Europe's arms production and left Germany's allies with the impression that Berlin might not really mean it, after all.

The logical conclusion would be that the defense budget would need to jump from roughly €50 to €80-90 billion in order to meet the NATO goal of spending at least 2 percent of GDP; or it would require more "special funds." Spending 3.5 percent of GDP (which is a figure that Germany needs to spend to meet NATO plans) would mean a defense budget north of €150 billion.

During the campaign, Scholz has appeared to harken back to the Merkel years when SPD politicians tried to argue that it was in no one's interest to spend more on defense—Germany's neighbors wouldn't like it! Another favorite claim was that no one had any idea what to spend the extra money on. Scholz, echoing his "no real change necessary" message that has been irksome when it comes to quite a few policy fields, also rejected any idea of cutting the welfare state to free up funds for the Bundeswehr or Ukraine. Playing the one against the other, however, seems to no longer be working particularly well as a campaign strategy.

The leader of the center-right Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), Friedrich Merz, who was leading the polls by a huge distance at the time of writing and is on track to become Germany's next chancellor, has left it at saying that for him the 2-percent goal was "the lower limit." In a speech on security policy in late 2024 he also suggested that shifts within the German budget may be necessary, without giving any details. That's not a winning strategy either.

Getting the Basics Right Therefore, this will be the most crucial task for Germany's next government: an agreed fiscal policy, including a "reformed" or abolished "debt brake," that allows for spending what is necessary on defense—and that much looks like something near 3.5 percent.

Revitalizing the Bundeswehr remains a huge task. The idea of bringing back compulsory national service for all school leavers, which the CDU/CSU is likely to push for once in government, would delay and complicate it. Germany's armed forces need to become a more professional and more attractive employer and less bureaucratic in every way; to accomplish that alone will use up a substantive portion of the budget before even starting to consider which capabilities the Bundeswehr, quite urgently, needs to add.

Beyond this, the next government needs to work more closely with European allies. Fences with Paris need to be mended, relations with Warsaw to be made closer. And London, too, needs to feature more strongly in the German foreign policy mindset (again, Pistorius has forged ahead, here with the bilateral Trinity House military cooperation agreement).

The fact that the FDP chose to blow up the Scholz coalition right after the reelection of Donald Trump as US president has meant that Germany will be missing initially when it comes to formulating a European response to whatever the second Trump administration will mean for Europe's security. It is likely that it will take until May or June to form a new government and thus allow Germany to play a significant role again, including when it comes to further strengthening the EU. And this will be necessary to ensure that Europe can withstand the challenges it now faces not only from Moscow and Beijing, but also from Washington.

That is a bad state of affairs. However, the coalition-building after the election on February 23 is likely to become a moment of truth. The Scholz government managed to paper over fundamental disagreements by giving each party what it wanted most. Germany's next government will need to set clear priorities.

Henning Hoff is executive editor of IPQ.

PARISCOPE

Europeanizing France's *force de frappe*

By Joseph de Weck

In one of his last interviews before his death, former German finance minister and doyen of the center-right Christian Democrats (CDU) Wolfgang Schäuble made a bold proposal: In return for helping Paris finance its nuclear deterrent, also known as *force de frappe*, Germany should be able to slide under the French nuclear umbrella.

It's an old idea that never got traction. Roughly 50 years ago, Franz-Josef Strauß, a legendary Bavarian prime minister and conservative figurehead, made a similar proposal. But Bonn hesitated, and Paris wasn't really interested.

After all, President Charles de Gaulle decided to build the bomb at great cost in the late 1950s not only because he feared the Soviet Union. It was also the ultimate guarantee that Germany would never invade France again. Furthermore, de Gaulle saw it as a means of retaining some great power status at a time when the French republic was in the process of losing its colonies in Asia and Africa. Why share that trump card with Bonn?

Time has passed. In France, few fear a German invasion anymore. And yes, for France the nuclear bomb is still a source of pride and ensures its recognition among nuclear powers.

But given Russia's neo-imperialism; US President Donald Trump not ruling out the use of military force to conquer European Union territory in Greenland, which is owned by member state Denmark; and France's empty state coffers, could Paris now be ready to seriously explore options of Europeanizing France's nuclear force? Two points.

Paris Wants a Dialogue First, the *force de frappe* hasn't been an exclusively French affair for a while. Successive French presidents from François Mitterrand onwards have underlined that France's vital interests protected by the nuclear deterrent also comprise a European dimension. What this means exactly is unclear. Former President François Hollande said in 2015, "Who could believe an aggression endangering the survival of Europe would have no consequences?" We are in the realm of constructive ambiguity here.


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Second, President Emmanuel Macron is willing to kick start a debate to flesh out more concretely what this "European dimension" of France's *force de frappe* entails. In a speech in February 2020 at the École de Guerre, France's military academy, Macron said that he was willing to discuss with other EU member states the role that France's nuclear deterrent can play in their collective security. Macron repeated that proposal in 2024.

German Chancellors Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz never responded to Macron's offer. With Friedrich Merz, who is likely to become Germany's next chancellor, there is perhaps a new chance. Last year, the former Schäuble confidante argued that Berlin must take up Macron's proposal of a strategic dialogue on nuclear protection. "A lot needs to be discussed without a pre-conceived result in mind. What is France ready to share? What do they expect from us? And what would the decision-making process look like?" Germany's likely next chancellor asked.

Time for Questions Macron's proposal to enter into a dialogue on the *force de frappe* should not be seen as an offer to build an independent nuclear deterrent within the framework of the EU, French officials say. Any arrangement, whereby Paris would transfer sovereignty over the use of its own nuclear bombs to an EU institution or some other state is a no go in terms of domestic politics. Instead, Macron is willing to discuss how France itself can offer some kind of extended deterrence guarantee to Europe in the event of US withdrawal.

Even this kind of more limited option raises an avalanche of technical, legal, strategic, and political questions. For instance, would France need to build up its arsenal so Paris could offer a credible deterrence guarantee that reaches beyond the Rhine? France currently has 290 warheads, which is no comparison to America's 5,550 or Russia's 6,257.

Or where exactly would France's updated nuclear doctrine draw its red lines and specify under which circumstances Paris would retaliate and "go nuclear" to defend a European ally? And would Germany be fine with co-financing a French nuclear weapons stock if it only had a limited say over its use when push comes to shove?

These questions are just scratching the surface. French expert circles advise that Paris and other European capitals should engage in a careful step-by-step approach if the *force de frappe* is supposed to complement and, in a worst-case scenario, replace the US guarantee. But Europeans may simply not have the time for gradualism in security integration anymore. French writer Victor Hugo once said, "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." Now may be the time.

Joseph de Weck is IPQ's Paris columnist and author of *Emmanuel Macron. The revolutionary president*.

CARBON CRITICAL

Strength Through Sustainability

By Kira Vinke

The global defense industry is booming—and with it its emissions. However, investing in technological advancements could reverse this trend.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and rising geopolitical tensions have driven governments to expand their military expenditures and increase procurement. But the growth is not limited to traditional applications. A number of new technologies are also seeing more uptake and companies' research departments are benefiting from higher sales. Besides sought-after drone technologies and artificial intelligence applications, the electrification of military vehicles is an often-overlooked segment where growth is happening—potentially reaching market volumes of $20 billion by the end of the decade.

Whereas non-tactical vehicles operating, for example, on domestic military bases are easier to replace and can already provide significant cost-savings today, the development of electric vehicles (EVs) for combat is more challenging. The benefits of electrification could be multifold. EVs typically require less maintenance, and their adoption would lead to reducing the militaries' dependency on fossil fuels, which are often difficult to transport to the frontline.

Looking into the future, questions of compatibility of traditional combustion engine machinery with civilian infrastructures could also arise in the medium term, as the increased use of EVs will increasingly displace traditional fueling stations. However, the advancements also come with new risks. Electrification will go hand-in-hand with increased use of digital technologies in military vehicles and machinery, which will henceforth require advanced cyber security measures.

Substantial Effects From a climate perspective, possible emissions reductions would be substantial. For comparison, while the world's militaries account for 1 to 5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, shipping and aviation make up around 2 percent. However, this does not fully reflect the effects over the whole lifecycle—from embodied emissions of energy-intensive steel to the fuel-intensive operation of machinery or transport, plus the potency of infrastructural and environmental destruction caused by warfare, requiring vast resources to rebuild and recover.

NATO had already released a "green defense" framework more than a decade ago in 2014 and allied countries such as the United

States have since moved forward in setting emissions reductions targets for their military. Most recently, the German defense ministry released its "Strategy on Defense and Climate Change" (March 2024), which closely examines the changing risk landscape.

The potential spillover effects of less polluting solutions in the defense sector on civilian applications should also not be underestimated. In some contexts, such as disaster response, the challenges to substitute emissions-intensive applications in already difficult-to-manage supply chains can be technically similar to those of military operations.

Retiring Generators One widely-used old technology is diesel or gasoline generators, which serve as an off-grid and emergency power supply solution. A study commissioned by the World Bank's International Finance Corporation estimates 25 million generators to be in use in developing countries, two-thirds of which operate in addition to existing, but unreliable, electricity grid infrastructures. They assume that around 55 billion liters of fuel are consumed in these generators per year. In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 20 percent of total diesel usage stems from generators. In developed nations these generators often come into use after natural disasters, such as flooding events.

Diesel combustion poses significant health risks, in particular when generators are operated near residential areas and businesses, as is often the case. In addition to their effect on the global climate through the release of CO_2 into the atmosphere, there are the health risks associated with the release of particulate matter directly impacting air quality.

On construction sites in Europe, where diesel generators are regularly used when energy needs for large machines cannot be met through the local grid, battery systems have been successfully deployed by some companies as a substitute for the dinosaur technology. Moreover, research institutes, including Germany's Fraunhofer Institute, are looking to replace diesel generators with hydrogen, which could be sourced from renewable energy. Another option could be the use of off-grid solar systems in combination with traditional generators or as a replacement thereof. Germany's GIZ, a government agency that works in international cooperation and capacity-building, has already published a feasibility study for such solar applications together with counterparts in India.

A Double Dividend The defense industry should take a closer look at sustainable solutions and carve out future market shares for technologies that pay a double dividend to security, both directly through their application and indirectly through avoiding negative ripple effects to the environment and health. Increased public spending on green defense would not only help modernize militaries, but also help countries meet their NATO obligations for military expenditures.

Governmental research programs should further incentivize the development and roll-out of sustainable and energy efficient defense technologies, reaping lower-hanging fruits such as the replacement of generators. This exercise of foresight could help build a strategic advantage for national defense.

Kira Vinke leads the Center for Climate and Foreign Policy at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP).

BRUSSELS BRIEFING

No Power Struggle at the EU's Security Table for Two

By Rebecca Christie

Defense is this year's Brussels buzzword, sparking a new round of European Union shapeshifting. After decades of leaving security matters largely in the hands of individual member states and NATO, the bloc is trying to take on a bigger role. But new leadership raises new questions: Will the EU step up, or step on its own feet?

Lithuania's Andrius Kubelius has taken on a newly created role as defense commissioner alongside the EU's other top jobs, making good on one of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's flashier campaign promises for her second five-year mandate. At first glance, this is a traffic jam waiting to happen. The EU already has budget and industrial policy commissioners. There is a treaty-designated top job, the high representative for foreign policy and security affairs, now held by former Estonian Prime

Minister Kaja Kallas. And during the prior institutional cycle, von der Leyen herself took a leading role in representing the EU around the world.

Adding an extra politician to this mix therefore runs the risk of creating new power struggles rather than newfound security. Yet so far, so good. It helps that Kallas and Kubelius both hail from Baltic states that have a particular interest in keeping the EU focused on external threats due to their proximity to Russia. Also, von der Leyen took care to lay out separate roles for each job in the mission letters to her new administration.

Tough Topics Kallas will take the lead on EU enlargement, neighborhood policy, and the EU's stance toward the Middle East, among other duties. As her January meeting with the families of Israeli hostages held by Hamas showed, she is prepared to represent Brussels on a global stage and to tackle its overall foreign affairs strategy. Von der Leyen also tapped Kallas to work with the commissioners for the Mediterranean and for industrial strategy, in the hope of building stronger policies on tough topics like immigration, economic security, and multilateral cooperation.

Yet defense can no longer be bundled neatly into those goals given the developments in recent years. Russia's war in Ukraine is now entering its third year, Finland and Sweden have joined NATO, and it is not at all clear that Washington will continue to underwrite European security with US President Donald Trump back in the White House. Kubelius therefore will spearhead a push for more joint investment, joint procurement, and technological innovation. His assignment from von der Leyen puts a particular emphasis on dual-use technologies—those that contribute significantly to the civilian economy as well as military capability—and on putting together a plan, fast.

Kubelius and Kallas will face their first big test at the new administration's 100-day mark, when their White Paper on the Future of European Defense is due. The pair are supposed to frame a new approach to defense, identify investment needs, and look for ways to get more buy-in from the European Parliament and the EU member states that make up the European Council.

Freeing Up Resources Proposals are already flying on everything from new joint procurement programs to common borrowing expressly for common security goals, such as air defense. Even if member states balk at going to the market jointly for military assets, there may be efforts to free up national resources by pursuing EU-level borrowing to improve the energy grid and other essential infrastructure. Furthermore, the EU's "Big Five" alliance of security-minded countries has already met twice—a sign that they may be serious about moving quickly to make Europe more resilient and less dependent on US support. Germany, France, Italy, Poland, and Spain recognize that they have the budget and the opportunity to take on a leadership role, perhaps with support from the United Kingdom.


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Brussels has a lot of work to do, and a new team of leaders to try to do it. By doubling the number of top-level officials, the European Commission has bet that more resources will lead to more action. But it won't be enough for Kallas and Kubelius just to sit down together at the table. For Europe to form the strategic and industrial alliances it needs, they will need to make good on the work.

Rebecca Christie is IPQ's Brussels columnist and senior fellow at Bruegel, the European think tank specializing in economics.

WARSAW MEMO

Tusk's Double Task Starts at Home

By Piotr Buras

"Poland is back," announced Donald Tusk when he became Poland's prime minister for a second time in December 2023. After eight years of rule by the right-wing populist Law and Justice (PiS) party, this sounded reassuring. Observers expected that Warsaw would mend fences with Brussels and Berlin and would give a boost to liberal and integrationist forces within the EU. In short, it would revive the European spirit.

One year on, Poland has taken over the European Council presidency (on January 1, 2025), amidst profound concerns about Europe's future and hopes that Tusk would provide the leaderless EU with sense and direction. The upcoming months, however, will be crucial not only for the EU, but also for

Poland's political trajectory. Tusk will need to steer the EU through uncharted territory and at the same time defend his political project in Poland's presidential election in May. It is the interplay of these two goals that will shape Poland's EU agenda and and define the scope of its ambitions.

After his impressive victory in October 2023, Tusk was rightly celebrated as the tamer of populism, but his success was not complete. While his three-party coalition government has a stable majority in parliament, it is divided on issues of key importance for the voters, such as the liberalization of abortion laws. Most importantly, the outgoing president, PiS loyalist Andrzej Duda, holds veto powers and is keen on preventing any legislation at odds with the current opposition's interests.

For the same reason, the restoration of the rule of law, which Tusk has promised and which requires a complete overhaul of the judicial system, has dragged on. And while the intimidation of judges has stopped, the legal chaos has persisted, deepening the political conflict to a dangerous degree.

Liberal Comeback Under Threat

Poland's liberal comeback seems today more vulnerable than a year ago. In January, PiS overtook Tusk's Civic Platform party in the polls. Satisfaction with the government's work has plummeted with voters wishing to see quicker changes. The combined support for the populist (PiS) and far-right (Konfederacja) parties reached 49 percent in the European Parliament elections in June 2024. That was a warning. The victory of a right-wing candidate in the May presidential election is not a far-fetched scenario even if the liberal candidate, Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, is the frontrunner in the race.

For Tusk, the stakes could not be higher. Should Trzaskowski fail, a domino effect could be set in motion: Tusk's reforms would come to a stop, the prime minister would lose legitimacy. A collapse of the coalition and snap elections could well follow. In such a scenario, PiS' return to power could be just a matter of time—which in turn would end the European dream of a Polish leadership role. Thus, the battle is not just about Tusk's political record and legacy, it's about the country's future.

Despite being a committed European, Tusk's EU policy will have to be subordinated to this fundamental goal. Liberals and EU enthusiasts may already have been disappointed in recent months. Tusk supported the suspension of the right of asylum as an instrument against the weaponization of migration by Belarus. He pushed war-torn Ukraine to solve bilateral disputes with Poland before opening the EU accession talks. He also opposed the EU-Mercosur trade agreement.

In the coming months, Warsaw will push for progress on EU security, supporting initiatives for new EU funds. That Tusk recently defined defense as a European public good reflects a major shift in Poland's traditionally staunch transatlanticist position. But on many other issues Warsaw will be happy to delay rather than seek quick decisions—in order to avoid a domestic backlash that could put at risk the strategic goal of defending Poland's political course.

For example, Poland will not want the EU to take decisions on the CO_2 reduction goal for 2040 that the European Commission is pushing for. The issue is too toxic in Poland's domestic context. The same is true for the future of the EU-Ukraine trade relationship (the current framework based on the so-called autonomous trade measures expires in June). The debate on this is likely to be pushed back until after the Polish presidential election. Furthermore, there are many reasons why Warsaw is skeptical about plans to deploy European troops in Ukraine, as proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron and others, but the need to avoid a public controversy before the crucial May vote is certainly one of them.

Juggling domestic constraints and European tasks will be a difficult balancing act. As a consequence, the Polish EU presidency may turn out to be not as ambitious as some expect. Poland's leadership may end up being less visible than needed. The real test of Poland's new role in Europe will only come if and when the domestic political conundrum has been solved. Importantly, it will coincide with the formation of a new German government. If not only Warsaw, but also Berlin is then "back," the chance for their renewed leadership in the EU must not be wasted.

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The New Age of Starvation

With Russia's war against Ukraine, the weaponization of food has taken on a new global dimension. Nations need to rethink their approach to food security.

By Michael Werz

Historically, the fertile Ukrainian black soil, rich in humus, phosphorus, and ammonia compounds, was the site upon which a central innovation of modern power politics took place. The soil, known in Russian as *chernozem*, rests on calcareous sediments and enables enormous agricultural yields thanks to its high moisture retention capacity. This part of the Eurasian steppe belt has therefore long been a geopolitical bargaining chip.

It didn't take long for Moscow to realize that the occupation of the wheat-rich region and the port of Odessa would be a key step toward expanding Russia's sphere of influence. In the 18th century, Russian ruler Catherine the Great sent over 100,000 soldiers to the Black Sea region to secure the economic foundations of the Russian Empire by exporting wheat to more developed Europe. The French Revolution, the rise of Napoleon, and France's subsequent military campaigns turned Odessa into a hub of the international grain trade—immeasurable quantities of goods were shipped on Greek ships to Livorno, London, and Liverpool to feed the war-hungry Europeans. Even today, the opulent opera house in Odessa bears witness to the immense wealth amassed by the continental trade flows.

A century and a half later, during World War II, Herbert Backe, state secretary in the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture, developed a Nazi war strategy of starvation against the Soviet Union. Once again, the black earth of Ukraine became geopolitical terrain—the Backe Plan provided for the supply of food in the territories occupied by the Wehrmacht to German troops and to the German Reich. Just 400 kilometers from Luhansk in Ukraine, German soldiers cut off all food supplies during the 872-day siege of Stalingrad (today again Volgograd) and caused the deaths of 1 million civilians.

Catherine the Great's military expedition and Backe's bureaucratic plan of starvation were characteristic of different eras, but they followed a similar logic: land seizure for the purpose of consolidating the tsarist claim to omnipotence and land seizure as part of the fascist delusion of "*Lebensraum* (living space) in the East." The consequences of both strategies were dramatic: a new topography of the land and an unleashing of unimaginable violence. As barbaric as the consequences were, they were limited by regional immediacy. Only those who were within range of the tsarist or Nazi armies or lived along traditional trade routes of medium range were affected.

Global Markets, Global Hunger This equation no longer applies in the age of globalized trade networks and ubiquitous crisis communication. International food trade flows increased tenfold between 1913 and 1970. The Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was driven in particular by new, high-yielding plant varieties, modern agricultural technology, and the increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. Developing countries such as India and Mexico, and later Brazil, became players on global markets.

Earlier, both the United States and the Soviet Union had used food aid as a political tool to gain influence in developing countries. In a January 1919 diary entry, Cary Grayson, personal assistant to US President Woodrow Wilson, transcribed the following statement by his boss: "Bolshevism is advancing further and further west, has overrun Poland and is poisoning Germany—it cannot be stopped by force, but it can be stopped by food." During the Cold War and after, food was used as a weapon many times, from the Nigerian civil war (1967-70) with food blockades and starvation tactics, to the Bosnian war (1992-95) and the destruction of agricultural infrastructure during the siege of Sarajevo.

Market Concentration When the World Trade Organization (WTO) began to dismantle trade barriers in 1995 and the financial crisis in Asia ended, international trade volumes of basic commodities such as wheat, maize, rice, and soy tripled again, resulting in an enormous concentration of markets. Today, only a handful of countries feed a large part of the world. The expansion of commodity trade has had monumental consequences: Trade chains and supply routes on a previously unimagined, global scale have linked far-flung regions via the umbilical cord of food.

Last year, international agricultural and food trade amounted to around $1.7 trillion, with exports from emerging economies accounting for more than a third. Four of the five largest grain trading companies (Cargill, Continental, Louis-Dreyfus, and Andre) are owned by a handful of European and American families and are therefore subject to far fewer comprehensive transparency obligations than listed companies. In addition, corporate control and monopolies over seeds and fertilizer is a strategic risk in and of itself.

However, food is not a luxury that humanity can do without. Wheat, soy, and maize are existential goods that are particularly worthy of protection; the uninterrupted flow of commodities can become a matter of life and death. A world market for perishable goods is a logistical and chronological challenge and thus provides options for using food as a strategic long-range weapon. World market prices and fragile trade routes allow interventions in conflicts from a long distance, not by means of rapid-fire rifles and artillery shells, but through price manipulation, port blockades, and the supply or withholding of vital carbohydrates.

Hunger as a Weapon in a Globalized World Parallel to this first internationalization of the threat of famine, the starvation of military and political opponents has been repeatedly used as a means of modern warfare. The English language has found the term "weaponization of food" for this deadly endeavor. Current examples include Somalia where the militias use food as a means of recruitment and suppression to gain tactical advantages, and Israel's blockade of aid supplies to the completely destroyed Gaza Strip in response to Hamas' horrific October 7, 2023, massacre. Starving the enemy is part of military calculations almost everywhere.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022, symbolizes a geographical and economic breach of tradition because, unlike the examples highlighted above, the conflict has had enormous effects on food security in distant regions of the world. The Russian attacks have been comprehensive, strategic, and ruthless. The Kremlin has targeted the entire agricultural infrastructure in Ukraine, bombing grain silos and seed factories, railroad lines and ports, while also mining agricultural fields.

The innovations are manifold: Speed, scope, and geopolitical effects allow food to be used as a weapon in a new kind of asymmetric warfare. What Russia has been doing, in effect, is taking hostage starving people from East Africa to Asia. Those affected are often thousands of kilometers away from the actual battlefield and uninvolved in the conflict itself. The weaponization of food in Russia's war against Ukraine has had massive economic consequences, too. The Russian blockade of the port of Odessa, which Ukraine managed to break eventually, was a military echo of Catherine the Great, in a negative inversion: Within a few months, goods worth over $100 billion had accumulated in the port of Odessa.

Russia's war has highlighted the concentration of international grain, oil, and fertilizer markets. Until 2022, Ukraine and Russia were among the world's largest food producers: 29 percent of wheat, 17 percent of corn, and 80 percent of sunflower oil used to be produced in these two countries. And while the Russian military engaged in the destruction of agricultural infrastructure and the blockade of Black Sea ports hampered exports, the sanctions against Russia, rightly imposed by Ukraine's international supporters, further fueled increases in commodity prices.

The effects have been enormous. According to figures from the World Food Program, a total of 51 million tons of grain were exported from Ukraine's seven

The MSC and Food Security

The MSC has increasingly focused on food security in recent years as a topic of priority. The MSC Food Security Task Force, established in 2024, acts as a connecting body between policy events. It brings together key players from five continents. The Task Force broadens discussions that move debates toward systemic and geopolitically informed approaches and integrated solutions.

Black Sea ports in the eight months before the Russian invasion. The speed with which the integrated markets reacted to the attack is also remarkable. Within a few days, grain prices experienced the most dramatic rise since the 2007 recession, with prices for wheat futures jumping by 70 percent in March 2022.

A global chain reaction followed. Many countries limited or stopped their food exports. In one of the most extreme examples, Serbia immediately ceased all exports of wheat, corn, flour, and cooking oil. Other Central and Eastern European countries restricted cereals imports and exports (undermining EU unity). India, Turkey, Indonesia, and Argentina took similar measures.

Fertilizer shortages were another consequence of Russia's invasion. Before the war, Russia produced around 25 percent of the world's raw materials for fertilizers, the export of which was restricted by the Kremlin. This further exacerbated the crisis, as almost half of the world's population rely on food produced with the help of fertilizers. All of this happened in an era during which regional climate crises, particularly in South Asia and North Africa, were already leading to food price increases, further complicating efforts to combat hunger in fragile states from Afghanistan to Haiti.

These epochal changes on the global food market were felt everywhere. The WTO estimated that global trade only grew by 3.4 percent instead of 4.7 percent in 2022 as a result. The disruption to shipping routes for Ukrainian exports and the sanctions against Russia have led to a restructuring of global trade flows in base metals, mineral oils, and agricultural production.

The Kremlin's political calculation is simple: Any upheaval in the international system distracts democratic states. The public and ethical pressure to provide aid ties up already limited political and economic resources. In Vladimir Putin's cynical view of the world, mass killings are political investment capital—whether terrorist warfare in Ukraine or causing famine in Lebanon, Sudan, Venezuela, Malawi, or Zambia. Exacerbating existing risks, Russia's war against Ukraine has contributed significantly to the fact that more than 730 million people worldwide are facing hunger in 2025, including a fifth of the African continent's total population. 2.8 billion people cannot afford healthy food, and the 2024 edition of the Global Hunger Index lists 36 nations where the threat is acute.

A New Notion of 21st Century Security Anyone who believes they can close their eyes to the political, strategic, and security dimensions of food security is under a dangerous illusion: Hunger is being manipulated into an instrument of war from a distance—taking people hostage who live far away and increasing the already enormous scope of a regional conflicts.

The Russian regime's manipulation of global food security requires a prudent and well-informed expansion of traditional military security concepts that embrace more complex crisis scenarios. This process is not about the militarization of development policy, but about the recognition that human and hard security threats are not siloed. Rather, food supplies, agriculture production, trade routes, climate change, regional differences, and military conflicts are interrelated, making food security is one of the arenas of raw power politics.

In other words, two-dimensional conflicts are a thing of the past; the new challenge is to learn to play the three-dimensional chess game of international security policy in the 21st century. Geopolitical hunger shockwaves are the first brute lesson. The task now is to draw the right institutional and political conclusions from the recent experiences in order to cushion and absorb the enormously complex regional and global consequences of the crisis.

As a part of this rethink, leaders must consider possible deterrence strategies. For example, more sustainable and resilient trade structures for essential goods, their special protection under international law and the laws of war, and the outlawing of the strategic use of food as a weapon are important steps. An international agreement that prohibits the weaponization of food would be an important starting point. Models for such protections already exist: UN Security Council Resolution 2417 from 2018 prohibits the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Making export restrictions on important food and fertilizer products more difficult is also an important goal. This would reduce the risk of panic buying and food hoarding by both individuals and isolationist governments.

However, this change in global security policy must also take place institutionally: The ministries for economic cooperation and development in industrialized countries such as Germany, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States should analyze the security policy dimensions of food security more closely. There is a clear need for integrated strategies. The same applies to the development banks, particularly the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

At the same time, both national and multilateral institutions must disincentivize thinking and working silos. The experience of Russia's war against Ukraine gives multilateral organizations and wealthy countries a new political imperative: In addition to important ethical considerations, there are also well-understood self-interests in a stable global order. Today's fragile global food system and the intensified strategy of the weaponization of food have increased the risks. And these new risks create new responsibilities.

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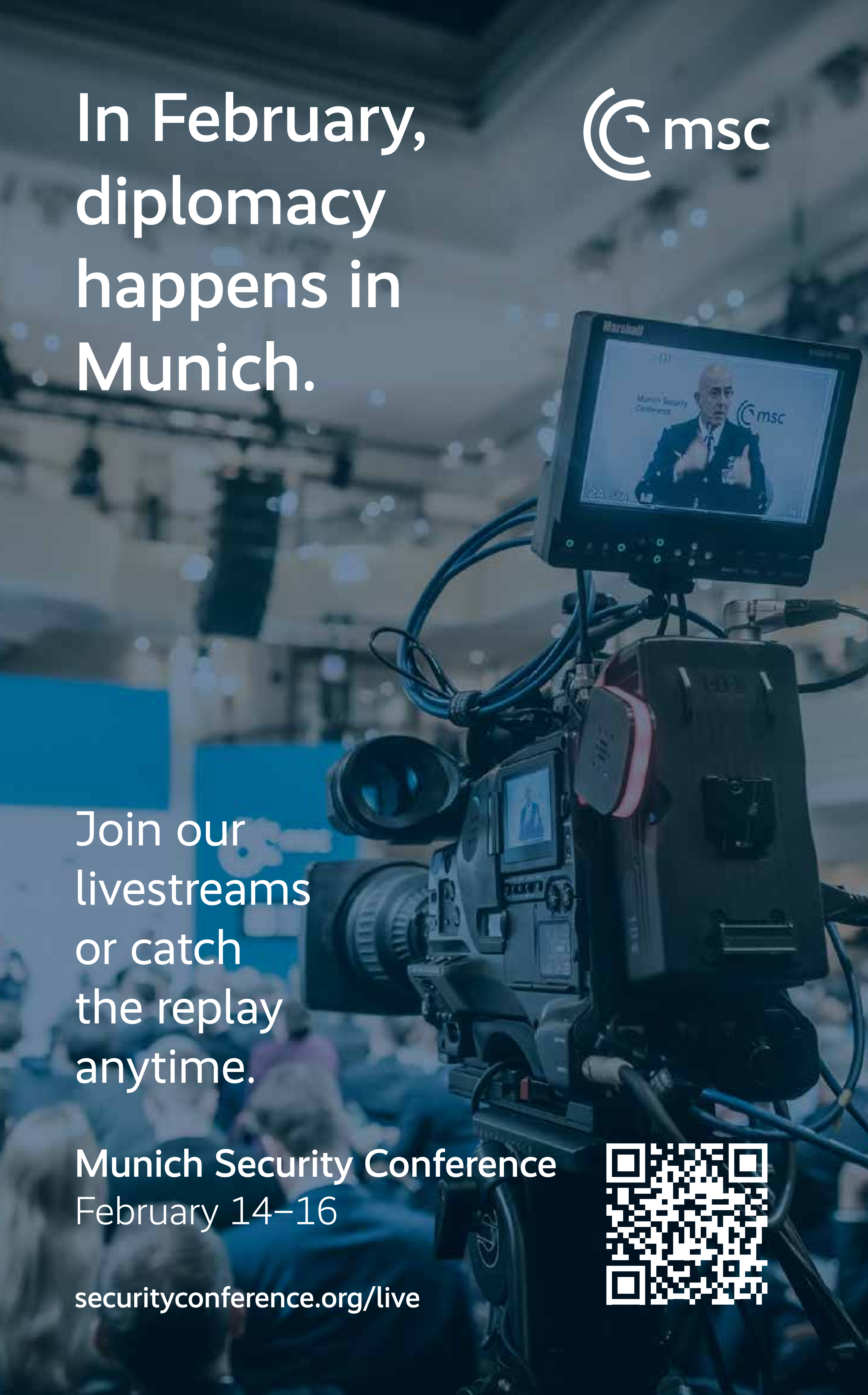
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