

# Germany's Zeitenwende and the Future of European Security

by Pia Fuhrhop



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
and International Cooperation

When German chancellor Olaf Scholz introduced the term *Zeitenwende* (literally, "historical turning point") in his speech three days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was primarily intended to describe the new security situation in Europe. According to the German chancellor, Russia's blatant and brutal war of aggression was a clear breach of the fundamental norms governing the post-war European security architecture. Denying Russian President Vladimir Putin the ability to turn his imperial dreams into reality required a new focus on economic independence and territorial defence "to secure our freedom, our democracy and our prosperity".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Federal Government, *Policy Statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German*

## *Shaking the foundations of Germany's security policy*

Scholz's speech – and strategic assessment of Germany's responsibility in Europe's order – was a watershed moment that shook German foreign and security policy to the very foundations. Russia's invasion fundamentally challenged two main assumptions that had guided much of Germany's foreign and security policy thinking for years. First was the deeply held view that security in Europe was only possible *with* Russia. This notion previously shaped Germany's engagement in European conventional and nuclear arms control and its attempt to settle

*Bundestag*, Berlin, 27 February 2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/-2008378>.

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the first Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 through diplomacy, namely the Minsk agreements. Second, much of German foreign policy had been premised on the hypothesis that what was good for the German economy would also be good for German security. Mutually beneficial economic relations – even if deeply asymmetric – were the preferred vehicle in trying to transform adversarial relations and transcend differences in governance. The Russian invasion put an end to both notions.

Russia's war certainly set in motion a remarkable shift in Germany's security thinking. How far-reaching the overhaul of the actual defence and security policy will be in the end, however, is difficult to foresee at this stage. The *Zeitenwende* was largely driven by the external shock of the war. The answer to this immediate challenge was – and still is – reactive and propelled much more by a perceived external demand than an internal forward-looking strategic reorientation. The German government has therefore struggled to translate the initial momentum behind the transformation of foreign and defence policy into a coherent programme outlining more clearly what the "strength of our own" to "secure our freedom, our democracy and our prosperity" – to put it in Scholz's word – actually involved.

### *Where the Zeitenwende has worked*

*Daring more progress*, the title of the coalition treaty of the first German "traffic light" coalition (comprising the SPD/Social Democrats, Greens and the FDP/Free Democrats), was full of ambition to move Germany forward

after sixteen years of Angela Merkel's leadership. While the Russian invasion dramatically reshuffled priorities, sweeping policy changes have been more successfully introduced in issue areas that can be situated within the government's pre-invasion ambition of giving Germany an ecological and progressive overhaul.

The revolutionary transformation of Germany's energy policy is the best example of this process. The *Zeitenwende* speech did away with Nord Stream 2, the controversial gas pipeline connecting Russia to Germany, and with German dependence on Russian gas deliveries altogether.<sup>2</sup> This has happened remarkably quickly. Within a year, Germany has become independent from Russian gas without catastrophic short-term implications to its economy; it has built two new liquefied natural gas terminals and has taken a number of far-reaching measures to boost the supply of green energy.<sup>3</sup> Limiting the damage of Russia's war on the German economy was the top priority. This included painful decisions, such as postponing the coal phase-out (a tough sell to Green voters) or increasing public debt

<sup>2</sup> Jana Puglierin, "Germany's 'Zeitenwende' and Its Implications for the European Security Architecture", in *Berlin Perspectives*, No. 1/2023, <https://iep-berlin.de/en/projects/germany-and-europe/berlinperspectives/zeitenwende>.

<sup>3</sup> "Schnellerer Ausbau von Windkraft beschlossen", in *ZDF*, 7 July 2022, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/klima-windkraft-klimaneutral-gesetzespaket-bundestag-100.html>; Georgi Kantchev, "The Five-Year Engineering Feet Germany Pulled off in Months", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 December 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/natural-gas-terminal-engineering-feat-germany-11670513353>.

(a hard decision to stomach for FDP supporters). Yet these uncomfortable decisions could be framed as steps to accelerate a policy change the coalition had decided to pursue anyway, including Germany's transformation to a green economy.

### *Security policy: The uphill battle*

When it comes to security and defence, the picture is much more mixed. As a consequence of the Zeitenwende assessment, Chancellor Scholz and many members of his cabinet claimed a leadership role for Germany in security and defence. Germany would have to be the "guarantor of European security that our allies expect us to be",<sup>4</sup> leading the largest conventional army in Europe.

This ambition is a sharp deviation from the government's pre-invasion plans. The coalition agreement saw territorial defence and international missions as equally important tasks, put emphasis on a more efficient and effective management of the armed forces instead of an increased budget, and expressed high hopes for renewed arms-control agreements with Russia to ensure European security.<sup>5</sup> Making huge investments in the German armed

forces, preparing it first and foremost for Europe's territorial defence, organising the long-term deterrence of Russia and securing a decisive US role in Europe's security was not on the progressive agenda. Therefore, the Zeitenwende in defence and security policy has proven to be much more difficult for the traffic light coalition, with the government struggling to keep a common course managing the daily business of the war.

To be sure, Germany has stepped up to the task of guaranteeing Europe's security in ways that were unimaginable before February 2022. To end the *Bundeswehr's* utter lack of material, the government initiated a 100 billion euro special fund for buying heavy equipment. Parliament granted an additional two billion euro of funding to make up for the donations of material to Ukraine's armed forces. The decision to procure F-35 fighter jets from the United States and, with it, the clear commitment to NATO's nuclear sharing is a milestone decision. According to data from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Germany is the largest European donor of humanitarian, financial and military aid to Ukraine.<sup>6</sup> The political magnitude of Germany delivering weapons to Ukraine – ranging from howitzers to (eventually) Leopard 2 – should not be underestimated. Berlin has been ready to provide re-assurance to NATO's Eastern flank, for example, through the

<sup>4</sup> Olaf Scholz, "The Global Zeitenwende. How to Avoid a New Cold in a Multipolar Era", in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (January/February 2023), p. 22-38, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/node/1129585>.

<sup>5</sup> Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Alliance 90/The Greens and the Free Democrats (FDP), *Dare More Progress. Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability*, Coalition Agreement 2021-2025, 7 December 2021, [https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/German\\_Coalition\\_Treaty\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/German_Coalition_Treaty_2021-2025.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW), *Ukraine Support Tracker: Europe Surpasses the U.S. in Total Committed Aid*, 7 December 2022, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/publications/media-information/2022/ukraine-support-tracker-europe-surpasses-the-us-in-total-committed-aid>.

provision of Patriot missile batteries to Poland and assigning a brigade of German soldiers to the defence of Lithuania.

At the same time, however, translating these initial steps into a coherent long-term policy faces four major obstacles. First, beyond op-eds and speeches, the coalition has so far not been able to agree on language and strategy documents communicating its worldview – and Germany's leadership in it – to the foreign and domestic audiences. The planned first national security strategy, the China and Africa strategies remain bones of contention. A more coherent foreign and security policy, as promised by the coalition partners, is yet to emerge.

Second, financially, Chancellor Scholz promised to regularly meet NATO's two per cent spending target. While Berlin could be more or less able to meet this goal with the help of the special fund, it has no plan to increase its regular defence budget, which remains capped at about 50 billion euro, roughly 1,2 per cent of the GDP.<sup>7</sup>

Third, in terms of administrative reform, implementing the necessary structural, personal and material changes to the *Bundeswehr* has been painfully slow. Germany's new defence minister, Boris Pistorius, has promised a reform of the defence ministry and a streamlining of its structures in

<sup>7</sup> Ana-Roxana Popescu, "Germany Defence Budget Exceeds EUR50 Billion", in *Janes*, 18 March 2022, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/germany-defence-budget-exceeds-eur50-billion>.

February 2023.<sup>8</sup> A reform of the armed forces command structure originally proposed in the previous election period remains necessary but up in the air. A concept to fill the ranks of the *Bundeswehr* with qualified personnel is missing. Changes made to Germany's procurement process and institutions seem insufficient, too. So far, the *Bundeswehr* has only used a tiny fraction of the special fund to procure US F-35s, while all other projects remain in the pipeline. Recent media reports revealed that the armed forces did not even place orders for the equipment given to Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, there is no long-term vision of a German defence industrial policy in sight. It is far from clear how the government intends to solve the dilemma of equipping the *Bundeswehr* as fast as possible and implementing the government's goal of strengthening Europe's defence industrial base at the same time. Based on the assumption that the armed forces' stocks have to be filled quickly, much of the special fund will likely benefit US or national firms rather than European solutions.

### Looking ahead

Whether Germany gets its response to the *Zeitenwende* right will matter a great deal for the future of the European security architecture. For Germany

<sup>8</sup> Matthias Gebauer and Konstantin von Hammerstein, "Aufgebläht ist ein hässliches Wort, aber ja 3000 Leute sind sehr viele", in *Der Spiegel*, 17 February 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Carstens, "Lambrecht hat Nachbestellungen für die Ukraine versäumt", in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 January 2023.

to become a guarantor of European security, it has to demonstrate its ability to keep the German public engaged, the Russians out, Europe united, and the Americans in.

So far, the steps taken in response to Russia's war against Ukraine have enjoyed broad public support in Germany. The conservative opposition supported the special fund and helped enshrine it in the constitution. When the government settled on increased spending or weapons deliveries to Ukraine, the majority of the public backed it. But this level of engagement and support may fade away once the higher costs of an increased defence role become more visible. Already, the public's trust in the military and its ability to organise Germany's defence and spend the additional money properly is at an all-time low.<sup>10</sup> Since the special fund will run out in a few years' time, while the demand for additional spending will not, keeping Germans engaged and ready to support the transformation will be key.

Relatedly, the *Zeitenwende* is premised on the idea of a long-term containment and deterrence of Russia. What form this will take in military terms in the medium-to-long term is hard to predict, at least in detail. Yet, keeping the Russians out will be not only a military matter but also a domestic policy issue. Voices that believe in the possibility

<sup>10</sup> ARD-DeutschlandTrendFebruar2023, <https://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/ard-deutschlandtrend/2023/februar>; Marc Drewello, "Rückendeckung für Scholz: Mehrheit der Bundesbürger unterstützt Panzerlieferungen an Ukraine", in *Stern*, 25 January 2023, <https://www.stern.de/33135386.html>.

of a reconciliation with Russia are prominent and will likely become more prominent the longer the war drags on, thus making a steadfast level of public support even more difficult.

At the European level, becoming a guarantor of European security in terms of territorial defence will require that Berlin finds a more effective way to address the current lack of trust in both the West and East of Europe. This is a conundrum as Berlin is mistrusted for different reasons in Paris and Central and Eastern Europe. Paris has been criticising the procurement of US equipment, such as the F-35 or the German "European Sky Shield Initiative", as a sell-out of the idea of European defence. These steps were instead largely praised in Central and Eastern Europe, where, however, Berlin's perceived hesitance to give heavy weapons to Ukraine and the uncertainties over the long-term funding of the *Bundeswehr* raise doubts amongst some about Germany's commitment to carry a larger military burden in NATO.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, in light of these intra-European differences and the obvious lack of military capabilities, keeping the Americans in remains key to European security from Berlin's point of view. Binding its delivery of Leopard 2 tanks to a similar commitment

<sup>11</sup> See Camille Grand, "The Missing European Dimension in Germany's *Zeitenwende*: A View from Paris", in *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 23 February 2023, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/node/38400>; Kristi Raik, "Germany's *Zeitenwende* Fails to Address New Geopolitical Reality", in *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 4 January 2023, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/node/38188>.

from Washington made abundantly clear that the Scholz government views transatlantic risk-sharing as indispensable. Yet, with US long-term priorities placed firmly in the Indo-Pacific and a less European-oriented administration than the current one being a distinct possibility, Berlin will have to demonstrate that it can keep the Americans in for the medium-to-long term. That will, first and foremost, require a sustained and successful effort to boost Germany's military capabilities.

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# European Security and Defence: Don't Get Your Hopes Up Just Yet

by Adája Stoetman



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"2022 will be the year of European defence".<sup>1</sup> These were the words of European Council President Charles Michel in October 2021. When he gave his speech at the Charlemagne Prize Award Ceremony in Aachen, no one expected that his statement would materialise in the way it did. Yes, headway was to be expected with the adoption of the Strategic Compass and European countries demonstrating commitment to investing more in defence cooperation. Although there is still a world of difference between ambitions and reality, the degree of

progress accomplished in the past twelve months was not foreseen.

Over the course of the year, Europe has moved towards setting bigger strides in the realm of security and defence. Ironically, this progress is the result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, former Secretary General of NATO, has, already before the Russian invasion, often stated that "Europe's geopolitical holiday is over".<sup>2</sup> Russia's aggression highlights

<sup>1</sup> European Council, *Speech by President Charles Michel at the Award Ceremony of the International Charlemagne Prize to Klaus Iohannis*, 2 October 2021, <https://europa.eu/!7tbcG9>.

<sup>2</sup> Former NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, has expressed this message for quite some time now and repeated this on multiple occasions (on Dutch media) after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. See for an original source: Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "De Europese Unie: de geopolitieke vakantie is voorbij", in *Gezamenlijke*

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the truth of this statement as it has brought war back to the European continent for the first time in almost thirty years (that is, since the Balkan wars), thereby permanently affecting the European security architecture. The awareness to take greater responsibility for safeguarding Europe's security interests had heightened with the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) of 2016, but the war in Ukraine accelerated Europe's defence efforts. Europe has made substantial progress, but this does not mean that the finish line is in sight. There are still plenty of hurdles on the road to advancing European defence cooperation.

## *2022: The year of the EU's big defence efforts*

Since the publication of the EUGS, European security and defence has received a serious boost, with initiatives like the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Coordinated Annual Review (CARD) front and centre. However, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Europe quickly moved to reinforce its efforts, and European security and defence gained serious momentum. In a way, the war in Ukraine was the wake-up call Europe needed. Within the blink of an eye, Europe turned itself into an actor to be taken into account. For instance, it managed to finance the delivery of weapons through the somewhat ironically named European Peace Facility (EPF). At the time of writing,

*Nieuwsbrief Adviesraden*, December 2019, <https://nieuwsbriefadviesraden.nl/nieuwsartikel/?tx%5Fttnews%5Btt%5Fnews%5D=851&cHash=6ddf670a3fffe1f84d660c51fc8365b8>.

3.6 billion euro has been allocated for the financing of military assistance to Ukraine through the EPF.<sup>3</sup> EU member states have eagerly supported Ukraine from the beginning, both financially and militarily. With respect to the latter, support has been scaled up from military equipment, such as helmets, to the delivery of increasingly heavy weapons, like the recent commitment to deliver Leopard 2 tanks.

In addition to the efforts to support Ukraine, multiple efforts have emerged to strengthen European defence cooperation. The first clear signs were visible in the Versailles Declaration of March 2022, which states that "in view of the challenges we face and in order to better protect our citizens, [...] we must resolutely invest more and better in defence capabilities".<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the European Commission was tasked with analysing the main defence investment gaps. At the end of May 2022, the Commission proposed a phased approach for the way forward. This included the establishment of the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), which incentivises EU member states to buy European, fostering common procurement.

Relatedly, the Commission was called on by the Council to deliver a proposal for a European Defence Investment

<sup>3</sup> Council of the European Union, *Ukraine: Council Agrees on Further Military Support under the European Peace Facility*, 2 February 2023, <https://europa.eu/!JNTjgQ>.

<sup>4</sup> European Council, *The Versailles Declaration*, 10-11 March 2022, point 9, <https://europa.eu/!txdCTy>.

Programme (EDIP). EDIP will help to strengthen the capacity and resilience of the European defence technology and industrial sector,<sup>5</sup> thereby being “the anchor for future joint development and procurement projects of high common interest to the security of the Member States and the Union”.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, EDIRPA and EDIP provide a unique opportunity to achieve an increasing degree of specialisation, whereby countries invest in those capabilities in which they excel or want to excel. Eventually, this will improve interoperability and thus strengthen defence cooperation.

Another major achievement was the adoption of the Strategic Compass in March 2022, a month after the war in Ukraine broke out. The Compass shapes the EU's security and defence policy for the upcoming 5–10 years. With concrete objectives and strict deadlines, the Compass serves as a steppingstone for a greater degree of strategic autonomy. A downside of the Compass, however, is that it lacks a clear perspective beyond its 10-year timeframe. This is especially relevant when considering that larger defence investments often have a time horizon of sometimes 20 to 30 years.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> European Council, *Conclusions*, 5 December 2022, <https://europa.eu/!FDf6Hf>.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, *Defence Industry: EU to Reinforce the European Defence Industry through Common Procurement with a €500 Million Instrument*, 19 July 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_22\\_4491](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_4491).

<sup>7</sup> See, Dick Zandee, Adája Stoetman and Bob Deen, “The EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. Squaring Ambition with Reality”, in *Clingendael Reports*, May 2021, <https://www.clingendael.org/node/12761>.

A final remarkable development has been the increase in defence budgets across Europe. After the Cold War, defence budgets drastically decreased, and until now, no substantial increases could be witnessed. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has marked a turning point. Across the board, European countries are increasing their defence budgets, many of which are finally fulfilling the commitment to spend 2 per cent of GDP in defence as agreed within NATO in 2014. So far, the most momentous example is Germany's *Zeitenwende*, with an astonishing boost to its defence budget and its breaking with old traditions like not delivering weapons to a country at war. But also the Netherlands is projected to reach, for the first time, the 2 per cent target in 2024 and 2025.

### *The hurdles to (over)come*

Although these advancements are momentous, they do not imply that there are no longer obstacles on the way ahead. The war in Ukraine demonstrates that European security is still heavily dependent upon the United States and that European strategic autonomy is far from ever becoming a reality. Relatedly, there is no guarantee that Europe's unity on Ukraine will last indefinitely. Divergences on weapon deliveries are already visible, with Hungary and Austria arguing against them,<sup>8</sup> while pre-existing differences among EU member states on important themes, such as the rule of law in Hungary and Poland, have not vanished.

<sup>8</sup> Chiara Swaton, “Austria, Hungary Agree on Not Sending Weapons to Ukraine”, in *Euractiv*, 31 January 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1871833>.

Moreover, while a few years ago doubts were cast about NATO's role in the European security architecture,<sup>9</sup> the war in Ukraine has led to renewed importance for NATO's primary task: collective defence. This is not problematic in itself; in contrast, it is welcomed by many. But it may lay bare at least two important issues.

First, NATO's revival means it will call upon the Allies to provide the necessary resources, in terms of capabilities, personnel, as well as financially. Simultaneously, the EU is also increasingly calling upon its member states to allocate more resources to, for example, the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (EU RDC). This could put the countries that are members of both organisations in a difficult position as they most likely want to fulfil both requirements, a burden that would be particularly difficult to bear for the smaller states.

Second, the renewed focus back onto collective defence runs the risk that other security issues, such as instability on Europe's southern flank, are overlooked. Addressing these security matters, for example, through deploying crisis management operations, requires primarily light and rapidly deployable capabilities. Hence, a close eye must be kept on ensuring that these capabilities also remain available.

Zooming in on Europe's defence efforts, there is also room for improvement. The war in Ukraine and Europe's

<sup>9</sup> See for example Macron's interview: "Emmanuel Macron Warns Europe: NATO Is Becoming Brain-Dead", in *The Economist*, 7 November 2019.

weapon delivery puts pressure on the European defence industry. It must cope with replenishing stocks and an increasing demand following rising defence investment. Presently, it cannot live up to this demand,<sup>10</sup> a result of shortcomings in production capacity, but also of a shortage of the necessary raw materials.

Furthermore, there is also scope for improvement regarding the implementation of the Strategic Compass. The first cracks are already becoming visible with respect to the EU's RDC. It runs the danger of becoming just as much a toothless tiger as the EU battlegroups, the tactical multinational groups originally thought to be a main instrument of EU operations which, however, have never been used. There is already bickering about which country should oversee the organisation of the first live exercises and where the financial means to do so should come from. Moreover, there are concerns regarding the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC),<sup>11</sup> including the lack of an appropriate volume of staff and the proper functioning of operational systems, like the computers that are claimed to be too old.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See, Ilya Gridneff, "Why Europe's Defense Industry Can't Keep Up", in *Politico*, 11 October 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/?p=2249964>.

<sup>11</sup> See, Dick Zandee and Adája Stoetman, "Realising the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity: Opportunities and Pitfalls", in *Clingendael Policy Briefs*, October 2022, <https://www.clingendael.org/node/15124>.

<sup>12</sup> Emmanuelle Stroesser, "Géopolitique européenne", in *B2Pro Carnet de veille*, 24 January 2023.

### *Looking ahead*

The steps that Europe has taken in the past years, and in particular in the previous twelve months, are remarkable, though long overdue. There is still a long road ahead, however. A lot of work must be done, and Europe cannot afford to just sit back. In the long run, that would be detrimental to its role in guaranteeing European security, a responsibility that Europe must increasingly take upon itself, given that the US's commitment to European security is no longer self-evident. Wake-up calls or major crises, like the war in Ukraine, should not have been needed for Europe to become serious about strengthening defence cooperation. The need to strengthen European security and defence must become part of daily strategic thinking at the highest political levels – not only now but for the long haul.

Furthermore, European countries need to demonstrate long-term commitment to the European security and defence project, thereby moving towards realising European strategic autonomy in security and defence. This long-term commitment applies to the political, but also to the financial domain, as financial backing and optimising defence investments are essential to back political ambitions.

Moreover, both NATO and the EU will increase their defence efforts in the nearby future. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that the renewed attention to defence and associated increases in defence budgets in European countries, and especially those that are a member of both organisations,

are not short lived, but sustainable over the long term. Spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence should thus be regarded as the bare minimum to be able to maintain security and safeguard interests. In addition, the shared NATO and EU member states should closely coordinate their defence efforts so that investments are done most efficiently and unnecessary duplication can be avoided.

In addition, and more concretely, to optimise defence investments, and thereby enhance efficiency and eventually interoperability, European countries should adopt a framework based on the logic of specialisation. In such a framework, groups of countries should invest in those capabilities in which they excel or want to excel. Only if the EU manages to implement these elements, will it be able to safeguard its own security interests and become the reliable and credible actor in security and defence it so desperately wants to be.

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# The War against Ukraine and Russia's Position in Europe's Security Order

by Stephen Blank



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Russia's aggressions against its neighbours since 2008 – first Georgia, then Ukraine twice – impel the urgent reconstruction of European security. While articulating a post-war European security order and Russia's place there is easy, implementing it is extremely difficult. Nevertheless, in Ukraine, Russia has unilaterally, and unprovokedly, violated or broken at least eight major international treaties and accords, ranging from the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, according to which Moscow had pledged to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, which prohibits nuclear threats against non-nuclear states.<sup>1</sup> It has also broken

<sup>1</sup> Ernest J. Moniz, *Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy*

NATO's (and especially Washington's) conventional deterrence.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Moscow's nuclear threats reveal its readiness to wage limited nuclear war without inexorably launching a general nuclear war: in other words, it could launch nuclear weapons against Ukraine or Europe, believing it could deter a US or NATO nuclear riposte using its full spectrum

*and Cyber, Nuclear Threat Initiative, Hearing on Russia's Waning Global Influence, 16 November 2022, <https://www.nti.org/?p=37152>.*

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca L. Heinrichs, *Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy and Cyber, Nuclear Threat Initiative, Hearing on Russia's Waning Global Influence, 16 November 2022, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA14/20221116/115182/HHRG-117-FA14-Wstate-HeinrichsR-20221116.pdf>.*

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nuclear capabilities while its doctrine and policy espouse limited nuclear war.<sup>3</sup> Given Washington and Europe's well-advertised reluctance to retaliate against nuclear weapons in Europe with nuclear counter-strikes, Russia believes it could escape nuclear retribution. Indeed, its actions in Ukraine negate notions of a shared concept of a mutually assured destruction (MAD) world.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, its war is arguably a genocidal war.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we must confront the problem of Russia in Europe and the requirements of invigorated conventional and nuclear deterrence.

To restore a nuclear order, the West must first postulate this order's foundational military, political and economic requirements, including: defeating Russia decisively and hopefully rapidly;<sup>6</sup> restoring Ukraine's

full sovereignty and territorial integrity as of 2013 (thus, including Crimea); granting Ukraine NATO membership – indeed the sooner, the better;<sup>7</sup> putting Ukraine on track for EU membership and rebuilding Ukraine's economy using Russian reparations; and war crimes trials for Russian perpetrators.

All this is easier said than done. Nevertheless, we must start building this order now, even if the war is in gridlock and will remain attritional for some time. This is especially necessary because Russian President Vladimir Putin will almost certainly fight to the bitter end. So, unless Russia is decisively defeated, no negotiated settlement is conceivable, let alone possible.<sup>8</sup>

### *Russia's imperial vision*

Since no rational assessment of Russia's interests justifies continuing fighting, the only explanation that makes sense is that Putin is now fighting first not to lose power and second to preserve a base for future imperial projects. Therefore, the current stalemate will not last forever, nor should we let it do so. Hence, rebuilding a viable and durable European security order now is essential for a number of reasons.

<sup>3</sup> Paul K. Davis, "Potential Implications of the War in Ukraine for Northeast Asia", in *NAPSNet Policy Forum*, 27 October 2022, <https://nautilus.org/?p=99413>; Stephen Blank, "Reflections on Russian Nuclear Strategy", in Adam B. Lowther (ed.), *Guide to Nuclear Deterrence in the Age of Great Power Competition*, Bossier City, Louisiana Tech Research Institute, 2020, p. 229-243; Sidharth Kraushal and Sam Cranny-Evans, "Russia's Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons and Its Views of Limited Nuclear War", in *RUSI Commentaries*, 21 June 2022, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/russias-nonstrategic-nuclear-weapons-and-its-views-limited-nuclear-war>.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Powell, "60 Years after Cuban Missile Crisis, Nuclear Threat Feels Chillingly Immediate", in *The Harvard Gazette*, 17 October 2022, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/?p=349355>.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Snyder, "Russia's Eugenic War. Four Policies of Racial Cleansing", in *Thinking About...*, 8 January 2023, <https://snyder.substack.com/p/russias-eugenic-war>.

<sup>6</sup> Condoleezza Rice and Robert M. Gates, "Time Is Not on Ukraine's Side", in *The Washington Post*,

7 January 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/01/07/condoleezza-rice-robert-gates-ukraine-repel-russia>.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Blank, "Imitating the Action of a Tiger: How to Support Ukraine", in *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, No. 4/2022 (December 2022), <https://pism.pl/publications/imitating-the-action-of-a-tiger-how-to-support-ukraine>.

<sup>8</sup> James K. Sebenius and Michael Singh, "Russia and Ukraine Are Not Ready for Talks", in *Foreign Affairs*, 11 January 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/node/1129799>.

First, Russia's post-2014 aggression does not merely target Ukraine. Instead, it deliberately assaults the very idea of international order, particularly that of a European security order.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Putin, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia Nikolai Patrushev and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov proclaim the collective West is at war with Russia.<sup>10</sup> Russian nationalist political scientist Sergei Karaganov openly says that "We are at war with the West. The European security order is illegitimate."<sup>11</sup> Therefore and second, the invasions of Ukraine confirm that Putin's Russia can only survive as an empire, entailing the diminished sovereignty of all its post-Soviet neighbours and also Central and Eastern Europe. Indeed, post-Soviet Russia has not really recognised the sovereignty or territorial integrity of any of these states.<sup>12</sup> Russia's quest

for empire necessarily entails war, because it requires curtailing these states' sovereignty, endangering their territorial integrity, while demanding not only imperial restoration, but also a free hand to pursue it. This outcome is only attainable by force, that is, war – and not just in the former Soviet Union.

Since the nature of the European order hinges on the outcome of this war, leaving Russia in control of any Ukrainian territory by a Korea-like negotiation or negotiating over Ukraine's head, as many advocate, would confirm Moscow's beliefs in its imperial destiny and Western weakness. That would only give Russia a reprieve, entailing continued Russia's war against the West to enshrine Putin's autocracy and its inevitable corollary, empire. In that order, security is only conceivable as being against Russia, with European security becoming an anomic order with no norms other than a permanent state of siege, if not actual war. Consequently, Russia, not the West, has excluded itself from any future European order that it cannot overawe. Its foreign policy rhetoric, as expressed by Putin, Lavrov, former Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and innumerable foreign policy thinkers, now emphasises rejecting Europe and identifying Russia as an Asiatic, Eurasian state that is the south's

<sup>9</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov and Ivan Krastev, *New Rules or No Rules*, Moscow, Valdai Discussion Club, March 2015, <https://valdaiclub.com/files/11484>.

<sup>10</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, "Russia Is Now Fighting NATO in Ukraine: Top Ally Says", in *Reuters*, 10 January 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-ally-patrushev-says-russia-is-now-fighting-nato-ukraine-2023-01-10>; Russian Presidency, *Vladimir Putin Answered Questions from Journalists*, 22 December 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70170>; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Interview with Newsweek*, 21 September 2022, [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/1830540](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1830540).

<sup>11</sup> Federico Fubini, "Sergey Karaganov: 'We Are at War with the West. The European Security Order Is Illegitimate'", in *Corriere della Sera*, 8 April 2022, [https://www.corriere.it/economia/aziende/22\\_aprile\\_08/we-are-at-war-with-the-west-the-european-security-order-is-illegitimate-c6b9fa5a-b6b7-11ec-b39d-8a197cc9b19a.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/economia/aziende/22_aprile_08/we-are-at-war-with-the-west-the-european-security-order-is-illegitimate-c6b9fa5a-b6b7-11ec-b39d-8a197cc9b19a.shtml).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Blank, "The Values Gap between Moscow and the West: The Sovereignty Issue", in *Acque & Terre*, No. 6/2007, p. 90-95; Stephen Blank, "Russia and the Black Sea's

Frozen Conflicts in Strategic Perspective", in *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Summer 2008), p. 23-54; James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion. Russia's Influence Abroad*, London, Chatham House, 2013, p. 61-62; Susan Stewart, "The EU, Russia and a Less Common Neighbourhood", in *SWP Comments*, No. 3 (January 2014), p. 2-3, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/the-eu-russia-and-their-neighbourhood>.



global natural champion.<sup>13</sup> A Korea-style negotiation would also permit a continuation of domestic Putinism that can only exist by inciting a global (not merely European) state of siege in world politics: an undefeated and thus unreformed Russia will resume a new political or non-kinetic war against Ukraine and the West preparatory to another effort to destroy Ukraine or other states within its alleged imperial sphere of influence.

For there to be a genuine order that resolves border and sovereignty issues de facto and de jure with ensuing legitimacy, Russia must be defeated and Ukrainian borders restored to the status quo ante Russia's first invasion in 2014.

### *Ukraine's European future*

Moreover, we must fully integrate Ukraine into NATO and the EU. It does not suffice to affiliate Ukraine with NATO, as Henry Kissinger suggested.<sup>14</sup> Neither will a new security organisation, as US foreign policy expert Michael O'Hanlon proposed, be an acceptable format for defending Ukraine and other states because only NATO remains the "gold standard" among binding alliances with credible security

guarantees.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Ukraine must receive a fast track for EU membership. Obviously, there must be more to this new order, but those are prerequisites for its durability and viability. Indeed, a, if not the, precondition for a viable and durable European security order is foreclosing Russia's imperial option by defeating it decisively, and that entails Ukraine's full integration with European security institutions and ensuing security.

In parallel, every member of a reinvigorated NATO must sustain credible conventional deterrence of Russia from the Arctic to the Black Sea, the latter being particularly needful of strengthening.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, if Putin retains power or Putinism continues after him, NATO must establish an equally credible nuclear deterrent to prevent any new nuclear threats from inhibiting NATO's conventional response to Russian aggression. Indeed, Putin and his supporters have shown not only that limited nuclear war is conceivable but also that they believe it may not inexorably trigger a full-scale nuclear war.<sup>17</sup> This task of deterring conventional war and preventing its escalation to the nuclear

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Blank, "Russia's New Foreign Policy Orientation", in *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (6 January 2023), <https://jamestown.org/?p=94850>.

<sup>14</sup> "A peace process should link Ukraine to NATO, however expressed. The alternative of neutrality is no longer meaningful, especially after Finland and Sweden joined NATO." Henry Kissinger, "How to Avoid Another World War", in *The Spectator*, 17 December 2022, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-push-for-peace>.

<sup>15</sup> Lise Howard and Michael O'Hanlon, "What Should Eurasian Security Look Like After the Russia-Ukraine War?", in *The Hill*, 26 December 2022, <https://thehill.com/?p=3786748>; Lawrence Freedman, "Who Can Guarantee Russian Security?", in *Comment is Freed*, 17 December 2022, <https://samf.substack.com/p/who-can-guarantee-russian-security>.

<sup>16</sup> Ben Hodges, "The Black Sea or ... a Black Hole", in *CEPA Articles*, 21 January 2021, <https://cepa.org/?p=1641>.

<sup>17</sup> Paul K. Davis, "Potential Implications of the War in Ukraine for Northeast Asia", cit.; Stephen Blank, "Reflections on Russian Nuclear Strategy", cit.

level is admittedly particularly difficult for NATO, both historically and given the current transformation that has made conventional weapons as lethal as nuclear ones. It also requires a new NATO nuclear policy, always a difficult issue for NATO. Nevertheless, this European order must necessarily exclude Russia until a fundamental transformation occurs not only of the Russian state but of Russia's political culture. These are tasks for the Russian people, not Europe, and this transformation is best accomplished peacefully over time. But it must terminate Russia's autocracy-empire nexus. Defeat in war, the sooner the better, is a necessary condition of this transformation. Then Europe can begin the gradual reintegration of Russia much as West Germany, Italy and Austria each underwent an enduring transformation to democratic governance after 1945.

Therefore, this order must also develop a more robust economic-political dimension. This requires resuming the EU's enlargement, not only to Ukraine but also to the Western Balkans, as well as a genuinely credible path to including Turkey that entails its ultimate democratisation. These additions to the EU are necessary to stimulate European economic growth, vision, democracy and political stability, while depriving Russia and its Balkan allies (Serbia and Bosnia's Serbs) of opportunities for subversion and political warfare that potentially incites ethnic conflicts, for example, in Kosovo or Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>18</sup> Achieving

<sup>18</sup> Matteo Bonomi et al., *In Search of EU Strategic Autonomy: What Role for the Western Balkans*,

these objectives would also give Europe and the West more instruments for dealing with Middle Eastern crises and countering Russian machinations there, as well as reducing Russian influence on Turkey that must be an integral component of any new order.<sup>19</sup>

### *Looking to the future*

Equally important to the economic-political pillar of a new order is Ukraine's democratic reconstruction and the EU finding new sources of hydrocarbons while simultaneously moving to a carbon-free environment to free itself from dependence on third, problematic countries. This trend will also compel a hopefully democratising, non-imperial Russia to overcome much of its historical economic-technological inefficiencies in its own interest. But perhaps most importantly, these moves would accompany and parallel a strategy to help a long-term enduring Russian socio-economic-political-cultural transition to a liberal, democratic order. Then perhaps Russia can recover its European vocation and escape the pattern by which every prior liberalisation has been thwarted by a coalition espousing autocracy and empire. Putin and Putinism represent the latest incarnation of this pattern, and his Mafia state and imperialistic wars reveal where such governance ends up.

Defining a new European order and both Moscow and Kyiv's places in it must begin immediately. It must combine the

Rome, IAI, June 2021, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/13530>.

<sup>19</sup> Ben Hodges, "The Black Sea or ... a Black Hole", cit.

EU's and NATO's democratic expansion, robust, credible conventional and nuclear deterrence, and economic transformation with both containment and the flexibility to accommodate a potentially democratising Russia. To paraphrase William Pitt, Ukraine has "saved itself by its exertions and Europe by its example." It's time we learned the lessons from that example.

*27 February 2023*

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# Turkey vis-à-vis Russia's War against Ukraine

by Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
and International Cooperation

Characterising Turkey's policy towards Russia's war on Ukraine is not an easy task. Elements of both support for Ukraine and neutrality have emerged in the past year. An analysis of the fundamentals of Turkey-US relations and Russia-Turkey relations is thus helpful.

## *Pro-Kyiv, but not anti-Moscow*

In Galip Dalay's words, Turkey's policy towards the war is "pro-Kyiv without being overtly anti-Moscow".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Turkey has taken several steps in support of Ukraine. It denounced the

invasion and voted for UN resolutions condemning Russia. It supplied armed drones to Ukraine, which played a key role, particularly in the early phases of the conflict. It blocked the straits connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to warring parties, as the Montreux Convention of 1936 permits, preventing Russia from reinforcing its Black Sea fleet.

On the other hand, Turkey refrained from taking an anti-Moscow position. It abstained from joining Western sanctions and continues to trade with Russia. Turkish exports to its northern neighbour jumped by 87 per cent in a year, leading some to conclude that Turkey has turned itself into a trade hub

<sup>1</sup> Galip Dalay, "Ukraine's Wider Impact on Turkey's International Future", in *Chatham House Expert Comments*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/node/28442>.

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between Russia and the West.<sup>2</sup> Russian oligarchs and ordinary citizens, seeing Turkey as a safe harbour, moved assets into the country. Turkey also continues the political dialogue with Russia: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has continued to meet his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, and the Turkish and Syrian defence ministers recently came together in Moscow under Russian facilitation. Maintaining political dialogue with Moscow and not joining the sanctions against Russia gave Turkey the opportunity to play a facilitator/mediator role between Kyiv and Moscow, a policy that is strongly supported by the Turkish public opinion.<sup>3</sup> Turkey facilitated not only meetings between Russia and Ukraine at the technical level in İstanbul but also at the level of foreign ministers in Antalya in March 2022. Turkey also mediated the grain deal in July 2022 and a prisoner swap between Russia and Ukraine in December 2022. How can Turkey support Ukraine, but not directly confront Russia, and why does it choose to do that? The answer lies in Turkey's grand strategy.

### *A competitive cooperation?*

Indeed, alongside with looking West policy, balancing major powers is

<sup>2</sup> Nicolas Bourcier, "Turkey Has Turned into a Trade Platform between Russia and the West", in *Le Monde*, 24 October 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-west\\_6001620\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/10/24/turkey-has-turned-into-a-trade-platform-between-russia-and-the-west_6001620_4.html).

<sup>3</sup> Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, Kadri Tastan and Ceylan Akman Canbilek, "Turkish Perceptions of the European Union 2022", in *GMF Insights*, 14 April 2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/turkish-perceptions-european-union-2022>.

among the pillars of Turkey's grand strategy.<sup>4</sup> This strategy goes back to the 19th century when the Ottoman Empire balanced the British and Russian Empires as a strategy for survival. From a long-term perspective, the Russia-Turkey relationship is characterised by "competitive cooperation".<sup>5</sup> While Russia and Turkey compete in Syria, the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Libya, this does not prevent cooperation between them in other areas such as the economy, trade and energy. Even on issues where they are competing, such as Syria and the South Caucasus, they can limit competition through mutual accommodation of each other's priorities.

The Russia-Turkey competitive cooperation is not a stable one and largely depends on both parties' relationship with the West. This is especially true for Turkey. When both felt excluded by the West, as was the case during the 1920s when the Bolsheviks were fighting for their survival and the Kemalists were waging a war of independence against European great powers, Russia supported the nationalist cause in Turkey by supplying weapons. In the early post-war period, however, Turkey joined NATO and the Western camp after Stalin had asked Ankara to give up sovereignty over the Bosphorus and Dardanelle Straits. Ankara started

<sup>4</sup> Mustafa Aydın, "Grand Strategizing in and for Turkish Foreign Policy: Lessons Learned from History, Geography and Practice", in *Perceptions*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Autumn-Winter 2020), p. 203-226.

<sup>5</sup> Mustafa Aydın, "The Long View on Turkish-Russian Rivalry and Cooperation", in *GMF On Turkey*, No. 5 (June 2020), <https://www.gmfus.org/news/long-view-turkish-russian-rivalry-and-cooperation>.

again looking more favourably towards détente with Russia in the 1970s. This was due to the US arms embargo against Turkey as a result of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 in response to the collapse of the constitutional order on the island and Greece's attempt to illegally annex it.

This dynamic can help explain Turkey's rapprochement with Russia after the failed coup in 2016, but only partially. In 2016, Turkey had several reasons to be frustrated with the United States and the EU. Washington continued to support the Kurdish YPG force in Syria against the Islamic State, despite Turkish allegations that YPG was the Syrian branch of the PKK, a designated terrorist organisation not only in Turkey, but in the United States too. The YPG had gained control of a large swath of territory in Northern Syria all the way from the Iraqi border to Afrin, getting very close to the Mediterranean. The United States did not accommodate Turkish demands to deterritorialise the YPG, but Russia did. Ankara made its first operation in Syria, Operation Euphrates Shield, in the Russian-controlled northwest in August 2016, roughly one month after the failed coup attempt.<sup>6</sup>

### *Mistrust of the West?*

If frustration with the United States was one reason why Turkey decided to cooperate with Russia, perceived threat from the United States could be another. Nicholas Danforth has

<sup>6</sup> Sinan Ülgen and Can Kasapoğlu, "Operation Euphrates Shield: Aims and Gains", in *Anadolu Agency*, 19 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/67754>.

argued that Turkey perceives both the backing of the YPG by the United States and various regional events, such as the 2013 overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and the increasing partnership between Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, and Israel in the eastern Mediterranean, as indications of "hostile Western encirclement".<sup>7</sup>

As Şaban Kardaş and I have argued, there are four key issues that affect the US–Turkey security relationship: an outdated strategic framework, deficit of trust, erosion of institutional ownership, and adverse public opinion on both sides.<sup>8</sup>

As far as Europe is concerned, the EU–Turkey relationship suffers from not only the stalling of the accession process, as a result of democratic backsliding in Turkey, but competition rather than cooperation on foreign policy. As reported by Selim Yenel, Turkey's alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has been weakening rapidly, from 97 per cent in 2007 to 7 per cent in 2022.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Danforth, "Frustration, Fear, and the Fate of U.S.-Turkish Relations", in *GMF On Turkey*, No. 11 (July 2019), <https://www.gmfus.org/news/frustration-fear-and-fate-us-turkish-relations>.

<sup>8</sup> Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı and Şaban Kardaş, "A Dual Framework for the Turkey-U.S. Security Relationship", in *GMF Policy Papers*, March 2021, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/dual-framework-turkey-us-security-relationship>.

<sup>9</sup> Selim Yenel, "Turkey's Disengagement from the European Union", in *GMF Insights*, 2 February 2023, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/turkeys-disengagement-european-union>.

Before these structural problems between Turkey and its Western partners are addressed, any progress made in the EU–Turkey and Turkey–US relationships would be suboptimal and temporary.

### *A balancing act*

When Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine turned into a full-scale invasion in February 2022, Turkey engaged in a balancing act. Politically, it supported Kyiv and denounced unprovoked Russian aggression. Militarily, in the early phases of the conflict, when other Western countries were reluctant to make significant arms deliveries to Ukraine, it continued to deliver armed drones to Kyiv, in the form of commercial sales by a privately-owned company.

As mentioned, Turkey also blocked the straits connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to warring parties early on, based on the Montreux Convention. This meant that two of Russia's Slava-class cruisers currently operating in the Mediterranean couldn't enter the Black Sea and Russia could not reinforce its Black Sea fleet,<sup>10</sup> which became a real problem for Moscow after several of its naval vessels were either sunk or badly damaged. If Russia currently does not have sufficient naval power in the Black Sea to threaten Odesa, this is thanks to the Turkish decision to keep the straits blocked.

<sup>10</sup> Heather Mongilio, "Turkey Closes Bosphorus, Dardanelles Straits to Warships", in *USNI News*, 28 February 2022, <https://news.usni.org/?p=92472>.

Meanwhile, however, Turkey did not join the sanctions against Russia, for four main reasons. First, Turkey is opposed to international sanctions not supported by the United Nations as a matter of principle. Second, Ankara was not consulted by either the United States or the EU when their sanctions packages were being drafted. Third, Turkey itself would be badly hit by the sanctions, as was observed in the cases of sanctions against Iraq and Iran. Finally, as evidenced when Turkey downed a Russian Su-24 in 2015, Russia has the ability to retaliate against Turkey economically. On that occasion, on Putin's order, charter flights from Russia to Turkey ground to a halt, significantly reducing the number of Russian tourists in Turkey, and Russia also stopped importing agricultural products from Turkey – all of which hurt the Turkish economy badly.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it has to be considered that Turkey relies on Russia for 45 per cent of its gas demand.<sup>12</sup>

One must not forget that presidential and parliamentary elections are planned in Turkey for May 2023, which will be competitive. Hence, Erdoğan absolutely needs to keep the Turkish currency stable despite the very large current accounts imbalance, which requires capital inflows to Turkey despite adverse market conditions. Against this backdrop, Putin came to Erdoğan's help in the form of Rosatom

<sup>11</sup> "Turkey's Downing of Russian Warplane - What We Know", in *BBC News*, 1 December 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34912581>.

<sup>12</sup> "Turkey Has No Plans to Cut Russian Oil Imports, Welcomes Iran Supply", in *Daily Sabah*, 9 March 2022, [http://sabahdai.ly/\\_168y](http://sabahdai.ly/_168y).



injecting capital into its Turkish affiliate Akkuyu Nuclear Plant.<sup>13</sup> While there was also news that Ankara asked Russia to delay a portion of Turkey's gas payments to Gazprom, there is no public information on how this ended.<sup>14</sup>

As the Russia–Ukraine war rages on, Turkey's balancing act may become unsustainable, and Ankara may feel compelled to take a clearer position. Several factors could impact which direction Turkey's position would tilt towards. The upcoming election is one of those factors. A new government in Turkey could have warmer relations with Europe and the US, and less need for Russia. On the other hand, a re-elected Erdoğan, with renewed confidence, could also build more constructive relations with Western allies and be less reliant on Russia's support.

The continuation of American resolve is equally key. Political or policy change in Washington resulting in diminished American support for Ukraine would also weaken Turkish support for Kyiv. In a similar vein, a reduction of European support for Ukraine is another important factor. Last but not least, developments on the ground will also play a key role. While additional setbacks faced by Russia on the battlefield leading to discontent at home could lead Turkey to distance itself from Moscow, Russian advances

in Ukraine would result in Turkey doubling down on its policy act as a mediator.

27 February 2023

<sup>13</sup> Firdevs Yuksel, "Russia Transferring \$15B for Türkiye for Akkuyu NP", in *Anadolu Agency*, 29 July 2022, <http://et.aa.com.tr/35933>.

<sup>14</sup> Firat Kozok, Kerim Karakaya and Cagan Koc, "Turkey Wants Russia to Delay Its Gas Payments Until 2024", in *Bloomberg*, 3 October 2022, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/-1.1827463>.

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# Europe's Evolving Order and the War in Ukraine

by Dario Cristiani



UNITED STATES EMBASSY  
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
and International Cooperation

## ABSTRACT

The 14th edition of the Transatlantic Symposium, IAI's annual Rome forum on transatlantic security, focused on the long-term implications of the Ukraine War for Europe's security arrangements. The seminar brought together a group of about twenty experts and officials from the US, Europe and Turkey, and encompassed four sessions on major factors capable of shaping Europe's order: Europe's push to boost its common defence; Germany's *Zeitenwende*; Turkey's new centrality; and Russia's future position in Europe. Each session featured a chair and a paper-giver, who started the debate with a short presentation, followed by an open debate. The 2022–23 Transatlantic Symposium was realised thanks to the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the US Embassy in Rome and Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

*Transatlantic relations | European defence | NATO | Russia | Ukraine | Germany | Turkey*

keywords

# Europe's Evolving Order and the War in Ukraine

by Dario Cristiani\*

## 1. European defence and transatlantic relations

### 1.1 *The focus*

The year 2022 saw significant progress in European defence cooperation, primarily due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The conflict served as a wake-up call for Europe, leading to increased defence budgets, the adoption of the Strategic Compass, and other initiatives to strengthen European defence cooperation. However, several hurdles remain, including dependence on the United States for territorial defence, potential divisions among European Union member states, and the need to balance commitments to both NATO and the EU.<sup>1</sup>

Key developments in European defence cooperation in 2022 include the Versailles Declaration, the establishment of the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) and the European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP). Additionally, many European countries have increased their defence budgets to meet NATO's 2 per cent of GDP target.

Challenges facing European defence cooperation include maintaining unity among EU member states, addressing the increased focus on collective defence while avoiding neglecting other security issues and improving the European defence industry's capacity to meet demand. Furthermore, the implementation of the EU Strategic Compass needs improvement, with issues arising regarding the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (EU RDC) and the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC).

<sup>1</sup> See Adája Stoitman, "European Security and Defence: Don't Get Your Hopes Up Just Yet", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 23|09 (March 2023), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/16676>.

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To ensure a stronger European security and defence architecture, European countries must demonstrate long-term commitment to defence cooperation, both politically and financially. This includes maintaining increased defence budgets and adopting a framework based on specialisation to optimise defence investments and enhance efficiency and interoperability. By addressing these challenges, the EU can work towards achieving strategic autonomy in security and defence.

### *1.2 The debate*

The transformation of European defence has not yet materialised, despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Although Europe has increased defence spending, provided arms to Ukraine, and maintained support for Ukraine, severe structural problems persist. European forces are in worse shape than previously thought, with depleted weapons stockpiles and defence industries unfit for purpose. Efforts to coordinate European procurements have failed, resulting in dysfunctional and fragmented defence forces and procurement systems.

The appalling state of European defence is due to underinvestment in armed forces over the past twenty years, leading to inadequate ammunition stockpiles, deteriorating tank fleets, and insufficient artillery. In summary, European armed forces are currently in a precarious state. Although NATO can coordinate and integrate forces, it has not managed to encourage effective defence spending harmonisation among its European members. The EU, on the other hand, is well-suited to integrate, coordinate and supplement European defence spending but has not yet demonstrated the necessary ambition to do so. The European defence industrial base suffers from low spending and the lack of a common defence market, leading to fragmented spending directed at national military industrial complexes.

Efforts to improve defence industrial cooperation have been met with some opposition from the US, which benefits from European defence contracts and lobbies for access to European defence funds. This opposition has stifled attempts to improve coordination, leading to a decline in European defence cooperation over the past decade. The result is a fragmented European defence sector with forces using different equipment, making it difficult for them to operate together and increasing their dependence on the US.

If Europeans do not reform their defence forces and procurement systems, they risk losing the opportunity to transform European defence.

Europe needs a comprehensive plan to increase defence integration and jump-start its own defence industrial base. However, the US has not pushed for any major structural reforms to European defence and has been sending mixed messages about its support for European defence integration.

To achieve this goal, the US should stop lobbying for access to EU defence funds and instead use its influence to push European countries to support more funding for EU procurement programmes. Additionally, the US should consider the impact of American arms sales on the defence industrial base of the NATO alliance when advocating for such purchases. Ultimately, it is crucial for the US to encourage European military cooperation and coordinated defence planning efforts between NATO and the EU in order to promote a more self-sufficient and capable European defence structure.

The US, under President Joe Biden, has shown a strong commitment to Europe. The role of the US is crucial in strengthening transatlantic relations. The Biden administration should continue its engagement with Europe to foster deeper integration. However, big defence companies in the US still has an interest in keeping the EU defence market fragmented.

However, there are hurdles to overcome in terms of European security and defence cooperation, such as internal cohesion, differences in the rule of law and freedom of the press and EU-NATO relations.

The EU's deployment capacity is still hindered by fragmentation within the European Defence industry. While there have been efforts to coordinate procurement, development and production, these initiatives have had little impact so far. The indispensable role of the US has confirmed the EU's dependence on the US for security.

It is important to note that in Washington there is not only a shift in focus toward the Pacific but also a generational shift in perspectives on security. NATO has demonstrated its strengths in coordination and integrating European armed forces. The EU must find ways to add value to this, particularly by integrating markets such as the defence market.

In the long term, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) will require a larger budget and member states willing to invest more. Challenges to be addressed include financial and bureaucratic constraints, as well as issues related to hi-tech capabilities, domestic suppliers, and defence relations.

In order to make progress, European defence cooperation needs to be prioritised, with decisions being made today to shape the future of European defence. The European Defence Industrial Policy (EDIP) should focus on improving interoperability between European armed forces and personnel, as well as addressing transatlantic interoperability concerns.

The boost in EU defence efforts due to the war is understandable, but there is no such thing as absolute autonomy. It is important to balance spending on defence with other priorities, recognising the importance of shared interests and motivations in shaping European foreign policy.

In conclusion, transatlantic interoperability is vital for European defence. Strengthening Europe's defence capabilities will ultimately strengthen NATO as well. Cooperation and interoperability can be achieved even within a fragmented market, but efforts must be made to address the risks of duplication and to meet pressing deadlines. The evolving German security policy and its impact on transatlantic relations should not be overlooked, as no EU defence can truly succeed without Germany's full involvement.

## 2. The German *Zeitenwende* and its impact on transatlantic relations

### 2.1 *The focus*

In his speech three days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz introduced the term *Zeitenwende* ("historic turning point") to describe the new European security situation. The term represents a paradigm shift in Germany's foreign and security policy, challenging two main assumptions: that European security was only possible with Russia, and that mutually beneficial economic relations would transform adversarial relations. The Russian invasion invalidated both ideas.

In response, Germany has made sweeping policy changes, particularly in energy policy, becoming independent from Russian gas and investing in green energy. However, security and defence policy changes have been more challenging. Germany has taken steps to enhance its defence capabilities, including a 100 billion euro special fund for the Bundeswehr and procuring F-35 fighter jets from the US. Germany has also provided significant aid to Ukraine.

Despite these steps, four major obstacles remain: lack of coherent strategic language and documents, capped defence budgets, slow bureaucratic reform, and no long-term vision for German defence industrial policy.<sup>2</sup>

For Germany to become a guarantor of European security, it must:

- Keep Germans engaged: Maintain public support as defence costs rise.
- Keep the Russians out: Develop a long-term containment and deterrence strategy, while managing domestic voices calling for reconciliation.
- Keep Europe united: Address mistrust from both Western and Eastern Europe by demonstrating commitment to defence and reforming the Bundeswehr.
- Keep the Americans in: Continue transatlantic risk-sharing and enhance Germany's military capabilities to secure US involvement in European security.

<sup>2</sup> See Pia Fuhrhop, "Germany's *Zeitenwende* and the Future of European Security", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 23|08 (March 2023), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/16673>.

### 2.2 The debate

Chancellor Scholz set high expectations with his speech. The commitment made was based not only on the speech but also on the coalition agreement between three German political parties, which mentioned increased European defence. Comparing the speech to the coalition agreement, there was great anticipation for what would come.

There have been issues with this approach over the past year. A fundamental change in Germany's mindset is needed, and there is a significant lack of understanding in the US regarding Germany's actions in the current geopolitical and security environment. Germany is often perceived as being feckless and unable to follow through on commitments. Turning the situation around will take time.

Nonetheless, there is hope as Germany has made commendable progress over the last year. While the debate over the provision of Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine was frustrating, it ultimately resulted in the decision to ship the tanks. Germany must work on improving its communication and explaining its positions in a way that the US can understand, particularly as the 2024 election season approaches. It is crucial to prevent Germany from becoming a political punching bag. The 100 billion euro special fund for defence spending is a great start, but Germany must also find a way to increase defence spending in its base budget.

The standards applied to Germany's progress can be viewed through two lenses: comparing it to pre-2022 Germany or contrasting it with the changing security situation in Europe. The former shows impressive progress, while the latter might be disappointing. The expectation horizon plays a significant role in determining whether the glass appears half full or half empty.

Secondly, the concept of leadership is often implied in these conversations. German voters generally reject the idea of military leadership, but they do support increased defence spending and NATO commitments. A German leadership style should differ from that of the US, focusing on forging proactive alliances in Europe. This approach aligns with Germany's post-World War II history.

Thirdly, optimism surrounds the change in Germany's approach to Russia. There is a growing realisation within Germany's political parties that the assumptions underpinning previous Russia policies no longer hold true.

Lastly, regarding communication, the current explanation for Germany's cautious messaging is that it is primarily aimed at a domestic audience, which the chancellor perceives to be less supportive of the actions that allies expect of Berlin. This results in communication that downplays Germany's role and avoids creating the impression that the country is overstepping its boundaries.

Scholz's domestic audience encompasses the coalition parties, the Social Democratic electorate and the general public. Critics of Scholz argue that he is



primarily signalling to the left wing of his party, but broader public scepticism also exists regarding the topic of leadership. However, it's important to note that public opinion can change when strong arguments are made, as demonstrated by the Leopard tank issue.

Regarding the National Security Strategy, there may not be any surprising announcements or major excitement in the document. The fact that there has not been a previous National Security Strategy is interesting in itself. The document is expected to outline the main tenets of German foreign and defence policy, emphasising the idea of never acting alone. Therefore, it might be perceived as a sensible, albeit not particularly exciting, document.

The process of drafting the National Security Strategy has been beneficial for the involved agencies, as it has allowed them to assess their actions, identify areas for improvement, and consider potential steps forward.

Communication remains a significant challenge, both within the coalition and more broadly. The lack of transparency in certain areas, such as the tank debate, complicates matters further. However, the working relationship between President Biden and Chancellor Scholz has been observed as positive, with Biden effectively managing their interactions.

It's important to maintain pressure on Germany, as it can encourage the country to take necessary actions and continue to grow in its role within the international community. This pressure can help Germany adapt and respond to changing geopolitical situations and security challenges.

### *2.3 The European views on Germany's shifting approach*

France: France starts from the assumption that many countries are currently reconsidering their foreign policy, with a lack of multi-partisan consensus on foreign policy in several nations. This is likely due to the changes in the geopolitical landscape since the end of the Cold War. The main challenge with the term *Sicherheitswende* (security transition) is the lack of clarity about what it will be replaced with. While there is a focus on what cannot be done anymore, there is less emphasis on the alternatives. This is an issue with not just Germany, but several countries. A focus on defence spending outputs rather than inputs is necessary for effective strategy development. There are similar issues with Germany's economic relations with China, which are more visible in Germany but still present in other countries.

It is essential for countries to communicate and address issues collaboratively, as demonstrated by the AUKUS situation. After the Afghanistan withdrawal, countries should have approached the US with their concerns and shared their assessments. The ability to discuss and have their own means, resources, and interests is crucial for better decision-making. There were questions raised about why German officials discussing defence commitments did not mention Franco-German

cooperation. The perception of the Franco-German relationship is important, as it affects NATO and other European allies.

Poland: From a Polish perspective, *Zeitenwende* can be traced back to the 1990s, although it began under a different name. The core issue now is how to rebuild German leadership in Europe. Despite Germany's strong economy and position within the EU, there is a lack of clear communication and effective leadership. There are visible problems with communication, such as conflicting messages from various German officials. The situation with the tanks in the context of the Ukraine war exemplifies the lack of German leadership. Instead of taking charge, Germany reacted to pressure from Eastern Europe, which in turn led to action from the US. Many are waiting for clear and meaningful statements on Germany's position and approach, as well as the release of the National Security Strategy and China strategy. While the process of developing these strategies has been lengthy and involved, there is optimism that they will provide clarity on Germany's direction. However, the delayed release of the National Security Strategy has led to some concerns about Germany's vision for its leadership role in Europe. It is important for Germany to establish a solid position and clear directions, as the circumstances have changed and demand strong leadership.

Netherlands: The Netherlands is particularly welcoming of increased cooperation with Germany. Recently, Germany and the Netherlands announced the joint Coleman Army vision, which incorporates Dutch land forces into the German 43rd Panzer Division. In the Dutch defence strategy published in June 2022, a few months after the Ukraine crisis, there was an emphasis on working closely with Germany and integrating their land forces. The Netherlands' perspective on Germany's *Zeitenwende* is generally positive and welcomed.

Italy: Italy's assumptions were somewhat alike Germany's, as Italy also relied on the "change through trade" formula and was heavily dependent on Russian energy. There are several reasons why Italy has not embarked on its own *Zeitenwende*. Firstly, Italy does not have Germany's financial resources. Secondly, Italy is also politically fragile, which makes long-term planning difficult. There is a cautious attitude towards confrontational approaches. Additionally, there are people in Italy who believe that Russia will not be an adversary forever. There is some scepticism about what will happen in the future, but overall, German leadership is taken for granted and is perceived positively.

### 3. Turkey and NATO: A complicated, necessary relationship

#### 3.1 *The focus*

The relationship between Turkey and Russia has a strategic dimension. The issue is not with Turkey continuing trade with Russia; the issue is with Turkey becoming a platform to circumvent sanctions.

When the Biden administration took office, there were big debates on whether it should put pressure on Turkey. One of the reasons the US did not do so is that the Biden administration could not sort out which issue to prioritise. Is the main problem with Turkey about human rights? Is it the circumvention of sanctions on Iran? Is it the cohesion in NATO? Is it the relationship with Russia?<sup>3</sup>

### 3.2 *The debate*

Not all European observers have been involved in studying Turkey since the early 2000s and can therefore lack an appreciation of the extent to which Turkey has changed under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rule and also the extent to which Erdoğan's leadership itself has evolved.

In early 2000s the mistake Europeans made, in hindsight, in placing too much hope in Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party. At that time, they were modernising the country and taking legislative steps that made it more open, inclusive, and democratic. Then, there was the period between 2007 and 2013 when Turkey transitioned from a modernising nation to a different kind of leadership. Erdoğan was no longer just the prime minister of an important country; he was becoming more of an autocratic ruler, working on consolidating his role in Turkey against internal enemies, including through the constitutional shift towards a presidential system.

Erdoğan and Putin share a worldview and the same kind of paranoia about the West constantly seeking to undermine their power. Putin has undoubtedly become unable to distinguish between Russia's interests and his own, while we are not certain about the extent to which Erdoğan does the same: Perhaps he is similar in that regard.

Looking into the future, there is a natural agenda for cooperation between the EU and Turkey, despite their many differences. The bilateral relationship can be strengthened by upgrading the Customs Union, revisiting the migration deal, and offering a better visa liberalisation package to Turkey. Even in foreign policy there is potential for cooperation. The Europeans can accept a Turkey that has a pragmatic or transactional relationship with Russia. The EU can nonetheless coordinate and cooperate on matters like Libya, Syria, and Iran.

Both sides must acknowledge their roles in shaping the current situation and work together to create a mutually beneficial partnership. This might involve addressing past mistakes, finding common ground on issues like Libya and Syria, and being open to redefining the relationship between Turkey and the EU.

<sup>3</sup> See Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, "Turkey vis-à-vis Russia's War against Ukraine", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 23|11 (March 2023), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/16680>.

Part of Turkey's grand strategy is indeed the pursuit of strategic autonomy and balancing great powers. This approach dates back to the Ottoman Empire's final two centuries and is deeply ingrained in Turkey's survival instinct. Consequently, this strategic approach will likely persist with a new government and in the long run as well. As for NATO, Turkey could as a committed NATO ally on issues concerning the organisation while exercising its autonomy in other areas.

Regarding Turkey's response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, it is essential to consider the upcoming elections and Turkey's current economic situation. With the Turkish economy on the brink of bankruptcy and Erdoğan lagging in the polls, his priority is to keep the Turkish currency afloat and control inflation. A currency crisis would almost certainly result in a loss for Erdoğan in the next election.

To keep the economy stable, Erdoğan desperately needs foreign capital inflows into Turkey. His need for financial support is so dire that he is willing to engage with leaders he has previously been at odds with, such as Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and even considering meeting with Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. In this situation, Erdoğan might also seek Russia's financial assistance, which could explain Turkey's cautious response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. Russia helps Turkey financially by not hurting its economy, as it did in 2015, and by providing financial support in various ways, such as upfront payments for projects, and possibly not pressing Turkey for gas payments. This assistance is crucial for Erdoğan, as he needs to keep the economy afloat to have a chance in the upcoming elections.

Considering these factors, it is understandable why Turkey might be cautious in responding to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The complex relationship between Turkey and Russia, along with Erdoğan's need to secure his position in the upcoming elections and stabilise the economy, makes it challenging for Turkey to take a strong stance against Russia.

If Erdoğan wins the upcoming election, he will be a president who has won his last election. Erdoğan's primary concern after winning the election would be his legacy. This might change his approach to politics and international relations, potentially leading to new opportunities for cooperation with the EU and other global partners. The possibility of a new government may create further opportunities for improved cooperation between Turkey and the EU, and other global partners.

Competition between Turkey and Western countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, and in various other regions is not beneficial for either side, and it would be much more productive if Turkey and the EU could find a way to cooperate on foreign policy issues. Such cooperation could cover areas like counter-terrorism, migration, energy security, trade, and conflict resolution. By working together, Turkey and the EU could address common challenges and promote regional stability. This would also help to rebuild trust and improve the overall relationship between Turkey and the UAE for Turkey-US relations; similar efforts should be made to strengthen cooperation and rebuild trust. Areas of mutual interest, such

as security, trade, and regional stability, could serve as starting points for improved dialogue and collaboration. Again, this would require openness and pragmatism from both sides.

In order to improve Turkey–EU and Turkey–US relations, it is essential for all parties to engage in open dialogue, identify areas of cooperation, and establish pragmatic approaches to address shared challenges. Here are some steps that could be taken to foster better relationships:

1. **Foreign policy dialogue:** The EU should actively involve Turkey in foreign policy discussions and consultations. This includes inviting the Turkish foreign minister to attend relevant meetings, and giving Turkey a voice in shaping policies that it is expected to comply with.
2. **Identifying areas of cooperation:** Turkey, the EU, and the US should work together to identify common goals and areas of collaboration. This could include efforts to address migration, terrorism, energy security, trade, and conflict resolution in the region.
3. **Establishing realistic expectations:** All parties should recognise that there will be areas of disagreement and focus on finding ways to work together on issues where cooperation is possible. This requires pragmatism and a willingness to set aside differences in pursuit of shared objectives.

Specifically to the US–Turkey relationship here are some steps that could be taken to:

1. **Open dialogue:** Establish channels of communication to discuss areas of disagreement and cooperation openly. This includes having regular meetings, consultations, and exchanges between officials from both countries.
2. **Agree to disagree:** Recognise that there will be areas where both countries will not reach a consensus. Instead of letting these disagreements undermine the entire relationship, both countries should accept these differences and work together in other areas.
3. **Focus on areas of potential agreement:** Identify issues where both countries may currently hold different positions but could find common ground through dialogue and negotiation. This could include regional security, counterterrorism, trade, and energy cooperation.
4. **Address the S-400 issue:** The S-400 missile system is a significant point of contention between Turkey and the US, with implications for NATO as well. Instead of presenting ultimatums, both countries should engage in a conversation about how they can address this issue in a way that supports the interests of both sides and NATO. The US could offer assistance or alternatives to Turkey, which could open the door to a productive discussion.
5. **Minimise spillover effects:** Both countries should work together to ensure that areas of disagreement do not negatively impact cooperation in other areas. This requires a pragmatic approach and a willingness to compartmentalise issues.
6. **Strengthening bureaucratic relationships:** Although the public perception of Turkey-US relations might be strained, it is important to maintain strong bureaucratic ties and communication channels between the two countries. This can help facilitate cooperation on shared challenges and promote mutual

understanding.

7. Focusing on areas of potential agreement: Turkey and the US should explore opportunities for collaboration on issues where they may currently hold different positions but could find common ground through dialogue and negotiation. If the US ended its relationship with People's Defense Units (YPG) if the US or would extradite Fethullah Gülen to Turkey, things for Turkey would be better. And then, if Turkey did other things that would appease the US life would be so much easier, right? But none of these things is going to happen. So, Turkey and the US need to find a pragmatic way to cooperate even with these problems still burdening the relationship.
8. Accepting differences: It is essential for all parties to accept that there will be some areas where agreement is not possible. Instead of allowing these differences to derail the entire relationship, they should be acknowledged and managed in a way that minimises their impact on broader cooperation efforts.

## 4. Russia's position in Europe's future order

### 4.1 *The focus*

The provocative paper produced for this session argues in favour of Russia's total defeat in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> This is the refrain of the US, the Baltics and Poland. What does Ukraine's victory mean? Returning to the borders of 23 February 2022, or even those before March 2014. The paper also argues in favour of Ukraine becoming a full NATO member. Moreover, Ukraine should be repaid for the destruction it has incurred using the Central Bank of Russia's frozen funds as reparations, and Russian leaders should be tried before an international tribunal for war crimes.

The debate thus focused on Russia's defeat, Ukraine's territorial settlement, Ukraine's NATO and EU membership prospects. The discussant claimed not to have any answer to the question of Russia's place in future Europe. However, taking some distance from the paper, the discussant expressed the frustration that discussions about the West's relationship with Russia often focus solely on the war, its outcome and the path to that outcome. There are other topics worth discussing when it comes to Russia. Of course, the war is important, as is Western support for Ukraine and the war's ultimate outcome, but we also need to ask other questions.

According to the discussant, Western countries can learn from our previous mistakes. The Europeans initially misjudged the cost-benefit calculation for Russia, although they accurately estimated the costs of military action. They believed that military action would alienate the Ukrainian people, lead to a strengthening of NATO and nullify ongoing discussions about arms control. Consequently, many in Europe thought that it would be in Russia's best interest to avoid war, and that the

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Blank, "The War against Ukraine and Russia's Position in Europe's Security Order", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 23|10 (March 2023), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/16679>.

financial and human costs would be too excessive for Putin to take that route. Yet, he proceeded with the invasion.

Several factors contributed to wrong assumptions about Putin's cost-benefit calculation. The first was the overestimation of Russia's military potential, not taking into account the differences between the country's involvement in Syria and a large-scale offensive like the one in Ukraine. Putin clearly made the same mistake.

Additionally, many in Europe did not consider changes in Russian governance and decision-making, nor were they aware of the significant paradigm shift within the Russian regime since 2020, which saw a more conservative, authoritarian, and aggressive approach both domestically and internationally. Moreover, mistakes were made concerning Putin's objectives, overestimating his interest in European security issues and underestimating his determination to regain direct control of Ukraine. The events of 24 February marked a shift from using frozen conflicts to maintain leverage over neighbouring countries to a strategy of imperial restoration.

As we look into the future, there are numerous known unknowns that we should be mindful of. These include the duration and outcome of the war, the state of Russia's military following the conflict, and the economic, demographic and societal impact of the war. The consequences of these factors for Russian society and politics are uncertain, as is the country's regional and international post-war role. The war's outcome will undoubtedly influence the domestic trajectories of post-Soviet countries and the behaviour of "middle ground" nations.

Furthermore, we must consider the war's impact on the larger global balance of power between China and the US and Russia's place within that context. While we know that these are important questions to ask, we do not yet have the answers. We currently face a complete lack of predictability and effective leverage to influence Russia's trajectory. Thus, we must learn to live with and navigate these challenges.

### *4.2 The debate*

A comparison was made with the situation we experienced with Covid-19. The comparison may not be entirely relevant, but looking back three years ago, the world learned to live with the virus because we did not know how it would mutate. Governments had very little capacity to influence its evolution and had to build collective immunity and unity. That is pretty much what the US and European countries need to do with Russia now – be aware that Russia will continue to display subversive or aggressive behaviour towards Europe, and they should minimise its ability to hurt them.

The first thing to do is make the EU "Russia-proof" by addressing its dependencies, particularly energy, and vulnerabilities. One of these is war fatigue. The US and European governments should never stop explaining the rationale for their policies in the war, why they support Ukraine, why it will take time and why a

Russian victory would have a negative impact on our societies and economies. Other vulnerabilities include migration, the resilience of critical infrastructure, cyber defence, intelligence, counterintelligence and, of course, the strengthening of defence capacities. All of this also means promoting European solidarity.

Another aspect the Europeans, in particular, should consider is the sanctions policy. Even in the event of a rapid end to the war, there may be some sanctions the Europeans will need or wish to maintain because they constrain Russia's capacity to launch further offensives and undertake actions detrimental to Europe. So, some sanctions should remain. However, the US and Europe should also think about what sanctions they could accept lifting in the event of a fair and sustainable settlement of the war. This discussion may not be urgent, but the US and Europe should consider sanctions as one element of our policy for building collective immunity.

A third element of Western policy could be strengthening the independence and resilience of EU neighbours. If a settlement involves compromises from Ukraine, the US and Europe should be aware that this could have extremely destabilising effects on the Ukrainian government. The same is true for other neighbouring countries, such as Moldova and Armenia. The US and the EU should adopt long-term assistance policies for these countries, including military assistance, possible security assurances, ongoing support for reforms, and fighting corruption.

There is also the need to develop a more focused policy towards Belarus, rather than always considering it as an extension of Russia. With formally independent borders, a specific Belarus policy should be part of a regional strategy aimed at preserving the possibility of an independent and democratic Belarus in the future. This is crucial for the security of Poland, the Baltic states and overall European stability. Decoupling Belarus from Russia's strategic sphere will be a key element for Europe's security.

The US and the EU should pursue a global Russia policy to maintain and increase support across the world. This includes addressing the impact of the war on emerging countries. Food and energy issues are only one aspect, while countering Russian influence operations and engaging with countries most susceptible to the Russian narrative, without patronising them, is another important factor.

When considering European security, the US and Europe should adopt a more pragmatic approach, rather than focusing on a grand architectural order based on treaties and institutions. They must accept that there will not be a clear security border in Europe for the time being. The challenge is how they can manage the relationship with Russia in the best interest of European security. On some issues, a level of engagement may be necessary.

Lastly, the US and Europe should be prepared for the possibility of change. As much as possible, they should continue supporting Russian independent civil society organisations. They can achieve this by creating synergies among the



scarce resources that remain inside Russia. Additionally, they should develop an inclusive approach towards the Russian diaspora in the EU, based on a better understanding of this community. By promoting awareness, engaging in open dialogue and pragmatically addressing the situation of Russians in the EU, they can achieve both political and practical benefits.

Regardless of one's views on the war and the role of Russians in it, an essential aspect of the Western narrative should be that the West is not waging war against Russians. Russia is waging war against Ukraine, but the West does not have any animosity against the Russian people.

### *4.3 The debate in Washington on the Russian war in Ukraine*

A participant knowledgeable of the US debate on the war said that the US government is not aiming for total Ukrainian victory. At best, from the impressions gathered through conversations, the US seeks a return to the pre-24 February lines, with Crimea not currently being part of any serious discussions. If the US were genuinely committed to a total and complete victory, its support for Ukraine would look different. Regarding NATO membership, the conversation about Ukraine joining NATO is not being taken seriously in Washington. A few weeks ago, there were meetings with representatives from the Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian parliaments, who emphasised the need for Washington to lead this discussion. However, it is unlikely to happen.

That is why the discussant thinks that it is more productive to change the framework slightly and discuss long-term security assistance to Ukraine without including NATO as part of the conversation right. This approach could make it easier for the US to lead the discussion. These are the impressions gathered from talking to people both within and outside the US government based in Washington, and this approach is unlikely to change with a potential new administration from 2025 onwards.

Regarding NATO and security assurances, the discussion should be focused on providing Ukraine with the necessary guarantees rather than NATO membership. These assurances would enable Ukraine to negotiate, attract investors for reconstruction, and allow refugees to return. While NATO membership may or may not happen, it won't occur before the war's end, making Ukrainian security a more pressing concern.

### *4.4 The debate in Europe*

A common element that came up in the discussion was the parallel between Russia and post-WWII Germany and Italy. They were reintegrated into the international order in a workable manner, which has led to some paradoxes today, such as the difficulty in holding a public debate about sending weapons to Ukraine or taking a leadership role in military engagements and peacekeeping missions. This relates to the discussion about Russia and what should be done with it after the war is

over.

In the opinion of one participant, the disastrous transition from the USSR to the Russian Federation in the 1990s is fundamentally at the root of what is happening today. It was not managed well, resulting in feelings of resentment and the sense that Russia's great power status was no longer acknowledged by the West, without any serious attempt to reintegrate Russia into a multilateral order. This issue lingered in the 1990s and the early years of Putin's presidency, eventually leading to conflicts in Georgia, the events of 2014, and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

This should make us think that – regardless of how the war ends – there needs to be a long-term plan for re-establishing ties with Russia and reintegrating it into a European security order, or at least maintaining an open channel for dialogue. To completely cut off Russia from Europe is not a good idea, as it is, in part, a European nation. This is why the idea of becoming completely independent or severing all interdependence with Russia in the long term may not be a viable strategy for ensuring a peaceful order and long-term security in Europe.

One of the participants criticised this comparison. In this view, post-war Germany could be re-integrated because it was a demilitarised and occupied country without nuclear weapons. We cannot ignore Russia's nuclear arsenal; we are not starting from the same position at all. There were fantasies, in hindsight, about Russia integrating more into the transatlantic alliance, becoming more connected with Europe, and perhaps turning into a sort of "Canada with nukes". Additionally, we must consider the narrative within Russia after the war. Even if Russia loses the conflict, it is unlikely to be discussed as a devastating war that was lost. Instead, it may be portrayed as a stand against the West and NATO expansion that was narrowly lost, but with a commendable effort.

A participant noted that Russia's history, starting from Ivan the Great, has been characterised by aggression and hunger for power. There have been only two brief examples of democratic changes in Russia: between February and October 1917, and between December 1991 and October 1993. These periods were marked by anarchy and the beginning of kleptocracy, respectively. The participant insisted that the prospect of a democratic Russia is doubtful, and any hope for a strong civil society in Russia seems wishful thinking.

The question of Russia's future is essential, and defining what a Ukrainian victory or a Russian defeat means is also crucial. A defeated Russia is one that lacks the resources to carry out aggressive plans. Russia's war against Ukraine is not just a war against one country; it is a war against the whole system of European security.

Comparing the current situation to 1945 may not be the best analogy; a better comparison might be 1919, after the First World War. The challenge lies in imagining the world after this conflict and learning from past mistakes, such as the American intervention in Europe in 1919 and their subsequent withdrawal.

### *4.5 Russia and the spheres of influence*

Russia's position presents two alternatives: one in which Russia maintains a sphere of influence, which is not an acceptable option for the West, and another which involves long-term friction with Russia due to its desire for a sphere of influence. The bad news is that friction with Russia will persist; however, the good news for the rest of the world, although not for Russia, is that Russia is a slowly declining power.

Russia suffers from an aging society and decreasing birth rates. While Europe also experiences declining birth rates, it attracts talented young people from around the world, which is not the case for Russia. In fact, educated individuals are increasingly leaving Russia, a trend that has accelerated since the war.

Russia's economy is not diversified, with heavy reliance on natural resources, particularly fossil fuels, and valuable minerals. As fossil fuels become less relevant, Russia will face significant economic challenges. Additionally, the Russian state does not depend on taxpayers due to its natural resource revenues, making it difficult for democracy to flourish in Russia.

In the long term, Russia will continue to be a declining, authoritarian power. The short-term focus should be on deterring Russia. In the long term, the challenge will be to manage and adapt to Russia's decline and the potential loss of its great power status, as this could also create global instabilities.

### *4.6 Is Russia post-1991 transition over?*

The transition after 1991 is still ongoing, and the full consequences of the Soviet Union's collapse are just beginning to surface. While Russia is currently not a democracy, it is impossible to predict the future. There are people in Russia who desire a more predictable legal environment and a setting where they can conduct business without fear. These individuals should be the focus of engagement, though working with foreign actors in Russia is now dangerous. Moreover, it is a challenging task for Western governments to decide how and with whom to interact. We must take these matters seriously without implying a "decolonise Russia" approach and encourage to speak more about civil society engagement in this context.

Russian civil society is not a monolith, and there are grassroots solidarity movements. Although it may not transform into a democracy overnight, aiming for a functioning, non-aggressive Russia is crucial. Turning Russia into North Korea would not be the best approach.

## Conference Programme

Rome, 13 February 2023

### Introductory Remarks

**Giuliana Del Papa**, Head, Policy Planning Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

**Shawn Crowley**, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, Embassy of the United States to Italy

**Riccardo Alcaro**, Research Coordinator and Head of Global Actors Programme, IAI

### European Defence and Transatlantic Relations

Chair **Dario Cristiani**, Associate Fellow, IAI, and Senior Fellow, German Marshall Fund of the United States

Paper-giver **Adája Stoetman**, Research Fellow, Clingendael - the Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Discussant **Sophia Besch**, Research Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

### The German *Zeitenwende* and Its Impact on Transatlantic Relations

Chair **Nicoletta Pirozzi**, Head of EU Politics and Institutions Programme, IAI

Paper-giver **Pia Fuhrhop**, Associate Fellow, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Germany

Discussant **Rachel Rizzo**, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council, USA

### Turkey and NATO: A Complicated, Necessary Relationship

Chair **Leo Goretti**, Head of Italian Foreign Policy Programme, IAI

Paper-giver **Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı**, Director of Ankara Office, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Turkey

Discussant **Dario Cristiani**, Associate Fellow, IAI, and Senior Fellow, German Marshall Fund of the United States

### Russia's Position in Europe's Future Order

Chair **Riccardo Alcaro**, Research Coordinator and Head of Global Actors Programme, IAI

Discussant **Marie Dumoulin**, Director, Wider Europe programme, European Council on Foreign Relations

Discussant **Nona Mikhelidze**, Senior Russia Fellow, IAI

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# How the Russia–Ukraine War Could End, and Its Impact on Conventional Arms Control

by Hans-Joachim Schmidt



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## ABSTRACT

In the case of the unprovoked Russian military attack against Ukraine, conventional arms control played no major role for crisis management and war prevention. However, NATO countries and Russia have thus far practised some kind of mutual unilateral restraints in their use of weapons, and in the general conduct of the war, in order to prevent a direct confrontation and a nuclear escalation. Because no one can predict the outcome of this conflict, three ideal-typical options, as well as their impact on the future of conventional arms control, are discussed – 1. Ukraine wins; 2. Russia wins; 3. A compromise where neither side wins –. All options raise three questions: how can the war be terminated, what kind of ceasefire seems possible and can confidence-building measures (CBMs) and conventional arms control be revived? Only the compromise option seems to offer a chance for future CBMs and conventional arms control.

*Russia | Ukraine | Arms control | Confidence-building measures*

**keywords**

## How the Russia–Ukraine War Could End, and Its Impact on Conventional Arms Control

by Hans-Joachim Schmidt\*

### Introduction

Unfortunately, conventional arms control was not much help in arresting the deterioration in Russia's relations towards Ukraine or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or in preventing President Vladimir Putin's military aggression. At the end of the East West conflict three layered conventional arms control agreements – the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE),<sup>1</sup> the Vienna Document (VD) on Confidence and Security Building Measures<sup>2</sup> and the Open Skies Treaty (OST)<sup>3</sup> – were created to strengthen the European cooperative security structure. But Russia suspended its CFE-membership in 2007 after the failure to modernize conventional arms control by the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.<sup>4</sup> And it left the Open Skies Treaty one year after the United States. Germany's efforts to revive conventional arms control through the Informal Structural Dialogue,<sup>5</sup> started in 2016, have also failed. This demonstrates that conventional arms control in Europe has lost its capability to control Russia as the greatest risk for European security. Therefore, it

<sup>1</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe*, 19 November 1990, <https://www.osce.org/node/14087>.

<sup>2</sup> OSCE, *Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence and Security Building Measures*, 22 December 2011, <https://www.osce.org/node/86597>.

<sup>3</sup> OSCE, *Treaty on Open Skies*, 24 March 1992, <https://www.osce.org/node/14127>.

<sup>4</sup> OSCE, *Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe*, 19 November 1999, <https://www.osce.org/node/14108>.

<sup>5</sup> See for the mandate: OSCE Ministerial Council, *From Lisbon to Hamburg: Declaration on the Twenties Anniversary of the OSCE Framework for Arms Control*, Hamburg, 9 December 2016, <https://www.osce.org/node/289496>.

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· Paper presented at the seminar "The War in Ukraine and the Future of Non-proliferation and Arms Control in the European Continent", organised in Rome on 10 March 2023 by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

is no surprise that Russia suspended the implementation of the Vienna Document when it started its war against Ukraine.

With Russia's unprovoked attack against Ukraine, the 1990 Charter of Paris and the cooperative European security structure based on it has finally broken down. But Russia does not bear sole responsibility for this breakdown. Differences between Russia and the Western countries have grown with the enlargement of NATO since 1999; the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty (2002); the introduction of US missile defence in Europe (2007); and the Western interventions in Serbia (1999), Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). In parallel, western security concerns have been raised by growing authoritarian rule in Russia since 2011, the country's illegal seizure of the Crimean Peninsula and the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine by Russian irregular forces (2014), and the intervention in Syria (2015).

Thus, the widening gap between Russia and Western countries predated the outbreak of the war, but creates no justification for starting such a war of aggression in Europe. When Russia began its unprovoked and illegal attack, it threatened the NATO Alliance with consequences "as you have never seen in your entire history"<sup>6</sup> in order to deter direct military support for Ukraine from Western countries.

Both sides have nevertheless shown a certain restraint in their use of weapons and the general conduct of the war, in order to control the risks of escalation and to avoid direct military confrontation:

- In spite of their growing military support for Ukraine, Russia has so far not attacked NATO forces or countries.
- Russia has so far not attacked Western weapons deliveries in Ukraine, presumably to minimise incentives for Western escalation.
- NATO countries have avoided becoming direct parties in the war.
- NATO delivers weapons and ammunition under the partly tacit/partly open restriction that they will not be used against Russian territory as it stood in February 2014.
- In order to minimise the risk of escalation and maximise Alliance cohesion, NATO also works hard to include all three of its nuclear powers as suppliers in the delivery of individual weapons categories.

Whether these restraints will continue to hold, is by no means assured. Currently, no one can predict the outcome of this war. In the following, three ideal-typical outcomes will be discussed:

1. With continuous support from Western countries, Ukraine wins the war.
2. Russia wins the war, either by installing a pro-Russian government or by conquering Ukraine and annexing much of it.
3. A compromise is reached between Russia and Ukraine, with Russia controlling parts of Ukrainian territory.

<sup>6</sup> Cited after the Russian Presidency, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 24 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.



All three variants raise the following three questions:

1. How can the war be terminated?
2. What kind of ceasefire regulations might be used as a starting point for further measures?
3. Can confidence-building measures (CBMs) and conventional arms control be revived?

In seeking to answer these questions, some preliminary suggestions are presented in the following.

### Option 1: Ukraine wins

The declared goal of the Ukrainian government is a complete withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory.<sup>7</sup> This goal is supported by many politicians in the West; yet in most cases they do not define it precisely nor do they discuss the potential risks inherent to this option. As their delivery has demonstrated, Ukrainian forces are capable of using modern Western weapons systems to reconquer parts of their territory. Depending on future levels of this kind of support, Ukraine may indeed manage to defeat Russia and liberate all of its territory.

This option could weaken the imperialistic ambitions of the current Russian leadership and improve the security situation for NATO, the European Union, other European countries and most post-Soviet states. Even a further dissolution of Russia itself could be not excluded,<sup>8</sup> with incalculable risks for a violent division of Russian nuclear and conventional forces. Putin's position could be severely weakened or a new president chosen, who may follow Putin's policy or an even more nationalistic, hardline approach. More improbably, a more democratically oriented leader might follow after a radical break with the current Russian political elite.<sup>9</sup>

An enlarged NATO could then determine the future European security structure supported by the EU. It could facilitate the Ukrainian process towards EU membership, with the desired Ukrainian mutual-defence commitment. The liberation of Ukrainian territory and the equipping of Ukrainian forces with Western weapon systems could make NATO membership for Kyiv more likely.

<sup>7</sup> Michael MacArthur Bosack, "The 'Ukraine Peace Formula' Explained", in *Parley Policy Cable*, No. 22 (25 November 2022), <https://www.parleypolicy.com/post/the-ukrainian-peace-formula-explained>. See point (5) of the ten points for a ceasefire agreement.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander J. Motyl, "It's High Time to Prepare for Russia's Collapse", in *Foreign Policy*, 7 January 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/07/russia-ukraine-putin-collapse-disintegration-civil-war-empire>.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Charap and Miranda Priebe, *Avoiding a Long War. U.S. Policy and the Trajectory of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, January 2023, p. 12-13, <https://doi.org/10.7249/PEA2510-1>.

However, this option involves one major political problem on the Western side, one major risk in interactions with Russia and one problem about war termination – these are, respectively that:

- there is no consensus between NATO and Ukraine, and not even among NATO countries, how far a potential military victory for Ukraine should go (e.g. including the country's borders before the attack of 24 February 2022,<sup>10</sup> all of Ukraine without the Crimean Peninsula or even with the Crimea included);
- a complete defeat of its forces on the ground contains the risk of a Russian escalation in its war against Ukraine's infrastructure or of other military means, including the use of sub-strategic nuclear weapons;
- because of the nuclear/non-nuclear asymmetry, Russia could continue to attack Ukraine with long-range weapons systems and/or irregular forces even after a complete withdrawal of its regular forces; this could raise difficulties in terminating the war.

These risks raise the following question: Is it possible to define a Ukrainian-win/Russian-defeat option with lower risks? Russia has shown some flexibility in its war goals through their reorientation towards the Donbas region in March 2022.<sup>11</sup> Following on from his illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions – Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia – on 30 September 2022,<sup>12</sup> Putin could threaten Ukraine with the use of nuclear weapons in order to protect this new "Russian" territory. NATO countries and even China have warned Russia against taking such an escalatory step. If Ukrainian forces proved capable of reconquering large parts of the Donbas region, Russia would be faced with the choice either to escalate or to negotiate in order to prevent possible defeat there. Negotiations should then be the preferable outcome.

What could this option mean for future arms control in Europe? Ukraine's victory is clearly not in Russia's security interest. Therefore, it seems likely that Russia could use irregular forces or other means to destabilise and undermine any ceasefire agreement with Ukraine. It would try to improve its military capabilities in order to change this unwanted outcome. Under such conditions, Ukraine would not accept any limits on its forces in order to protect its security guarantees for self-defence as long as it remained outside NATO.<sup>13</sup> An unconstrained arms race would become

<sup>10</sup> William Mouldin, "U.S. Goal in Ukraine: Drive Russian Forces Back to Pre-Invasion Lines, Blinken Says", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-goal-in-ukraine-drive-russians-back-to-pre-invasion-lines-blinken-says-11670351786>.

<sup>11</sup> Danny Kemp and Brendan Smialowski, "Russia Signals Less Ambitious Goals in Ukraine War", in *The Moscow Times*, 26 March 2022, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/03/26/a77091>.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Roth and Isobel KoshiW, "Putin Signs Decrees Paving Way for Annexing Ukraine Territories of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia", in *The Guardian*, 29 September 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/p/mbmme>.

<sup>13</sup> See Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Andrii Yermak (co-chairs), *The Kyiv Security Compact. International Security Guaranties for the Ukraine: Recommendations*, Kyiv, 13 September 2022, p. 4, [https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/01/15/89/41fd0ec2d72259a561313370cee1be6e\\_1663050954.pdf](https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/01/15/89/41fd0ec2d72259a561313370cee1be6e_1663050954.pdf).

very likely. The resulting, hardened contradictions within European security would make it impossible to develop a new common approach for European conventional arms control. And it seems questionable how far NATO countries and Russia could agree risk-reduction measures.

## Option 2: Russia wins

Russia has more weapons, ammunition and manpower resources than Ukraine, and can continue the war for at least two or three years.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, public support for assistance to Ukraine has already decreased from 60 to 48 per cent<sup>15</sup> – and in other Western countries it is also weakening. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has announced that he would end the war in one day;<sup>16</sup> his rival, Ron DeSantis, has indicated a reduction in assistance for Ukraine.<sup>17</sup> European NATO countries are facing other difficulties: they can only continue military support for Ukraine by weakening their own defensive capabilities or with a time lag investing massively in the defence industry, as some suggest. Many European NATO countries already face serious problems in their own defences. In addition, Putin may hope that the growing social costs of Western sanctions and increasing numbers of Ukrainian refugees will strengthen nationalistic forces in Europe and thus strain the unity of NATO and also the EU.

Option 2 would also be the worst case for NATO because it would demonstrate that a nuclear weapons state could use its nuclear deterrence against a non-nuclear country offensively with success. It would also increase insecurity for post-Soviet states like Georgia or Moldova, and for NATO states such as the Baltics, Poland, Slovakia or others. It would constitute a strong boost for Putin's imperialistic ambitions. He could either try to rebuild a stronger Russia or to increase control over the post-Soviet states on the basis of having subdued the strongest of them: Ukraine. Neither Ukraine nor Georgia would enter NATO. Moldova and Ukraine would have to give up on their ambitions for EU membership, which Brussels offered in June 2022. But Russia might also face a problem in ending the war because Western countries could support paramilitary resistance in Ukraine in order to raise costs for the occupier.

<sup>14</sup> Andrius Sytas, "Russia Can Fight in Ukraine for Two More Years at Current Intensity, Lithuania Says", in *Reuters*, 9 March 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-can-fight-ukraine-two-more-years-current-intensity-lithuania-says-2023-03-09>.

<sup>15</sup> Amer Madhani and Emily Swanson, "Support for Ukraine Aid Softens in U.S. Public, Poll Says", in *PBS News Hour*, 15 February 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/support-for-ukraine-aid-softens-in-u-s-public-poll-says>.

<sup>16</sup> Liam James, "Donald Trump Claims He Could End War in Ukraine in a Day if Re-elected to White House", in *Independent*, 3 May 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/b2331973.html>.

<sup>17</sup> DeSantis has reduced his critical position towards the Ukraine but his future support for it is still unclear. Rob Garver, "DeSantis Clarifies Position on Ukraine War, Calls Putin 'War Criminal'", in *VOA News*, 23 March 2023, [www.voanews.com/a/7019033.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/7019033.html).

What could this option mean for future arms control in Europe? This outcome is clearly not in the interest of Ukraine or the Western countries. At a first glance, it may seem that a ceasefire would not be necessary under this option, because Ukraine would no longer exist and NATO countries would not have been direct parties to the war. But it seems more likely that Russia either failing to completely conquer Ukraine or establishing a pro-Russian government. In both cases a ceasefire agreement would be necessary. Most European states would probably not recognise the results of the war, however, and might support irregular forces or use other means (e.g. sanctions) in order to raise costs for the occupier. Therefore, a possible ceasefire agreement runs the risk of not being very stable. And most European countries would continue to build-up and modernise their forces in order to deter the growing military threat from Russia. This option could also harden the conflict and would make it impossible to develop a new common approach for European conventional arms control. And it also seems questionable how far NATO countries and Russia could agree on risk-reduction measures.

### Option 3: Compromise – neither side wins

This is not the option that either side prefers, but it may be the most likely outcome of the war. Russia may not be able to win as long as Western countries support Ukraine with sufficient weapons and ammunition. And Ukraine may not be able to prevail because the risks of escalation are higher for it than for Russia. As of now, the decisive Western supporters seem to be willing to uphold a meaningful defence for Ukraine but not the option of a “win” – at least, not a complete one.

But Ukraine needs more reliable weapons and munitions deliveries, and thereby demands a readiness for Western countries to accept greater risks under the current unilateral restraints to provide Kyiv with the necessary military means to bring Russia to meaningful negotiations about a ceasefire. Therefore, Western countries must develop common military and political goals and a common security strategy with Ukraine over how they want to convince the Russian political leadership to accept talks about a stable and lasting ceasefire.

The compromise option could mean that Russia still controls certain parts of Ukrainian territory, perhaps the Crimean Peninsula together with parts of Donetsk and Luhansk. This outcome would probably be perceived as more of a defeat for Russia than for Ukraine, and could weaken Putin’s regime. It also would not by itself solve the underlying political conflicts (security as well as territorial ambitions and systemic threats – i.e. the democratic “virus” and totalitarian reactions). And a Minsk-like agreement alone would certainly not be enough, because this did not prevent the war in the first place.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Option 3 would raise a number of serious

<sup>18</sup> Minsk I (2014) and Minsk II (2015) were negotiated between the Russian, Ukrainian and French President, the German chancellor and an OSCE representative. Their primary goal was to stop the fighting in the Donbas region between Ukrainian forces and Russian irregular forces. The

questions:

- How to satisfy the differing demands from both sides for credible and stable security guarantees that would be strong enough and adequate to prevent a subsequent war about the same issues?
- How to manage the problem that Russia has illegally annexed parts of Ukrainian territory?
- Who should observe the ceasefire, and should guarantee its stability? Should BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) participate in such a mission?
- How to deal with war crimes and reparations?

In substance, any compromise will depend on the positions and territories occupied by each side at the time of a ceasefire. Different outcomes seem possible. Ukraine would be in a better position if it could threaten Russia with a possible military defeat. This could force Russia to accept talks about a ceasefire if it does not want to escalate the war further. However, it depends on the delivery of the necessary military equipment and training through its western supporters which is so far not sure because of the inherent escalation risks.

But there is also the possibility of a stalemate between Russia and the Ukraine that could lead to exhaustion and a forced compromise. Such a scenario could pose the question of acceptability for Kyiv and lead to instability in Ukraine. This outcome should be not in the interest of the Ukrainian supporters because Russia could use it to its political advantage.

### Conclusion

At the end of the Cold War, the Paris Charter of 1990 created a new cooperative security structure for Europe. This process was supported and strengthened by the build-up of a layered system of three conventional arms control regimes (CFE, OST and VD 2011). This cooperative European security structure eventually broke down in 2014 with Russia's illegal annexations of parts of Ukrainian territory and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. As mentioned above, the crisis of arms control started many years before the current war and it definitely contributed to it. Conventional arms control became more and more outdated and holey, thereby losing its capability for war prevention and crisis stability in Europe. True, so far both sides have practised mutual unilateral restraints in the conduct of the war to prevent a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia and a nuclear escalation. But this is by no means assured for the future.

The war clearly demonstrates the necessity of conventional arms control for European security, because nuclear deterrence alone was not able to prevent it.

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agreements were only partially successful and finally broken by Putin with his recognition of the region of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states at 21 February 2022.

And one should not forget that nuclear and conventional deterrence alone are not sufficient for crisis stability and war prevention. They must be supplemented by confidence-building measures and arms control in order to enhance transparency, stability and security. NATO's new Strategic Concept of June 2022, even though it reduces the role for arms control under present circumstances, keeps the door open for it and should do so in the future.<sup>19</sup>

Discussion of the three options has shown that the future for conventional arms control in Europe looks dim in the case of the two "win" options. But a combination of a smooth option 1 and option 3 seems to offer a chance for future arms control. In this scenario, the outlook for arms control could be better because both sides would be forced to seek compromises and common regulations for their security issues. But under such auspices, the chances for arms control or confidence-building measures will initially remain limited to very small regional measures to stabilise a ceasefire. Furthermore, even such small measures would need much more personnel and equipment and much more legitimate power for controls on the ground than had been provided by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitoring mission in the Donbas region before the war. If such measures demonstrate that they are reliable and stable, they could provide the political basis and create some kind of trust for further risk reduction measures between NATO countries, Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. The period of the Cold War showed that confidence-building measures are possible even under differing security approaches on the two sides. Then, the question will be how far the Structured Dialogue or a new format could be used for such a purpose. However, a broadening of conventional arms control measures towards the whole of Europe will be only possible if both sides were to develop a new common European security structure. For the time being, this seems unlikely. Without a change in Russia's expansionist approach, nothing can or will happen in this area. And serious moderation in Russia's foreign policy may take many years.

Despite the fact that conventional arms control has largely lost its function to manage primary security issues in Europe, NATO countries want to maintain the current three regimes of confidence-building measures and conventional arms control (CFE, OST and VD 2011) as long as there are no better alternatives. It seems better to have something in place for secondary security issues in Europe than to have nothing. And with the Sub-regional Arms Control Regime of 1996<sup>20</sup> based on Article IV of the Dayton Peace Accord in the former Yugoslavia, there is still a conventional arms control agreement in place that has so far worked successfully.

<sup>19</sup> NATO, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, 29 June 2022, point 32, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept>.

<sup>20</sup> OSCE, *Agreement on Sub-regional Arms Control*, Florence, 14 June 1996, [https://www.archiviodisarmo.it/view/qqorm1zkCuQ\\_eBudOj5HGwtBS\\_RpLiGQX1Iw4ZqUSY8/1996-agreement-on-subregional-arms-control-1996.pdf](https://www.archiviodisarmo.it/view/qqorm1zkCuQ_eBudOj5HGwtBS_RpLiGQX1Iw4ZqUSY8/1996-agreement-on-subregional-arms-control-1996.pdf). The agreement was based not on parity but on a balanced asymmetry: Serbia got more forces than Croatia and the entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina together (ratio: 5:2:2), but in Bosnia and Herzegovina the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina can possess more weapons than the Republika Srpska (ratio 2:1).

The return to arms control will be difficult and will need a great deal of time. Currently, Western countries are forced to strengthen Ukraine's conventional warfighting capabilities within the unilateral constraints mentioned above. Russia must be confronted with the real fear of losing the war; otherwise, it will not return to the negotiating table. To achieve this goal, it does not seem necessary to liberate the whole of Ukraine – an approach that would reduce unwanted escalation risks. This could contribute to the development of a common strategy between Western countries and Ukraine to realise this goal.

The growing deliveries of weapons systems and ammunition will raise another long-term danger for a ceasefire and any subsequent peace process. With a hopefully stable peace process, large numbers of weapons and munitions might be no longer necessary for both conflict parties. Then these weapons and munitions will become more and more expendable, with possible negative repercussions for the peace process itself and through their export to other violent conflict areas. This is not an immediate danger after a ceasefire, because neither side will give up its weapons and munitions as long as another war seems possible. However, developments following the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement have shown that this long-term danger should not be underestimated. Therefore, it is to be welcomed that most Western countries, like those of the EU, deliver their weapons systems and munitions with an end-user certificate. The control mechanism behind these certificates will become important after some years of a stable ceasefire.

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# The EU and the Transformed Nuclear Context since the War in Ukraine

by Clara Portela



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
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## ABSTRACT

The invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in February 2022 has entirely transformed the European security landscape, bringing war to the European Union's doorstep. Importantly, the war features a nuclear dimension that manifests itself in consequential ways, including Moscow's nuclear sabre-rattling and its denunciation of the last surviving nuclear arms control treaty. This unleashed intriguing reactions, like a surprisingly tough resort to sanctions by the EU, or the shrinking of neutrality on the continent. However, while support for nuclear deterrence has increased in some NATO countries, support for arms control remains strong too. Meanwhile, nuclear disarmament advocates have not shifted their stance as a result of the crisis.

*European Union | Russia | NATO | Finland | Sweden | Arms control | Nuclear weapons*

**keywords**

## The EU and the Transformed Nuclear Context since the War in Ukraine

by Clara Portela\*

### Introduction

Although debates about the Western response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022 typically centre on the supply of military equipment, the refugee and humanitarian crisis, and Kyiv's European Union membership bid, the conflict also features a nuclear military dimension. This was evident from the start, when the security assurances provided to Kyiv in exchange for giving up on Soviet-era nuclear weapons left on its territory in the context of the non-binding Budapest Memorandum of 1994, one of the main diplomatic endeavours towards nuclear de-proliferation after the disintegration of the Soviet Union,<sup>1</sup> were violated. Awkwardly, the Kremlin's justification for the attack alluded, among other issues, to Ukraine's ability to produce nuclear weapons thanks to the technological capacity inherited from the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup>

But it was, above all, the more or less explicit threats of nuclear-weapons use issued repeatedly throughout 2022 by Russia's leaders – notably President Vladimir Putin himself – that commanded the most attention from media and policy circles. No less than 165 "interactions with a nuclear dimension" were observed in the course of barely one year.<sup>3</sup> What impact are such actions having on European security? How will the transformed environment emerging after the shock of the invasion

<sup>1</sup> Virginia I. Foran and Leonard S. Spector, "The Application of Incentives to Nuclear Proliferation", in David Cortright (ed.), *The Price of Peace. Incentives and International Conflict Prevention*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 1997, p. 21-53.

<sup>2</sup> See Russian Presidency, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>.

<sup>3</sup> Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt, "Nuclear Signalling in Russia's War Against Ukraine", in *CSDS Policy Briefs*, No. 5/2023 (22 February 2023), p. 1, <https://csds.vub.be/node/1317>.

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of Ukraine, in turn, affect prospects for nuclear deterrence, arms control and disarmament in Europe? With these questions in mind, the present paper addresses the possibility of nuclear-weapons use and its impact on European public attitudes towards nuclear deterrence, the shrinking of neutrality as a security policy and the abandonment of bilateral arms control between the United States and Russia. A brief overview of consequences for the EU, and for the role it can play in the resulting security situation, concludes the paper.

## 1. Russian threats of nuclear-weapons use

Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russian officials have repeatedly alluded to a possible use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine. First and foremost, the key purpose of such allusions was to prevent direct Western military intervention in Ukraine. Russian officials warned that a direct clash between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russian forces could lead to a nuclear escalation. The fact that such statements were particularly frequent at the outset of the war, underlines the pre-eminence of this purpose. Secondly, such nuclear posturing was intended to limit Western support for Ukraine. Russian officials occasionally highlighted the fact that the provision of certain types of assistance to Kyiv would transform NATO into a direct party to the conflict, which entailed the risk of a direct nuclear clash.<sup>4</sup> However, the language of such statements tended to be vague – and the government frequently retracted them, blaming Western misinterpretation.

The effectiveness of such nuclear sabre-rattling remains contentious. Some posit that it compelled the US to show restraint, as reflected in the White House's insistence that it would not intervene directly in the Russia–Ukraine war, as well as other Western officials' public rejection of intervention citing nuclear-escalation concerns. In March 2022, the White House announced that it would not interfere directly in the Russia–Ukraine war and, when Russia declared it had put its nuclear forces on alert, plans to supply Ukraine with aircraft were cancelled.<sup>5</sup> In October 2022, US President Joe Biden declared that, for the first time since the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world was facing “a direct threat of the use of the nuclear weapon if, in fact, things continue down the path they've been going”.<sup>6</sup> However, alternative explanations hold equally well: Western decision-makers might have refrained from intervention out of sheer risk-averseness. Western actors have, after all, not been characterised by an eagerness to get involved in extensive

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Borger and Patrick Wintour, “US Dismisses Polish Plan to Provide Fighter Jets to Be Sent to Ukraine”, in *The Guardian*, 9 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/p/yx9yt>.

<sup>6</sup> White House, *Remarks by President Biden at Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Reception*, New York, 6 October 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/10/06/remarks-by-president-biden-at-democratic-senatorial-campaign-committee-reception>. See also Carlos Torralba, María R. Sahuquillo and Macarena Vidal Liy, “Putin's Nuclear Threats: Should the West Take Them Seriously?”, in *El País*, 9 October 2022, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2022-10-09/putins-nuclear-threats-should-the-west-take-them-seriously.html>.

military operations after the costly and largely inconclusive interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan or Libya. Indeed, US presidents from Barack Obama to Joe Biden have been openly reticent about interventionism. The debacle of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in summer 2021 epitomises the US reluctance over any overseas force deployment. From that vantage point, a Western intervention in Ukraine would have been unlikely – particularly in the absence of an Article 5-type security guarantee that could compromise the credibility of the Atlantic Alliance. In fact, the absence of NATO membership does not preclude the unilateral offering of nuclear security guarantees to Ukraine; yet, this has not been contemplated either. Instead, Western countries have opted for supporting Ukraine via weapons transfers, intelligence gathering and military training. The US has reacted to Russia's hints that this kind of support could elicit use of nuclear weapons. For instance, former US general David Petraeus warned in October 2022 that the likely response to Russian nuclear escalation would be a sweeping attack which would destroy Russia's troops and equipment in Ukraine as well as sinking its Black Sea fleet: "we would respond by leading a NATO, a collective effort, that would take out every Russian conventional force that we can see and identify on the battlefield in Ukraine and also in Crimea and every ship in the Black Sea".<sup>7</sup> While it is impossible to know whether this is indeed the Biden Administration's policy, senior officials – namely National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and CIA Director Bill Burns – are known to have warned the Russians that any move involving nuclear weapons would have very serious consequences for Russia.

Be that as it may, there is consensus around the idea that nuclear sabre-rattling has seemingly undermined the "taboo" on the use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear posturing dovetails with the introduction in the Russian nuclear doctrine of the notion of "existential threat", a term largely undefined, as a possible justification for nuclear use.<sup>8</sup> The most recent doctrinal document, the "Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence" of 2020, spells out that nuclear use is geared at preventing the "escalation of military actions and their termination on conditions that are acceptable for the Russian Federation".<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it accommodates two scenarios for nuclear-weapons use: a "launch on warning" posture based on credible information about the launching of ballistic missiles towards Russian territory, and an attack by an adversary against critical governmental or military sites whose disruption "would undermine nuclear force

<sup>7</sup> "'This Week' Transcript 10-2-22: FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell, Sen. Marco Rubio & Gen. David Petraeus", in *ABC News*, 2 October 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=90870039>. See also Edward Helmore, "Petraeus: US Would Destroy Russia's Troops if Putin Uses Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine", in *The Guardian*, 2 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/p/mcct4>.

<sup>8</sup> Russian Presidency, *Vojennaja doktrina Rossijskoj Federatsii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 February 2010, point 16, <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/461>. For an unofficial English translation see the Carnegie Endowment website: [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia\\_military\\_doctrine.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doctrine.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Russian Presidency, *Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence*, 2 June 2020, point 4, [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/1434131](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/1434131).

response actions”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, conventional attacks with potential impact on nuclear-weapons systems are covered under the scenarios that may give rise to a nuclear response.

Interestingly, Russian warnings about nuclear use have also been accompanied by simultaneous accusations of nuclear threats allegedly directed against Moscow. Highlighting the fact that Ukraine retains “the nuclear technologies created back in the Soviet times”, the presidential address of February 2022 claimed that

If Ukraine acquires weapons of mass destruction, the situation [...] will drastically change, especially for us, for Russia. We cannot but react to this real danger, all the more so since [...] Ukraine’s Western patrons may help it acquire these weapons to create yet another threat to our country.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Russian media spread the (false) news in January 2023 that Sweden was planning to allow the deployment of NATO nuclear weapons – a notion dismissed by the Swedish prime minister, Ulf Kristersson.<sup>12</sup> Thus, despite the fact that doctrinal instruments cover the option of nuclear use in response to conventional challenges, an attempt is made to justify the threat with the help of “equalising” circumstances of purported nuclear danger.

## 2. More sanctions, less neutrality

The European reaction to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has taken various forms. And one is that the EU has adopted an unusually robust sanctions policy, closely coordinated with G7 partners.<sup>13</sup> The threat of sanctions by a Western alliance that coincides almost exactly with NATO membership was originally meant to have a deterrent effect, as Russia was warned about this if it indeed had invaded. However, the deterrent effect against potential military aggression was compromised by several factors.

To begin with, sanctions threats cannot be spelt out too specifically, given that their announcement can preclude their effectiveness by granting the target time to prepare for the measures to come. Secondly, the threat of sanctions is less potent than that of military force because they can be circumvented and evaded, an option unavailable with force. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that sanctions take a long time to display their effects, undermine their deterrent potential, as

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., point 19.

<sup>11</sup> Russian Presidency, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2022, cit.

<sup>12</sup> Georgi Gotev, “Swedish PM Warns against Russian ‘Nuclear’ Propaganda”, in *Euractiv*, 11 January 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1863535>.

<sup>13</sup> Clara Portela and Janis Kluge, “Slow-acting Tools. Evaluating EU Sanctions against Russia after the Invasion of Ukraine”, in *EUISS Briefs*, No. 11 (November 2022), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2825>.

the aggressor is reassured that its actions will not meet any resistance greater than economic bans. The reliance on sanctions, however severe they may be, confirms that the option of a military intervention in support of a non-NATO ally remained as unpalatable to European political elites as to the US leadership.

Another form of reaction to the invasion has been the shrinking of neutrality as a security policy. This development has found its most drastic manifestation in Finland and Sweden's decision to apply for NATO membership shortly after the outbreak of the war. Even the persistence of the commitment to neutrality in Moldova is in question, as public debate about a possible application to join NATO is currently under way.<sup>14</sup> Some reconsideration of the obligations arising from neutrality has penetrated public debates even in Switzerland and Austria, with regard to such questions as the re-export of military equipment or participation in sanctions efforts.<sup>15</sup>

Since Finnish and Swedish neutrality policy, unlike that of the neutrals in central Europe, was never constitutionally enshrined, it could be abandoned easily. The persistence of neutrality had remained contested among post-Cold War elites in both Nordic countries – especially after the 2014 annexation of Crimea heightened the threat perception in both.<sup>16</sup> Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, popular support for NATO accession became a majority position. Although the trigger for Helsinki's and Stockholm's NATO applications was primarily the Russian conventional attack on Ukraine, the accompanying nuclear threat meant to preclude intervention by third parties increased the perception of vulnerability and exposure in Sweden and Finland, which ceased to regard neutrality as a protection policy. Interestingly, those countries that are not yet EU members and whose NATO membership is not on the table have intensified their efforts to join the EU – a move that Brussels reciprocated by fast-tracking their candidate status. Moldova was granted EU candidate status alongside Ukraine in June 2022, a mere three months after filing their applications.<sup>17</sup>

The question now is: What will the consequences for European security be? The Nordics' accession to the Atlantic Alliance, along with Moldova's reconsideration of neutrality, dramatically shrinks the space outside of Alliance commitments or aspirations: in Europe's continental landmass, only Switzerland and Austria remain neutral. With the Nordics' change of status, gone are the roles that neutrality had fulfilled since the Cold War era: avoiding direct borders between adversaries and keeping tensions low around the Baltic Sea. Despite claims declaring neutrality

<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Lynch, "Time to Join NATO? Moldova Eyes Joining 'a Larger Alliance'", in *Politico*, 20 January 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/?p=2536740>.

<sup>15</sup> Constanze Stelzenmüller, "Ukraine Crisis Could Transform the Future of Neutrality", in *Financial Times*, 22 November 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/2ddad5db-3500-44b9-a93e-d5ca40c7409e>.

<sup>16</sup> Leo Michel and Matti Pesu, "Strategic Deterrence Redux. Nuclear Weapons and European Security", in *FIIA Reports*, No. 60 (September 2019), <https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/strategic-deterrence-redux>.

<sup>17</sup> European Council, *Conclusions, 23-24 June 2022*, <https://europa.eu/!TCKrrj>.



“obsolete”,<sup>18</sup> this may have negative consequences for European (and broadly Western) global nuclear diplomacy. Both Finland and Sweden – particularly the latter – acted as long-standing disarmament advocates capable of building bridges across intra-European divides and between Europeans and the Global South in the context of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Past efforts in this regard resulted in the launch of the first EU Strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in 2003 – spearheaded by Sweden to soften the rift created by the US–UK invasion of Iraq, which was initially justified on counter-proliferation grounds. Most recently, Sweden convened the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament – a move that was, again, intended to reconstitute a European consensus around the matter in the face of deepening polarisation in the attitudes of EU member states towards nuclear deterrence.<sup>19</sup> However, in the context of Sweden’s bid to join NATO, Stockholm has de-facto ceased to lead the initiative.

Although the direction in which these countries will evolve is open, two main options are plausible: one scenario is that they align with NATO member states’ policies on non-proliferation issues.<sup>20</sup> Tellingly, Finland and Sweden abstained from voting on the resolution promoting the universalisation of the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2020, but voted against in 2021 and 2022. This is significant because United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions promoting the TPNW have been vehemently opposed by NATO members. If this option materialises and the Nordics fall into line, the EU will lose much of its bridge-building ability in the global nuclear non-proliferation complex. In an alternative scenario, the Finnish and Swedish position on nuclear weapons could be one of continuity, in an attempt to keep the Baltic Sea a low-tension area. They might retain their deep-seated disarmament credentials, remaining outside the mainstream of NATO and would keep providing the EU with a bridge-building “Nordic cluster” along with Norway.

### 3. The demise of bilateral nuclear-arms control between the US and Russia

A further consequence of the Ukraine war is the demise of bilateral nuclear-arms control between the US and Russia. The network of treaties between the two countries limiting nuclear weaponry witnessed Washington’s withdrawal from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, citing Russian non-compliance.

<sup>18</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, “Why Neutrality Is Obsolete in the 21st Century”, in *Foreign Policy*, 4 April 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/04/finland-sweden-nato-neutral-austria-ireland-switzerland-russia-war>.

<sup>19</sup> Michal Onderco and Clara Portela, “NATO’s Nordic Enlargement and Nuclear Disarmament: The End of Bridge Building?”, in *War on the Rocks*, 20 February 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/?p=28287>.

<sup>20</sup> Robin Forsberg, Aku Kähkönen and Jason Moyer, “If Finland Joins NATO, It Needs a New Nuclear Weapons Policy”, in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 8 December 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/?p=102005>.

Only the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) survived – and that only after it was extended at the eleventh hour, in February 2021, for a period of five years.<sup>21</sup> Initially, implementation of New START remained unaltered despite the invasion of Ukraine. However, one year into the war, Russia announced it would suspend the application of New START's verification procedures on the ground that it was now unacceptable to have US officials inspect Russian nuclear sites. The suspension of the verification system was justified with reference to

connection between strategic offensive weapons [the kind of weapons limited by New START] and, say, the conflict in Ukraine or other hostile Western actions against our country. [...] They [the West] want to inflict a strategic defeat on us and also to get to our nuclear sites.<sup>22</sup>

The decision was criticised for fostering instability due to the loss of confidence-building mechanisms and the information exchange foreseen in the treaty,<sup>23</sup> which is likely to result in an upgrade of US capabilities as a response to Washington's increased threat perception.<sup>24</sup> Despite the announced suspension, hopes remain for a full restoration of the treaty. The suspension is reported to be effected under *clausula rebus sic stantibus*, a figure that allows states to denounce international obligations on the basis that circumstances changed fundamentally since they first acceded to the treaty. The invocation of this clause is invariably controversial, since it is used to justify a non-consensual withdrawal from of a treaty. Moreover, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which regulates the *clausula rebus sic stantibus*, stipulates that during a period of suspension, the parties shall refrain from acts tending to obstruct the resumption of the operation of the treaty.<sup>25</sup>

The recent announcement of the (re-)deployment of Russian nuclear weapons to Belarus after these had been handed over to Russia following the breakup of the Soviet Union has added yet another layer to the nuclear dimension of the Ukraine conflict.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, despite a deteriorating security climate characterised by ongoing bellicosity, the negotiation of a new arms-control treaty is still considered viable by some authors. Leading Ukrainian expert Polina Sinovets proposes to use

<sup>21</sup> Clara Portela, "The EU's Arms Control Challenge. Bridging Nuclear Divides", in *Chaillot Papers*, No. 166 (April 2021), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2571>.

<sup>22</sup> Russian Presidency, *Address by the President of the Russian Federation*, 21 February 2023, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70565>.

<sup>23</sup> John Mecklin, "Jon Wolfstahl Assesses the Suspension of Russian Participation in New START", in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 21 February 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/?p=102846>.

<sup>24</sup> Lydia Wachs, "New Start vor dem Aus? Rüstungskontrolle als Teil Moskaus nuklearer Erpressungsstrategie", in *SWP Kurz gesagt*, 3 March 2023, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/new-start-vor-dem-aus-ruestungskontrolle-als-teil-moskaus-nuklearer-erpressungsstrategie>.

<sup>25</sup> Rose Gottemoeller and Marshall L. Brown Jr., "Legal Aspects of Russia's New START Suspension Provide Opportunities for US Policy Makers", in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2 March 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/?p=102976>.

<sup>26</sup> "Russia Signs Deal to Deploy Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Belarus", in *Al Jazeera*, 25 May 2023, <https://aje.io/49mj51>.

arms control as a method for de-escalating the conflict, positing that both parties continue to have an interest in the reduction of certain categories of weapons, such as cruise missiles, in a scenario in which the blueprint of the INF could be replicated.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in spite of the heightened risk perception, public opinion in Western Europe remains remarkably favourable to new arms-control endeavours, in contrast to public opinion in the US or Russia.<sup>28</sup> However, because bilateral arms control is a Washington–Moscow business, European governments remain less vocal about this.

#### 4. Implications for the EU: An unchanged script?

Notwithstanding the strains that the war in Ukraine has put on the EU, Brussels institutions have seized the opportunity to bolster their security relevance. This role has manifested itself primarily in the mobilisation of funds to finance weapons deliveries by means of the Peace Facility and, above all, the adoption of a remarkably far-reaching sanctions effort. These actions have afforded Commission President Ursula von der Leyen the occasion of constructing the “geopolitical Commission” she had advocated for since her inauguration.<sup>29</sup> In nuclear deterrence and arms-control questions, however, the Atlantic Alliance remains the preeminent forum. Despite continued efforts to frame a common EU stance on nuclear issues since the release of the Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD Strategy), intra-European disagreements over the role of nuclear deterrence have prevented a shift from NATO to the EU. The EU has traditionally been divided into two camps. One of them composed of NATO members that accepts nuclear deterrence, and that notably includes nuclear weapons states France and, until 2019, also the UK. The second camp is composed of disarmament advocates, typically neutral states. The cleavage has not narrowed much over time: instead, a recent study of EU member states’ alignment on disarmament questions at the UN General Assembly and the NPT Review Conferences reveals a deepening cleavage between EU members that are concurrently NATO allies, on the one hand, and disarmament advocates, on the other.<sup>30</sup> As recalled above, Finland and Sweden are the only countries still occupying a middle position between both

<sup>27</sup> Polina Sinovets, “Nuclear Posturing in Russia’s War with Ukraine: ‘Offensive Deterrence’ in Progress”, in Marc Ozawa (ed.), “War Changes Everything: Russia after Ukraine”, in *NDC Research Papers*, No. 28 (February 2023), p. 27-37, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=792>.

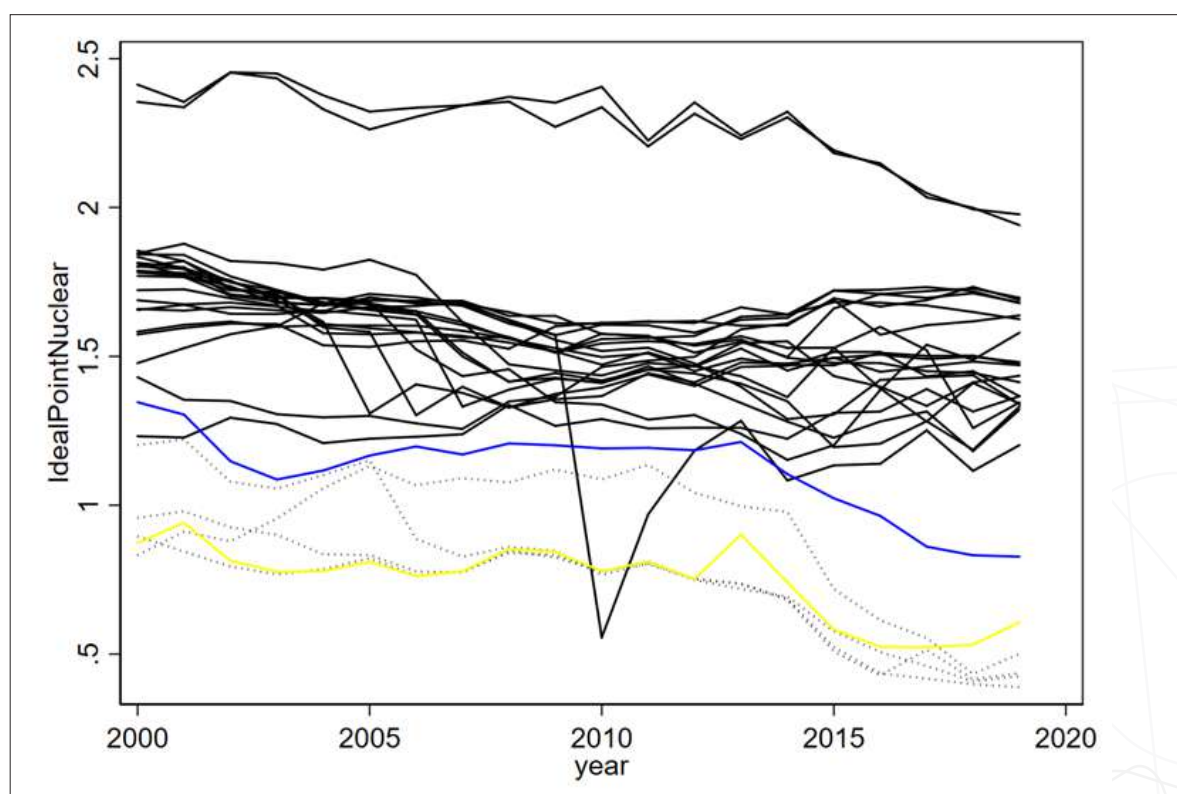
<sup>28</sup> Michal Onderco, Michal Smetana and Tom W. Etienne, “Hawks in the Making? European Public Views on Nuclear Weapons Post-Ukraine”, in *Global Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 2023), p. 305-317, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13179>.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, *Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the European Parliament Plenary on the Occasion of the Presentation of Her College of Commissioners and Their Programme*, Strasbourg, 27 November 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_19\\_6408](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6408).

<sup>30</sup> Michal Onderco and Clara Portela, “External Drivers of EU Differentiated Cooperation: How Change in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime Affects Member States Alignment”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2023), p. 150-175, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2146336>.

groups – as displayed in Figure 1. The graph displays ideal points, which estimate the distance between stances of different countries in a policy area, based on their voting behaviour on resolutions about nuclear weapons at the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>31</sup> The graph includes all EU member states between 2000 and 2020, with the top lines depicting the nuclear weapons states, central lines representing NATO members, and dotted lines showing disarmament advocates. The evolution of the Nordics, with Finland coloured in blue and Sweden in yellow, is noteworthy. Sweden used to be among the most vocal disarmament supporters, but in recent years it has moved slightly closer to the NATO mainstream while other disarmament advocates moved further away from them. Finland, originally close to NATO member, gradually became more favourable to disarmament. By 2020, it had become the only country half-way through between the NATO mainstream and pro-disarmament members, positioned between the bulk of NATO countries and the nuclear advocates.

**Figure 1** | Evolution of EU member states voting on nuclear resolutions at UNGA, 2000–20



Note: top lines=nuclear weapons states; central lines=NATO members; dotted lines=disarmament advocates; blue line=Finland; yellow line=Sweden.  
Source: Own elaboration from Michal Onderco and Clara Portela, “External Drivers of EU Differentiated Cooperation”, cit., p. 161.

<sup>31</sup> Ideal points use a computational algorithm to estimate positions of actors on a single axis based on the results of many votes.

## Conclusions

Russia's continued nuclear sabre-rattling is unlikely to affect the intra-European cleavage over disarmament. This is not because EU members underestimate the disquieting prospect of a potential nuclear attack but because each "camp" has drawn opposite conclusions from the crisis: most NATO allies regard the Alliance's nuclear deterrence posture as the only guarantee against nuclear blackmail, while disarmament advocates see the increased likelihood of use as a reason to step up abolitionist efforts. This is a key point as the war has not compelled EU member states to approximate their positions.

Popular support for disarmament is decreasing, a development that could eventually erode the intra-European divide on the issue. Interestingly, a recent survey of public attitudes towards nuclear deterrence and disarmament among the traditionally anti-nuclear populations in the Netherlands and Germany recorded a notable increase in support for nuclear deterrence following the invasion of Ukraine, accompanied by a corresponding drop in support for nuclear disarmament.<sup>32</sup> More than half of respondents in both the Netherlands and Germany believe that the stationing of nuclear weapons on their territory deters nuclear attacks on NATO countries.<sup>33</sup>

Although signs of arms-control optimism among the European public may create the political conditions for action on this front, the latest NATO Strategic Concept suggests that for the time being it is not shared by foreign-policy elites.<sup>34</sup> In sum, although we are unlikely to see a convergence in the overall stance of EU member states on nuclear deterrence and disarmament, the rate of acceptance of nuclear deterrence among the public has increased considerably. As a result, continued polarisation between EU members remains the most likely scenario.

*Updated 30 May 2023*

<sup>32</sup> Michal Onderco, Michal Smetana and Tom W. Etienne, "Hawks in the Making?", cit.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>34</sup> William Alberque, "The New NATO Strategic Concept and the End of Arms Control", in *IISS Online Analysis*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis//2022/06/the-new-nato-strategic-concept-and-the-end-of-arms-control>.

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# The War in Ukraine and the Future of Non-proliferation and Arms Control in the European Continent

by Manuel Herrera



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
and International Cooperation

## ABSTRACT

The seminar to which this report refers aimed to identify the conditions and instruments necessary to re-establish a security system on the European continent capable of preventing new conflicts and deterring potential aggressors, including through agreements on the control of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, taking into account the negotiation processes that may be developed to provide a political solution to the conflict in Ukraine or to manage its consequences. As a consequence, the main focus of the event was on the EU's non-proliferation and disarmament policies in the European context, and more specifically on the role of the EU in the context of the diplomatic efforts to establish a more stable security system in Europe and to provide security guarantees to Ukraine; concrete initiatives that the EU can take to revive arms control in Europe, in particular in the field of conventional arms and Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), in order to restore a stable strategic balance; and the prospects – if conditions are met – for a resumption of the security dialogue with Russia in the framework of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or other forums.

*European defence | NATO | Russia | Ukraine | Arms control | Nuclear weapons | Conventional weapons*

keywords

# The War in Ukraine and the Future of Non-proliferation and Arms Control in the European Continent

by Manuel Herrera\*

## Introduction

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) project on “The war in Ukraine and the security situation in Europe”, promoted with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, aims to examine the implications of the war in Ukraine on the security architecture in Europe and the policies necessary to rebuild a strategic balance through a credible deterrence posture and the establishment of new regimes or arrangements on arms control and confidence and security measures in the continent.

The project has a threefold objective: 1) to analyse, in the light of developments in the war in Ukraine, the threats and risk factors, including long-term ones, to European security and the new strategic imbalances that have emerged; 2) to identify the conditions and instruments necessary to re-establish a security system on the continent capable of preventing new conflicts and deterring potential aggressors, including through agreements on the control of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, taking into account the negotiation processes that may be developed to provide a political solution to the conflict in Ukraine or to manage its consequences; 3) offer suggestions and proposals on the role Italy can play, in the transatlantic arena and within the EU, to achieve these objectives, in the light of its specific security interests and concerns.

The seminar to which this report refers focused on the second point listed above, specifically on the EU’s non-proliferation and disarmament strategy within the Union’s broader security strategy. The main focus of the event was on the EU’s non-proliferation and disarmament policies in the European context, and more

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specifically on the following issues:

- The role of the EU in the context of the diplomatic efforts to establish a more stable security system in Europe and to provide security guarantees to Ukraine;
- Concrete initiatives that the EU can take to revive arms control in Europe, in particular in the field of conventional arms (Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, CFE) and Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), in order to restore a stable strategic balance;
- The prospects – if conditions are met – for a resumption of the security dialogue with Russia in the framework of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or other forums.

The two thematic panels organised discussed both the nuclear and conventional dimensions of the aforementioned issues. The seminar was also a useful platform in order to discuss the impact of the latest developments in the Ukraine war on the prospects of rebuilding a stable security system on the European continent. The seminar was attended by a total of 129 participants, both online and in person.<sup>1</sup>

The seminar was opened by **Ettore Greco**, IAI Executive Vice-President and Head of the Multilateralism and Global Governance Programme, who in his welcome remarks pointed out that some fundamental treaties and arms control agreements have become obsolete after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, for example the New START Treaty, and that even an armistice between both parties would imply new challenges in this area. As a consequence, he concluded that there will be the need for a mix of deterrence and arms control in post-War Europe.

The remainder of this report summarises the main issues and observations raised throughout the event's two thematic panels and identifies the key issues that need to be addressed in order to establish a durable security architecture on the European continent in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine.

### Panel 1 – The future of nuclear arms control in Europe

This panel consisted of Clara Portela, Professor of Political Science, Faculty of Law, University of Valencia as speaker; Ambassador **Carlo Trezza** as chair; and Nikolai Sokov, Senior Fellow, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) and Francesca Giovannini, Executive Director, Project on Managing the Atom, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, as discussants.

Ambassador Trezza opened the session by pointing out that the EU is not a homogenous nor cohesive actor on nuclear disarmament, noting that this became evident with the adoption and entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), making clear the division within the Union on this issue.

<sup>1</sup> For more details see IAI website: <https://www.iai.it/en/node/16633>.

For example, Ireland and Austria are more supportive of the abolitionist postulates promoted by the TPNW, while Sweden and Finland have become more moderate and now advocate an intermediate position towards nuclear disarmament similar to that of most European states.

Afterwards, **Clara Portela** began her intervention enumerating the consequences for European security of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The first and foremost consequence is the presence of Russian threats, including the potential use of nuclear weapons in the context of the war. Such threats were present especially in the early part of the conflict due to fears of a direct clash between NATO and Russia. However, these threats, far from undermining Western support for Ukraine, have reinforced it, thus favouring more direct military support for Ukraine, even hypothesising the possibility of assisting Ukraine in the development of a nuclear weapon.

The second consequence has been an oscillation in the neutral positions of some European nations. For example, countries such as Finland, Sweden, Moldova, Austria and Switzerland have rethought their policies of neutrality as a result of the war. Two of these countries (Sweden and Finland) have even applied for NATO membership.

In this sense, Portela concluded that abolitionist countries will have to redouble their efforts to justify their arguments and positions vis-à-vis the rest of the European states, which are increasingly showing a favourable position towards increased nuclear deterrence against Russia, the two main drivers of this approach being Germany and the Netherlands.

Following Portela's intervention, **Nikolai Sokov** addressed three main issues: 1) The role of nuclear weapons in today's warfare; 2) The future development of arms control in Europe and the world; 3) The (potential) role of the EU in the field of arms control.

In this regard, Sokov pointed out that there is widespread opposition to the United States from the so-called BRICS countries, and especially Russia and China, in the field of arms control; and consequently, the foreseeable future is that nuclear weapons will continue to be part of the defence strategies of the great powers.

He then pointed out that Russia's attempt to use the nuclear threat as an instrument to prevent Western support for Ukraine failed, as NATO countries know that the use of nuclear weapons in the context of this war is highly unlikely. Russia would only resort to the use of nuclear weapons in the event of a large-scale defeat, and even then, it would be more likely to accept a surrender or a forced regime change from within. Thus, Sokov noted that in order to get as close an estimate as possible of Russia's intentions with respect to its nuclear arsenal, we must define what kind of scenario Russia might consider a defeat. He also pointed out that very few are now talking about nuclear disarmament and therefore abolitionist perspectives will be limited in scope in the coming years.

With respect to the EU, Sokov noted that the EU has very quickly assumed its identity as a defence actor, and in this sense has become the main pillar of NATO's support for Ukraine. However, Sokov believes that there is a risk that the EU will try to converge its defence activities with those of NATO and, in this sense, that the EU will become a subordinate of the Atlantic Alliance.

Finally, **Francesca Giovannini's** intervention took place. For her, it is important to distinguish between things that were ongoing before the war and things that have accelerated as a result of the war; for example, the progressive aggressiveness of nuclear doctrines was a process that had been going on since the mid-2010s.

She then pointed out that the use of nuclear weapons as an instrument of foreign policy has been a failure, and in this sense the lessons are very different for each side, for example for the West, nuclear threats are an attempt at blackmail that can hardly materialise on the ground, and therefore shows the limits of nuclear deterrence as an instrument of conflict prevention and management.

She then pointed out that Sweden and Finland's application for NATO membership symbolises the loss of credibility in nuclear disarmament because two traditionally neutral and pro-disarmament countries will be covered by the Atlantic Alliance's nuclear umbrella. At the same time, she noted, like Sokov, that there is a risk of the EU becoming a subordinate working group of NATO, even as countries within the Alliance such as Hungary, Italy and Turkey increasingly question support for Ukraine.

She concluded her intervention pointing out that there is a need to start talking about arms control transformation because treaty-based nuclear deterrence may have come to an end. In this regard, she indicated that arms control needs to be addressed through unilateral instruments, strategic dialogues, and new presidential initiatives. It is up to analysts to give the Russians a new vision on arms control and to think of a new generation for arms control in order to move towards an *"arms control behaviour"*.

### Panel 2 – The future of conventional arms control in Europe

This panel consisted of Hans-Joachim Schmidt, Associate Fellow, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) as speaker; **Manuel Herrera**, Researcher, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) as chair; and Nils Duquet, Director of the Flemish Peace Institute and Polina Sinovets, Head, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University and Director, Odessa Center for Nonproliferation (OdCNP), as discussants.

**Hans-Joachim Schmidt** began his intervention by outlining three possible future scenarios for the war in Ukraine: 1) Ukraine wins the war with Western support; 2) Russia wins the war; 3) A ceasefire is achieved and Russia controls part of the Ukrainian territories.

Regarding option 1, Schmidt considered that there is no consensus on how far a Ukrainian victory should go; for example, to a reconquest of Crimea? This view could lead to an indefinite war against Russia, which could continue to attack Ukrainian targets more aggressively.

Regarding option 2, he considered that a situation could arise in which US and Western support for Ukraine diminishes, and Russia would end up winning the war. This scenario could lead to Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic States feeling more insecure, and would demonstrate to the world the effectiveness of the nuclear threat posed by Russia.

Regarding option 3, he considered this scenario the most likely, but not the most preferable as it would require reaching some kind of compromise with Russia. At the same time, this scenario could be seen more as a defeat for Russia than for Ukraine, which could have consequences for Putin's regime and Russia's stability as a country.

Following Schmidt's intervention, **Nils Duquet** began to examine the three scenarios outlined above, starting with option 2, which he said was more likely at the beginning of the war, but not now, as too much is at stake for the West and a total Russian victory would not be acceptable. With regard to a total victory by Ukraine, Duquet also considers that it is neither likely nor acceptable because it could create further risks as a result of a possible collapse of the Russian political system. Like Schmidt, Duquet considered that a political compromise resulting in a Cold War scenario between Russia and NATO is most likely.

He then turned to the issue of arms deliveries to Ukraine. The West is not divided on this issue, but they are discussing the possible extent of these deliveries and what specific weapons to deliver. The only way to contribute to peace now, he said, is to improve Ukraine's negotiating position, and for this to happen, continued arms deliveries to the Ukrainians is imperative. However, he also noted that arms control is crucial to maintaining peace after the end of the conflict, and that there is a risk of diversion of delivered arms, the main danger being small arms and light weapons. Duquet gave as an example the former Yugoslavia where the problems created in that situation by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons are still being dealt with. In other words, there is a possibility that weapons delivered to Ukraine could disappear and reappear in other parts of the world.

Finally, he noted that there is a risk to Ukraine's own security if the peace process is negotiated only between the US and Russia, noting that the involvement of other major powers, such as China, in the negotiation process is necessary.

After this, **Polina Sinovets** began her intervention by stressing that this is not a war in Ukraine, but a war against Ukraine. In this sense, she pointed out that going back to the borders of February 2022 is not enough for Ukraine, and that the borders of 1991 are at stake.

She immediately addressed the question of what does victory mean for both sides now. In this regard, she pointed out that for Ukraine it could be the seizure of Crimea or the Donbass, because if Crimea is regained this could endanger Putin's regime, and if Putin loses the Donbass, he automatically loses the war. Regarding a scenario of a Russian victory, Sinovets said that it is not clear what Putin would consider a victory.

She went on to say that Russia is not prepared to use nuclear weapons because nuclear deterrence does not work against non-nuclear states. In this regard, Russia hopes that in 2024 the US presidential election will result in an isolationist Republican presidency and that Washington's support for Ukraine will change. In this case, Russia could take over other parts of Ukraine, for example Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. However, a new Russia without Putin would be very interested in dialogue and bringing the issue closer from an arms control perspective is the best way to do this.

Sinovets ended her intervention by questioning the engagement scenario put forward by Schmidt since the question is: how to get there? And what kind of engagement? In this sense, Sinovets was not very optimistic because the prospect of arms control in the region cannot be foreseen.

### Closing remarks

The closing remarks were delivered by Ambassador **Alessandro Azzoni**, Deputy Director General/Principal Director for Security, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

He began his intervention by stressing the fact that the return of war in Europe represents a profound transformation of the continent's security architecture. For instance, on the NATO side, the trans-Atlantic alliance has been more politically united than ever, something that the Russian leadership did not expect. On the EU side, Brussels has undertaken three main measures: 1) military support; 2) financial assistance; 3) restrictive measures and sanctions.

On this last point, he stated that sanctions are a good thing, but they have to be seen for what they are: a tool to achieve something, not an achievement in itself, as sanctions have a cost also for the ones who implement them.

He then proceeded by pointing out that Europeans are at a unique stage in their history, and that the time has come to take initiatives, through the Strategic Compass, to strengthen the EU as a global security provider. We are heading in the right direction.

Regarding the future of OSCE he said that the problem is that the organisation works by consensus, which means that it is now blocked because of Russia, but



there is also resistance from western partners because of the extensive use of extra-budgetary projects, such as the Support Programme for Ukraine.

Finally, he stated that arms control and disarmament is a political process that reflects the current state of mutual relations. When Putin suspended the New START, no one was surprised as in November 2022 the Russians did not attend the Cairo meeting to discuss the verification complaint put forward by the United States. So, relations between Moscow-Washington on the New START had already been suspended in April 2022. Russia, unlike in the Cold War, does not want to separate arms control from the current geopolitical situation. Without any change, there will be no nuclear limitation for the first time since 1972. Hopefully Russia will reverse its decision.

As a conclusion, he pointed out three main issues. First, NATO will be stronger and more united than ever. Neutrality is not possible anymore and this is evidenced by the fact that Finland and Sweden are joining NATO and the security discussions with Switzerland. At the global level, even the margin for abstention at UN General Assembly is going to be narrower and narrower.

Second, the OSCE is in coma, but it could provide, in a changed environment, a good platform for a fresh re-start with Russia. Still the foundation for potential new Helsinki Accords is not in the foreseeable future. However, even if it seems impossible, efforts still need to be undertaken within the framework of OSCE. The challenge is to preserve the existing architecture, however dilapidated it may be as we cannot create anything new at the moment.

Third, the invasion of Ukraine is a decisive event. It marked a permanent redefinition of our relations with Russia. But the Russian Federation will remain a variable in the equation that determines the functioning of our continent.

## Programme

Rome, 10 March 2023

### Welcome remarks

**Ettore Greco**, Executive Vice-President, Istituto Affari Internazionali

### Session I: Nuclear Arms Control in Europe

Chair **Carlo Trezza**, Ambassador, Scientific Adviser, Istituto Affari Internazionali

Speaker **Clara Portela**, Professor of Political Science, Law School, University of Valencia

Discussants **Nikolai Sokov**, Senior Fellow, Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP)

**Francesca Giovannini**, Executive Director, Project on Managing the Atom, Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs

### Session II: Conventional Arms Control in Europe

Chair **Manuel Herrera**, Researcher, Istituto Affari Internazionali

Speaker **Hans-Joachim Schmidt**, Associate Fellow, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF)

Discussants **Nils Duquet**, Director, Flemish Peace Institute

**Polina Sinovets**, Head, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University and Director, Odessa Center for Nonproliferation (OdCNP)

### Closing remarks

**Alessandro Azzoni**, Deputy Director General/Principal Director for Security, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

# The War in Ukraine and the Future of Non-proliferation and Arms Control in the European Continent

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- 23 | 01 Alessandro Marrone and Elio Calcagno (eds), *Naval Combat Systems: Developments and Challenges*
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- 22 | 07en Ottavia Credi and Camilla Vianini, *Short Range Air Defence: Operational and Technological Developments*

# La sicurezza italiana e la guerra contro l'Ucraina: i punti di vista degli esperti

di Leo Goretti



Ministero degli Affari Esteri  
e della Cooperazione Internazionale

## ABSTRACT

L'invasione russa dell'Ucraina ha segnato un momento di cesura per le politiche di sicurezza e difesa dei paesi europei. In un'ottica di medio-lungo periodo, il nuovo scenario pone importanti questioni per la sicurezza italiana: tra queste, lo spostamento dell'attenzione della Nato verso il fianco nord-orientale dell'Alleanza, le prospettive dell'integrazione europea a livello di politica estera e di sicurezza e difesa comune, le scelte di investimento del paese in ambito difesa, la necessità di gestire una potenza nucleare ostile e una prevedibile proliferazione degli armamenti e delle minacce non convenzionali. Per offrire un punto di vista qualificato e individuare possibili risposte a livello di *policy* su questi interrogativi, vengono qui presentati i risultati di una *expert survey* e di un seminario di discussione a tema svoltisi tra marzo e maggio 2023.

Politica estera italiana | Russia | Ucraina | Nato | Allargamento Ue

keywords

## La sicurezza italiana e la guerra contro l'Ucraina: i punti di vista degli esperti

di Leo Goretti\*

### Introduzione

L'aggressione russa contro l'Ucraina ha segnato un momento di cesura per le politiche di sicurezza e difesa dei paesi europei da molti punti di vista: dalla ritrovata centralità delle forme di deterrenza convenzionale alla necessità di far fronte a un aggressore che dispone di armi nucleari, sino all'urgenza di ripensare le politiche industriali della difesa e al continuo contrasto delle minacce cyber e delle campagne di disinformazione da parte di paesi ostili<sup>1</sup>.

Da queste sfide non è esente l'Italia, che dal 24 febbraio 2022 si è schierata con fermezza e senza ambiguità dalla parte di Kyiv, sostenendo politicamente, finanziariamente e militarmente il governo ucraino e svolgendo un ruolo proattivo nella definizione delle sanzioni contro Mosca. I governi italiani hanno agito di concerto con gli alleati in Europa e nell'ambito dell'Alleanza atlantica, confermando e anzi consolidando i tradizionali orientamenti strategici del nostro paese<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Marrone, "The War against Ukraine and Its Lessons for NATO Militaries: Food for Thought", in *IAI Commentaries*, n. 23|05 (febbraio 2023), <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16637>; Michele Nones, "Riformare l'Europa della difesa", in *AffarInternazionali*, 6 aprile 2023, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/?p=103111>; Dario Cristiani, "Europe's Evolving Order and the War in Ukraine", in *Documenti IAI*, n. 23|07 (aprile 2023), <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16891>.

<sup>2</sup> Nona Mikhelidze, "Italy's Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine", in *IAI Commentaries*, n. 23|06 (febbraio 2023), <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16643>.

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Questo rapporto si basa su una *expert survey* su "La sicurezza italiana ai tempi della guerra contro l'Ucraina" e su un successivo seminario di discussione dedicato a "La sicurezza italiana di fronte alla guerra contro l'Ucraina" organizzati nell'ambito del progetto di ricerca "La guerra in Ucraina e l'assetto di sicurezza in Europa" realizzato dall'Istituto Affari Internazionali col supporto del Ministero degli Affari esteri e della Cooperazione internazionale e della Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo. Tutte le opinioni espresse nel documento sono solo ed esclusivamente dell'autore. L'autore ringrazia tutti i partecipanti alla *survey* e al seminario di discussione per i loro input, e i colleghi Riccardo Alcaro, Ettore Greco, Alessandro Marrone e Irene D'Antimo per i preziosi suggerimenti.

In un'ottica di medio-lungo periodo, tuttavia, il nuovo scenario determinato dall'aggressione all'Ucraina e dall'antagonismo con la Russia pone importanti questioni per la sicurezza italiana: tra queste, lo spostamento dell'attenzione della Nato verso il fianco nord-orientale dell'Alleanza, le prospettive dell'integrazione europea a livello di politica estera e di sicurezza e difesa comune, le scelte di investimento del paese in ambito difesa, senza dimenticare la necessità di gestire una potenza nucleare ostile e una prevedibile proliferazione degli armamenti e delle minacce non convenzionali<sup>3</sup>.

Per cercare di offrire un punto di vista qualificato su questi pressanti interrogativi e individuare possibili risposte a livello di *policy*, il Programma di Politica estera dell'Italia dell'Istituto Affari Internazionali ha promosso una *expert survey* tematica. Alla *survey*, che si componeva di otto domande a risposta chiusa e tre domande a risposta aperta somministrate attraverso la piattaforma SurveyMonkey, hanno risposto 25 esperti, tra cui otto ricercatori accademici, cinque esponenti delle forze armate, quattro ricercatori di think tank e quattro funzionari pubblici. Le risposte, raccolte tra il 19 marzo e il 3 aprile 2023, sono state successivamente oggetto di discussione durante un seminario a porte chiuse, tenutosi il 3 maggio 2023, con la partecipazione di esperti, funzionari e politici.

Le principali evidenze emerse nella *survey* e nel seminario di discussione sono analizzate nel seguito, cercando di operare una sintesi e trarne spunti per un'ulteriore riflessione. Un caveat preliminare riguarda il profilo dei partecipanti: i risultati della *survey* sono espressione di un campione ristretto e certamente non rappresentativo della popolazione nel suo complesso<sup>4</sup>, portatore di un punto di vista informato e qualificato, che a tratti fa fatica a trovare spazio nel dibattito pubblico. Più che una fotografia di orientamenti e percezioni complessive, quindi, questa ricerca rappresenta un tentativo di problematizzare alcune questioni e di trarne possibili implicazioni sul piano dell'elaborazione politica e strategica.

### 1. Le priorità della sicurezza italiana

Una prima area di riflessione ha riguardato stato e prospettive della sicurezza italiana nel mondo post-24 febbraio 2022. In base alle risposte degli esperti, le principali minacce per la sicurezza italiana nel contesto attuale sono quelle connesse alla

<sup>3</sup> Si veda in particolare il capitolo di Alessandro Marrone e Michelangelo Freyrie, "La politica di difesa italiana e il ruolo della Nato", in Ferdinando Nelli Feroci e Leo Goretti (a cura di), *L'Italia dal governo Draghi al governo Meloni. Rapporto sulla politica estera italiana. Edizione 2022*, Roma, IAI, 2023, p. 40-48, <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16471>. Persistono comunque significative continuità rispetto a trend già in atto da tempo, come evidenziato in Fabrizio Coticchia e Francesco N. Moro, "The Italian Armed Forces and the New Conflicts in Europe", in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, vol. 15, n. 2 (2023), p. 219-236.

<sup>4</sup> Per un sondaggio di opinione condotto nel settembre 2022 su un campione rappresentativo della popolazione italiana su temi in parte coincidenti con quelli della *survey* si veda LAPS e IAI, *Gli italiani e la politica estera 2022*, Roma, IAI, ottobre 2022, <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16116>.

guerra contro l'Ucraina (Figura 1): con un livello di 8,8 su 10, è il pericolo di un possibile allargamento del conflitto in corso ai paesi Nato a collocarsi al primo posto per gravità percepita, seguito immediatamente da un eventuale conflitto nucleare tra Stati Uniti e Russia (8,4). Le risposte evidenziano un'ulteriore fonte di preoccupazione legata alla crescita dell'instabilità nel Mediterraneo allargato (8,0), tradizionale area di interesse strategico per l'Italia; decisamente meno gravi per la sicurezza nazionale vengono considerati rischi legati a una possibile escalation militare nell'Indo-Pacifico (6,2).

Nel complesso, si conferma la percezione di uno scenario di "policrisi", in cui è indispensabile approfondire le interconnessioni e interdipendenze tra i diversi contesti regionali. In questa prospettiva, allo sguardo rivolto al conflitto in Ucraina si associa l'attenzione costante alle minacce che potrebbero materializzarsi in parallelo a Sud, nel Mediterraneo allargato. D'altro canto, la minor preoccupazione che si registra per gli sviluppi nell'Indo-Pacifico non deve portare a trascurare le ripercussioni che le tensioni tra Stati Uniti e Cina potrebbero avere nel medio-lungo periodo a livello globale, e quindi – più o meno direttamente – anche in Europa.

Sul piano delle interdipendenze economiche, il controllo preponderante della Cina su terre rare e materiali critici viene considerata una minaccia pressante (7,8), in misura maggiore rispetto alla dipendenza da forniture energetiche da paesi autoritari (7,0): un dato, quest'ultimo, che da un lato sembra un riconoscimento del successo delle politiche di diversificazione degli approvvigionamenti adottate dai governi italiani nell'ultimo anno, ma che dall'altro – come evidenziato nella discussione – potrebbe celare una sottovalutazione dei rischi connessi ai nuovi accordi di fornitura sottoscritti con regimi pur sempre autoritari nell'area del Medio Oriente e Nord Africa.

Tra le minacce di carattere globale, si colloca al primo posto l'emergenza climatica (7,5), mentre minor gravità viene attribuita alla regressione degli standard democratici a livello globale (6,8), alla crisi del multilateralismo (6,7) e al collasso del sistema di controllo degli armamenti (6,6). Un dato, quest'ultimo, che suggerisce un'apparente contraddizione: alla gravità del conflitto in corso in Ucraina non sembra associarsi l'urgenza di rilanciare lo sforzo per minimizzare e contenere i rischi legati alla proliferazione degli armamenti – o forse, piuttosto, a predominare è una percezione di scetticismo o di fatalismo rispetto alle prospettive di una ripresa del dialogo su questi dossier nel breve periodo.

Da segnalare, infine, come il terrorismo di matrice islamista venga attualmente considerato dagli esperti la minaccia meno grave per l'Italia tra le 17 opzioni proposte nella survey. Come osservato nel corso del seminario, si tratta di una valutazione razionale, che trova riscontro nelle analisi relative al numero e alla gravità degli attacchi di matrice religiosa in Occidente, in diminuzione dal 2017 in avanti<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Si vedano i dati inclusi in Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2023: Measuring*

**Figura 1** | Le minacce più gravi alla sicurezza dell'Italia



*Domanda:* Di seguito Le verrà presentato un elenco di questioni che caratterizzano il contesto internazionale contemporaneo. Per ciascuna di esse indichi se a Suo avviso costituisce o meno una minaccia per la sicurezza nazionale dell'Italia, utilizzando una scala da 0 a 10, dove 0 significa "Non è una minaccia" e 10 significa "È una minaccia molto grave".

Sul piano strategico e delle priorità di sicurezza, il conflitto in Ucraina sembra rilanciare con forza il ruolo della Nato a garanzia della sicurezza europea. Secondo oltre la metà degli esperti intervistati (52 per cento), il rafforzamento dell'Alleanza atlantica è la prima priorità per la sicurezza italiana nel contesto attuale; decisamente più distanziato il rafforzamento della politica di sicurezza e difesa comune europea (24 per cento) (Figura 2). Il diverso peso attribuito alle due dimensioni è verosimilmente anche il portato della sempre maggior integrazione dei paesi Ue nella Nato: come è stato evidenziato, a seguito dell'ingresso della Finlandia (avvenuto il 4 aprile 2023) e di quello previsto della Svezia (atteso entro fine 2023) nell'Alleanza, il 96 per cento dei cittadini Ue sarà incluso sotto lo scudo della Nato<sup>6</sup>.

Significativamente, nella classifica delle priorità di sicurezza per ordine di importanza (Figura 3), al terzo posto si colloca l'incremento della spesa italiana nel comparto difesa, seguito dal potenziamento delle partnership industriali con gli alleati. L'avvio di un processo di mediazione e pacificazione nei fora multilaterali rispetto alla guerra in Ucraina è solo al quinto posto, mentre la riattivazione del dialogo in materia di nonproliferazione e controllo degli armamenti finisce addirittura in fondo alla classifica delle opzioni proposte: dati che sembrano indicare l'aspettativa di un perdurare delle tensioni internazionali e una scarsa fiducia

*the Impact of Terrorism*, Sydney, marzo 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3943000>.

<sup>6</sup> NATO, *NATO Deputy Secretary General Underlines Importance of "Strategic Solidarity" between Europe and North America*, 10 ottobre 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_208097.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_208097.htm).



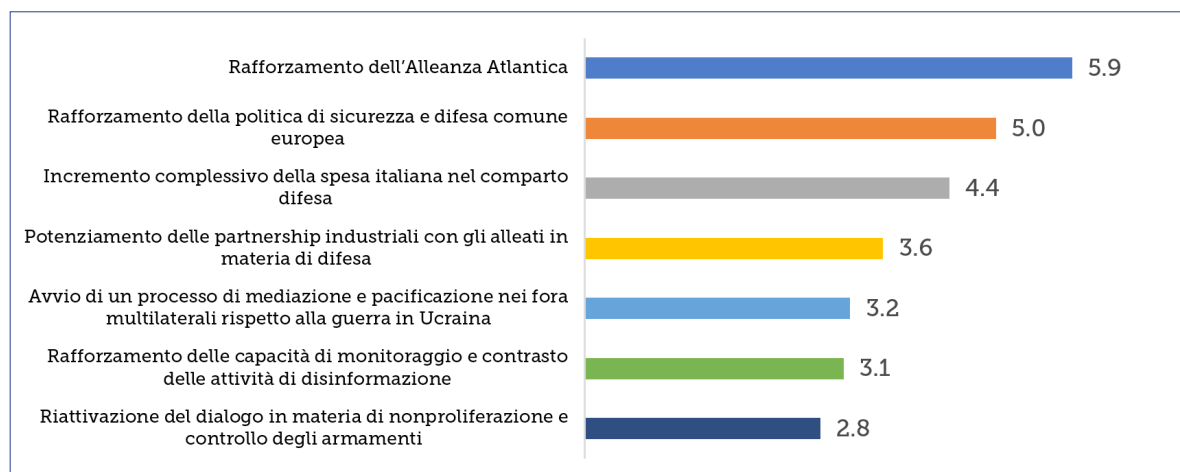
riguardo alla possibilità di una riapertura del dialogo nei contesti multilaterali.

**Figura 2** | Le priorità di sicurezza dell'Italia: prima priorità



*Domanda:* Di seguito Le verranno presentate una serie di priorità di sicurezza per l'Italia nello scenario determinato dall'invasione russa dell'Ucraina, da ordinare in ordine di importanza, dalla più importante (in cima) alla meno importante (in coda), usando le frecce a fianco di ciascuna opzione.

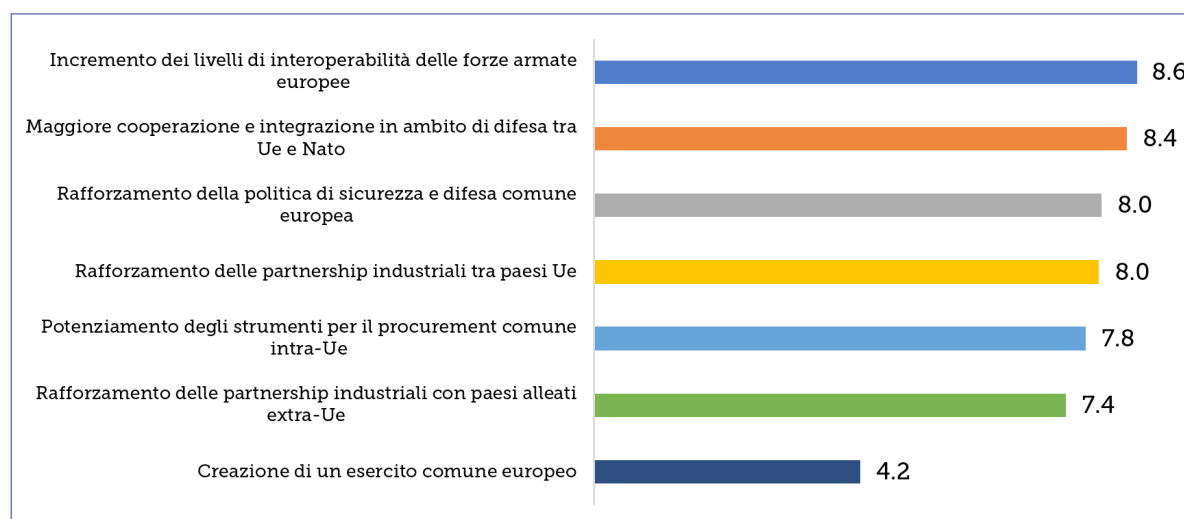
**Figura 3** | Le priorità di sicurezza dell'Italia: ordine di importanza



*Domanda:* Di seguito Le verranno presentate una serie di priorità di sicurezza per l'Italia nello scenario determinato dall'invasione russa dell'Ucraina, da ordinare in ordine di importanza, dalla più importante (in cima) alla meno importante (in coda), usando le frecce a fianco di ciascuna opzione.

Spostando l'attenzione più specificamente sulle direttrici di cooperazione di sicurezza e difesa in ambito europeo (Figura 4)<sup>7</sup>, la priorità viene attribuita anzitutto all'aumento dei livelli di interoperabilità delle forze armate europee (8,6 su 10 per importanza percepita), seguita a strettissima distanza dalla maggiore cooperazione e integrazione in ambito di difesa tra Ue e Nato (8,4). A riprova della maggiore enfasi posta sull'Alleanza atlantica nel contesto attuale, il rafforzamento delle politiche di sicurezza e difesa comune europee riceve una valutazione elevata, ma inferiore (8,0). Infine, a sgombrare il campo da equivoci e da una narrazione semplicistica ma ricorrente nel dibattito pubblico, gli esperti non considerano invece una priorità la creazione di un esercito comune europeo in senso stretto (4,2)<sup>8</sup>.

**Figura 4** | Le priorità di cooperazione a livello europeo



*Domanda:* Di seguito Le verrà presentato un elenco di direttrici di cooperazione per la sicurezza europea. Per ciascuna di esse indichi quanto è a Suo avviso importante per l'Italia, utilizzando una scala da 0 a 10, dove 0 significa "Non è importante" e 10 significa "È molto importante".

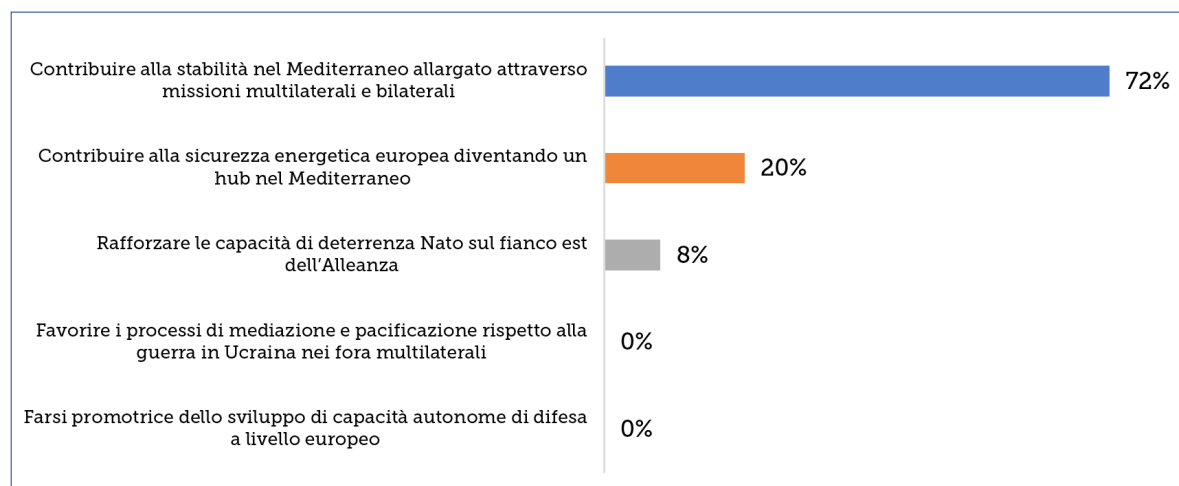
Se la Nato e – in misura complementare ma leggermente subordinata – l'Unione europea risultano le cornici fondamentali a garanzia della sicurezza italiana, il ruolo specifico dell'Italia nel contesto delle alleanze esistenti è, secondo gli esperti, chiaramente focalizzato sull'area mediterranea (Figura 5). Secondo il 72 per cento degli intervistati, il principale contributo che l'Italia può fornire alla sicurezza internazionale nello scenario attuale è quello legato alla stabilità nel Mediterraneo allargato attraverso missioni bilaterali e multilaterali; un ulteriore 20 per cento ritiene che l'Italia possa avere una funzione importante a supporto della sicurezza energetica europea diventando un hub nel Mediterraneo. Minor enfasi viene

<sup>7</sup> A riguardo si veda anche Adája Stoetman, "European Security and Defence: Don't Get Your Hopes Up Just Yet", in *IAI Commentaries*, n. 23|09 (marzo 2023), <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16676>.

<sup>8</sup> A riguardo si vedano le considerazioni di Ulrike Franke, "The 'European Army', A Tale of Wilful Misunderstanding", in *ECFR Commentaries*, 3 dicembre 2018, [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_the\\_european\\_army\\_a\\_tale\\_of\\_wilful\\_misunderstanding](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_european_army_a_tale_of_wilful_misunderstanding).

posta sul ruolo italiano nel rafforzare le capacità di deterrenza Nato sul fianco Est dell'Alleanza (contributo principale dell'Italia secondo l'8 per cento delle risposte).

**Figura 5** | Il principale contributo dell'Italia alla sicurezza internazionale



*Domanda:* A Suo avviso, qual è il principale contributo che l'Italia può fornire alla sicurezza internazionale nello scenario attuale?

Questa prospettiva centrata sul Mediterraneo allargato (o "fianco Sud" della Nato e dell'Ue)<sup>9</sup> va precisata e qualificata. Anzitutto, non va dimenticato che nel 2022, in conseguenza dell'aggressione contro l'Ucraina e del rafforzamento dei contingenti dispiegati sul fianco Est, l'impegno di personale italiano in missioni internazionali è stato in realtà maggiore in Europa rispetto all'Africa e all'Asia<sup>10</sup>. Questo impegno dovrà verosimilmente essere confermato almeno nel breve periodo e va considerato non come alternativo, bensì come complementare e parallelo a quello sul fianco Sud, nell'ottica di interdipendenza tra regioni già ricordata.

Inoltre, se è vero che dare un contributo alla stabilizzazione delle aree di crisi nel Mediterraneo allargato resta una priorità per l'Italia, le modalità specifiche attraverso cui questo contributo potrà concretizzarsi dovranno essere vagliate con attenzione per massimizzarne l'efficacia e minimizzarne i rischi, anche alla luce dei fallimenti delle missioni internazionali (specialmente a guida francese) nel Sahel nell'ultimo decennio<sup>11</sup>. In questo senso, sarà importante partire da una

<sup>9</sup> Per un inquadramento del concetto di Mediterraneo allargato nell'ambito delle politiche di sicurezza e difesa italiane si veda Ministero della Difesa, *Strategia di sicurezza e difesa per il Mediterraneo. Edizione 2022*, maggio 2022, [https://www.difesa.it/Il\\_Ministro/Documents/Strategia%20Mediterraneo%202022.pdf](https://www.difesa.it/Il_Ministro/Documents/Strategia%20Mediterraneo%202022.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Servizio studi della Camera dei deputati, *Autorizzazione e proroga missioni internazionali nell'anno 2022*, 8 agosto 2022, [https://temi.camera.it/leg18/temi/autorizzazione-e-proroga-missioni-internazionali-ultimo-trimestre-2019\\_d\\_d\\_d.html](https://temi.camera.it/leg18/temi/autorizzazione-e-proroga-missioni-internazionali-ultimo-trimestre-2019_d_d_d.html).

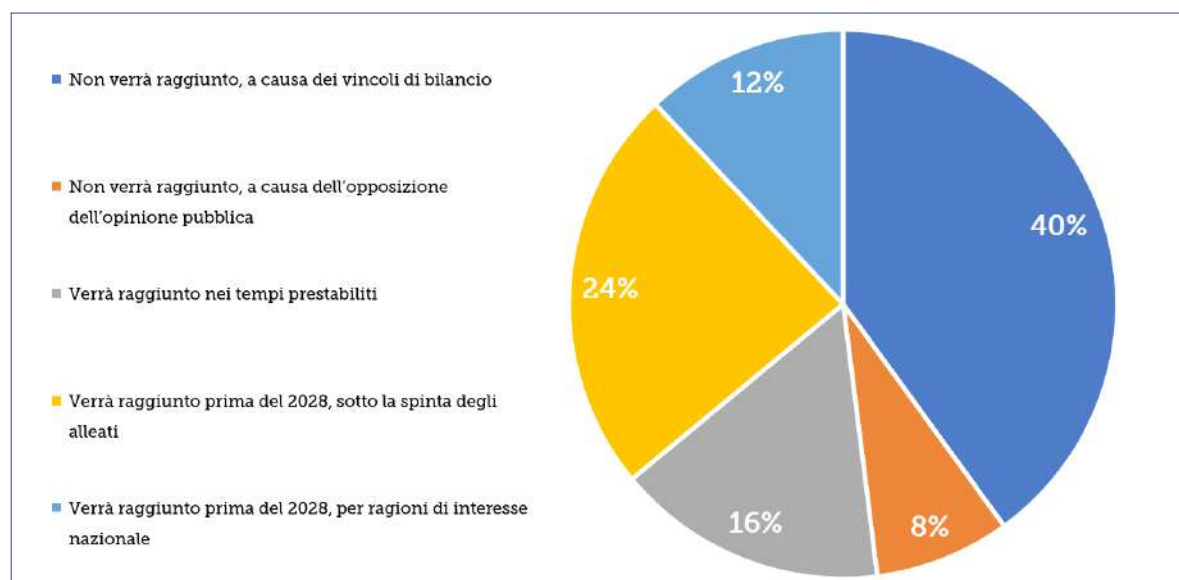
<sup>11</sup> Francesca Lenzi, "The EU vis-à-vis Turmoil in Burkina Faso: Towards Europeanisation?", in *IAI Commentaries*, n. 66|22 (dicembre 2022), <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16374>; Nathaniel Powell, "Why France Failed in Mali", in *War on the Rocks*, 21 febbraio 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/?p=26433>.

riflessione sulle iniziative promosse dall'Italia nella regione negli ultimi anni – non solo in Libia ma anche, ad esempio, in Niger – e sviluppare un approccio inclusivo che tenga conto da vicino dei processi e degli stakeholder già presenti sul campo – compresi attori non statali come, tra gli altri, la Comunità di Sant'Egidio o le principali organizzazioni non governative internazionali.

In un'ottica di medio-lungo periodo, due temi complementari alla riaffermazione dell'importanza dell'Alleanza atlantica e del Mediterraneo allargato come ambiti di riferimento primari per le politiche di sicurezza e difesa italiane riguardano l'impegno a investire il 2 per cento del Pil nel comparto difesa<sup>12</sup> e la già citata necessità di allargare lo sguardo verso il quadrante dell'Indo-Pacifico.

Per quel che riguarda il primo aspetto, le opinioni degli intervistati sono molto eterogenee: il 48 per cento ritiene che l'obiettivo del 2 per cento non verrà conseguito neanche entro il 2028 – l'orizzonte temporale fissato dal governo Draghi, in particolare dall'allora ministro della Difesa Lorenzo Guerini<sup>13</sup> – mentre il 16 per cento pensa che il traguardo sarà raggiunto nei tempi stabiliti e il restante 36 per cento che il raggiungimento della soglia prevista avverrà prima del 2028 (Figura 6).

**Figura 6** | L'Italia e l'obiettivo del 2 per cento



*Domanda:* L'Italia ha attualmente in programma di raggiungere l'impegno Nato a investire il 2 per cento del Pil nella difesa entro il 2028. A Suo avviso, tale obiettivo: ...

<sup>12</sup> Nato, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 settembre 2014, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm).

<sup>13</sup> "Spese militari, Guerini tiene il punto: «Spenderemo il 2% del Pil entro il 2028, non il 2024», in *Open*, 30 marzo 2022, <https://www.open.online/2022/03/30/governo-draghi-spese-militari-guerini-2-per-cento-pil-2028>.

L'interrogativo di fondo è quello delle condizioni che potrebbero permettere, o al contrario inibire, questo processo. Dalla discussione emerge la necessità di una presa di coscienza, anche nel dibattito pubblico, di come la tendenza a un aumento delle spese nel comparto difesa sia un fenomeno strutturale a livello internazionale<sup>14</sup>, da cui è poco realistico pensare che il paese possa chiamarsi fuori senza un impatto significativo sulla propria sicurezza. In questo senso, è necessario uno sforzo per sensibilizzare l'opinione pubblica italiana, superando lo iato che attualmente esiste tra la riflessione qualificata ristretta ai soli esperti e il più ampio dibattito pubblico.

Altra questione rilevante riguarda il possibile impegno italiano nel quadrante dell'Indo-Pacifico, destinato a essere sempre più al centro delle attenzioni di Washington e la cui importanza per la sicurezza euro-atlantica è sottolineata nel Concetto strategico 2022 della Nato<sup>15</sup>. Come abbiamo visto, in realtà, le tensioni che attraversano la regione non vengono considerate tra le principali minacce alla sicurezza italiana. Una possibile accresciuta presenza dell'Italia nell'area viene valutata in modo molto diversificato dagli intervistati (Tabella 1): mentre alcuni la considerano non una sfida, bensì una "opportunità", e sottolineano la necessità di elaborare "documenti strategici" specificamente dedicati alla regione, altri giudicano le missioni della Marina italiana nel quadrante (come il recente invio del pattugliatore Morosini per una missione di cinque mesi)<sup>16</sup> come "molto negative". Una delle preoccupazioni che emergono è quella relativa a un possibile *overstretch* di risorse e alla conseguente necessità di un supporto "in termini di budget" da parte degli alleati.

Da un punto di vista prospettico, il rischio principale sembra essere quello di un "disengagement della Nato nel Mediterraneo". Di fronte a un possibile "indebolimento del focus regionale" dell'Alleanza, due sono le possibili risposte di *policy* individuate dagli esperti intervistati. Anzitutto, è indispensabile sottolineare l'"interconnessione" tra Indo-Pacifico e Mediterraneo allargato, evidenziando gli *spillover* in termini di sicurezza tra le varie regioni. In questa prospettiva, l'Italia dovrebbe assumere un ruolo di leadership e di responsabilità diretta sul fianco sud dell'Alleanza atlantica, proponendosi come un attore "primario" nella regione, anche nel contrasto a "politiche malevole" da parte cinese nel Mediterraneo allargato. Nel quadro delle alleanze esistenti, l'impegno italiano a Sud andrebbe presentato non come alternativo, bensì come complementare a quello di altri paesi nell'Indo-Pacifico: facendosi carico in maniera importante della stabilizzazione del Mediterraneo allargato, l'Italia consentirebbe ai paesi alleati di "liberare risorse" da impiegare in Asia orientale.

<sup>14</sup> Nan Tian et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2022", in *SIPRI Fact Sheets*, aprile 2023, <https://doi.org/10.55163/PNVP2622>.

<sup>15</sup> Nato, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, giugno 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept>.

<sup>16</sup> Chiara Rossi, "Morosini salpa verso l'Indo-Pacifico... e nave Cavour?", in *StartMagazine*, 8 aprile 2023, <https://www.startmag.it/?p=229326>.

In parallelo, l'Italia dovrebbe farsi promotrice di una coalizione informale tra i paesi alleati più coinvolti sul fianco Sud (primo fra tutti, la Francia), per sottolinearne la perdurante rilevanza strategica: questo impegno potrebbe ad esempio tradursi nella richiesta di elaborare "precisi *'regional plans'* per il sud, in analogia a quanto si sta facendo per il fianco est" in ambito Nato.

In sintesi, il richiamo degli esperti è a evitare una narrativa secondo cui solo determinate aree di crisi sarebbero di interesse europeo e che incentivi di conseguenza una posizione di distacco e neutralità rispetto alle tensioni che percorrono regioni apparentemente distanti come l'Indo-Pacifico; piuttosto, è fondamentale sottolineare le profonde interconnessioni tra le diverse regioni e la possibile *ripartizione di responsabilità complementari tra gli alleati*, valorizzando la specificità che può venire dal contributo italiano, orientato non solo all'Europa, ma anche al Mediterraneo allargato. In questo senso, come emerso nella discussione, sarà importante il modo in cui verrà sostanziata e resa operativa l'idea di un Piano Mattei per l'Africa avanzata dal governo<sup>17</sup>.

**Tabella 1** | Le implicazioni per la sicurezza italiana della crescente centralità dell'Indo-Pacifico (risposte scelte)

<b>Un trend davvero importante per la Nato e per l'Italia?</b>
«La regione Indo-Pacifico non sta assumendo una crescente centralità nell'agenda Nato. Costituisce un elemento tutt'ora marginale, sia in termini politici, sia di allocazione di risorse.»
«Non una sfida ma una opportunità.»
«Molto negative – Non inviare forze nell'Indo-Pacifico, come invece (purtroppo) stiamo già facendo.»
<b>La Nato e le interconnessioni tra le regioni</b>
«È bene che la Nato acquisisca una maggiore consapevolezza delle implicazioni globali della sicurezza nell'Indo-Pacifico. Al tempo stesso, occorre evitare un indebolimento del focus regionale dell'Alleanza e della sua capacità di garantire la sicurezza della propria area di responsabilità a 360 gradi.»
«Il rischio di un <i>disengagement</i> della Nato nel Mediterraneo rischia di far aumentare la attorness di Cina e Russia nella zona. Il governo italiano dovrebbe lavorare per creare alleanze con altri paesi europei (Francia in testa) per evitare che il Mediterraneo perda rilevanza nell'agenda Nato.»
«Interconnessione Indo-Pacifico e Mediterraneo allargato. Approccio Nato a 360 gradi con ruolo Italia primario nel Mediterraneo allargato.»
<b>Le possibili risposte italiane</b>
«L'Italia dovrebbe dotarsi un documento strategico esplicitamente diretto all'Indo-Pacifico.»
«L'Indo-Pacifico va visto principalmente da noi in chiave economica, oltre che politica.»

<sup>17</sup> Silvia Gasparetto, "Meloni in Etiopia: 'A ottobre presentiamo il piano Mattei per l'Africa'" in *Ansa*, 15 aprile 2023, [https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2023/04/14/meloni-a-ottobre-presentiamo-il-piano-mattei-per-lafrica\\_395c8e97-c8fa-4294-8328-89f9dfd3c80b.html](https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2023/04/14/meloni-a-ottobre-presentiamo-il-piano-mattei-per-lafrica_395c8e97-c8fa-4294-8328-89f9dfd3c80b.html).

«È [...] necessario un potenziamento militare, politico, diplomatico non indifferente che permetta all'Italia di agire [...] secondo un ventaglio di competenze differenziate ma seriamente cruciali. Occorre un serio ripensamento strategico da parte degli uffici di difesa e politica estera, così come, si spera, un "aiuto" soprattutto in termini di budget da parte europea.»

**La priorità: rilanciare il ruolo italiano nel Mediterraneo allargato**

«Maggiore presa di responsabilità (far sì che venga riconosciuto il ruolo di attore regionale di primo piano nel Mediterraneo).»

«L'Italia non è una potenza globale né nucleare. La sua dimensione può essere definita come una grande-media potenza europea con interessi vitali e strategici nell'area euroatlantica e del cosiddetto Mediterraneo allargato. La crescente importanza dell'Indo-Pacifico non ci deve vedere del tutto estranei a questa evoluzione degli equilibri globali, per contro tuttavia l'Italia non deve distrarre importanti attenzioni e risorse dalle appena citate aree di proprio primario interesse. In altre parole, vanno bene anzi sono necessarie tutte le iniziative bilaterali (con India, Giappone, Corea del Sud, Australia e altri Paesi dell'area Indo-Pacifico) ma non sono sostenibili e nemmeno opportuni impegni onerosi con schieramenti di forze navali, aeree e terrestri in quelle aree, fatte salve eventuali esercitazioni e presenze di "diplomazia militare". Questo in quanto il nostro Paese deve dedicare ogni sforzo a riconquistare o consolidare forti legami economici politici socio-culturali e militari in vari quadranti del continente europeo, Nord Africa e vicina Asia.»

«Assumere maggiori responsabilità per la sicurezza del Mediterraneo allargato in misura tale da liberare risorse delle potenze maggiormente interessate al contenimento cinese nel quadrante Indo-Pacifico. Affermare la propria disponibilità al contenimento delle politiche malevole di Pechino nel Mediterraneo allargato.»

«Cercare di coagulare il consenso tra gli alleati del fianco sud per chiedere alla Nato dei precisi "regional plans" per il sud, in analogia a quanto si sta facendo per il fianco est.»

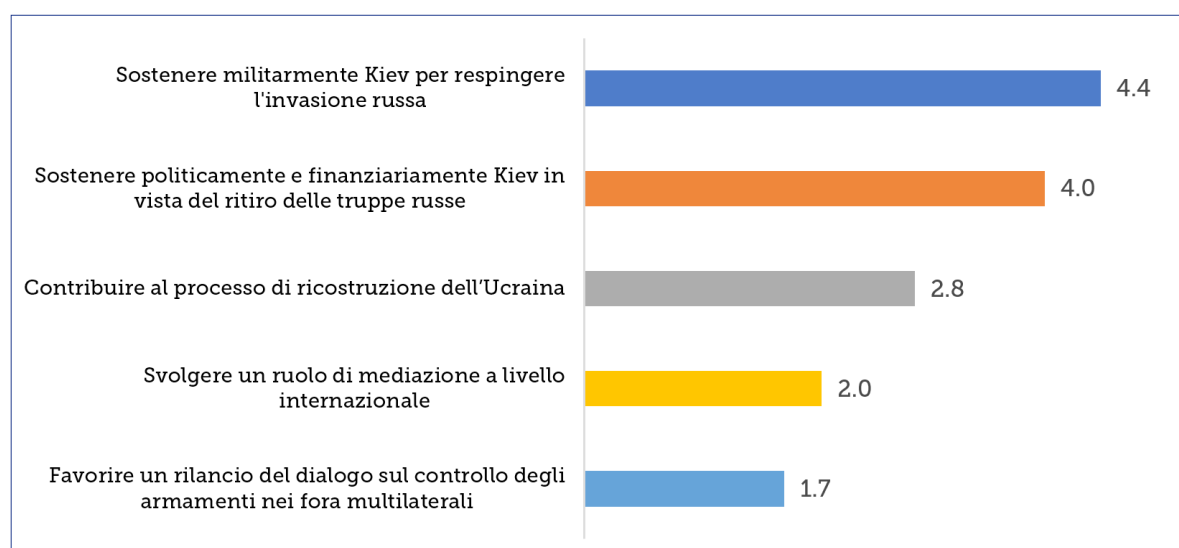
*Domanda:* In un'ottica di medio-lungo periodo, quali potrebbero essere le implicazioni per la sicurezza italiana della crescente centralità dell'Indo-Pacifico nell'agenda Nato? Come dovrebbe rispondere a questa sfida il governo italiano, anche alla luce dell'importanza che tradizionalmente hanno per la politica estera del nostro paese le direttrici europea e mediterranea?

## 2. L'Italia e la guerra in Ucraina

Un secondo focus della *survey* e della discussione ha riguardato in modo più ravvicinato le dinamiche relative alla guerra in corso. Per quel che riguarda lo specifico contributo che l'Italia può dare alla risoluzione del conflitto, questo, secondo gli esperti, deve continuare a essere incentrato sul sostegno militare a Kyiv per respingere l'invasione russa, in linea con le scelte del governo Draghi prima e del governo Meloni poi, seguito dal sostegno politico e finanziario all'Ucraina in vista del ritiro delle truppe russe (Figura 7). Al terzo posto si colloca il contributo al processo di ricostruzione del paese, mentre maggiore scetticismo sembra emergere rispetto a un possibile ruolo di mediazione a livello internazionale e, ancor più, a un rilancio del dialogo sul controllo degli armamenti, in linea con le risposte già discusse sopra.

Da quest'ultimo punto di vista, in realtà, rimangono dei margini di manovra per il nostro paese, come evidenziato nel corso della discussione. Da un lato, è indubbio che il ruolo dell'Italia – e dell'Ue più in generale – nell'ambito dei negoziati sulla nonproliferazione nucleare sia marginale: si tratta di negoziati che tradizionalmente sono stati guidati dalle potenze nucleari e che oggi risentono inevitabilmente dello stato dei rapporti tra Mosca e Washington. D'altro canto, tuttavia, maggiori margini di manovra potrebbero esistere per quel che riguarda le armi convenzionali: da questo punto di vista l'Italia potrebbe farsi promotrice di iniziative volte a limitare il rischio di una diffusione incontrollata di armi leggere e di piccolo calibro (*small arms and light weapons*) tra la popolazione civile, come accaduto negli anni Novanta nella ex Jugoslavia.

**Figura 7** | Il ruolo principale dell'Italia per la risoluzione del conflitto

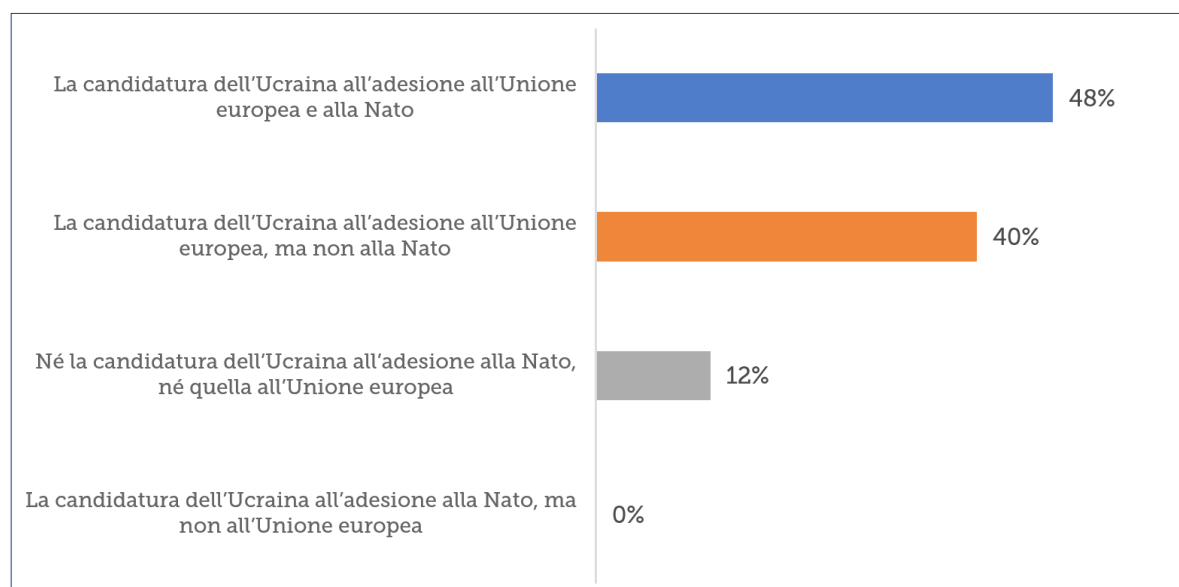


*Domanda:* A Suo avviso, che ruolo potrebbe giocare l'Italia in un possibile percorso di risoluzione del conflitto in Ucraina? Classificare in ordine di rilevanza usando le frecce a lato delle opzioni.

Su un piano più ampio, resta aperto il nodo del quadro politico e strategico all'interno del quale dovrebbero svilupparsi i rapporti futuri con Kyiv. Per quel che riguarda la posizione italiana di fronte alle candidature dell'Ucraina all'ingresso nell'Unione europea e nell'Alleanza atlantica, le opinioni degli intervistati sono piuttosto varie. A fronte di un 48 per cento di risposte a favore di un sostegno italiano a entrambe le candidature, un 40 per cento dei partecipanti afferma che l'Italia dovrebbe appoggiare solo l'ingresso di Kyiv nell'Unione europea, mentre il restante 12 per cento ritiene che sarebbe preferibile tenere una posizione contraria a entrambe le candidature (Figura 8).



**Figura 8** | L'Italia e la candidatura dell'Ucraina a Nato e Ue



Domanda: A Suo avviso, l'Italia dovrebbe sostenere: ...

Le motivazioni fornite alle risposte consentono di problematizzare meglio la questione. Chi sostiene l'ingresso sia nella Nato che nella Ue lo fa principalmente per due diversi ordini di ragioni (Tabella 2): da un lato motivazioni di carattere valoriale, legate al "processo storico di definizione dei confini della comunità euro-atlantica" e alla necessità di affermare "l'apertura dello spazio euro-atlantico a tutti i Paesi che si sentano di condividerne i principi fondamentali di rispetto per la democrazia, lo stato di diritto e i diritti della persona"; dall'altro, per favorire una possibile stabilizzazione del conflitto e, più in generale, della regione<sup>18</sup>.

Chi sostiene la sola adesione all'Ue di Kyiv pone l'accento su due diversi aspetti (Tabella 3). Anzitutto, l'ingresso nell'Alleanza atlantica, almeno sin tanto che il conflitto non sarà risolto, comporterebbe il rischio di un coinvolgimento diretto della Nato nelle ostilità – tale coinvolgimento sarebbe anzi inevitabile in base all'articolo 5 del trattato<sup>19</sup>. Inoltre, mentre un ingresso dell'Ucraina nella Nato potrebbe essere strumentalizzato dalla "propaganda di Putin" come una prova *ex post* della presunta legittimità dell'invasione del 24 febbraio 2022, l'adesione alla sola Ue potrebbe essere presentata come una forma di "concessione" alla Russia, andando a trasformare l'Ucraina in una sorta di "area cuscinetto tra le due super potenze". Di fronte a questo scenario, resta tuttavia da verificare se l'ingresso nella

<sup>18</sup> Una posizione analoga è espressa in Stephen Blank, "The War against Ukraine and Russia's Position in Europe's Security Order", in *IAI Commentaries*, n. 23|10 (marzo 2023), <https://www.iai.it/it/node/16679>.

<sup>19</sup> Nato, *The North Atlantic Treaty*, Washington, 4 aprile 1949, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm).

sola Ue rappresenterebbe una garanzia di sicurezza sufficiente per Kyiv, anche di fronte all'opinione pubblica nazionale.

Infine, chi si esprime contro entrambe le candidature lo fa sulla base di due motivazioni complementari (Tabella 4): gli impegni di sicurezza dei trattati rendono "istituzionalmente impossibile" l'ingresso nelle due organizzazioni sino a che il conflitto non sarà terminato; inoltre, la presenza dell'Ucraina sarebbe una fonte di rischi e di estrema instabilità, per cui la priorità va data al sostegno militare a Kyiv, ma non al processo di integrazione nella Nato o nell'Ue.

Nel complesso, emergono le sfumature della questione: se, da un punto di vista valoriale e di lungo periodo, l'integrazione dell'Ucraina nella comunità euro-atlantica viene vista da molti come la strada da seguire, resta tuttavia problematica la definizione del percorso, così come di un possibile orizzonte temporale di riferimento. In questo senso, come evidenziato nella discussione, potrebbe rivelarsi rischioso cercare delle scorciatoie – come un ingresso affrettato dell'Ucraina nell'Ue nella speranza che i problemi esistenti si risolvano naturalmente in virtù dell'allargamento, o un allentamento delle garanzie di sicurezza previste dall'articolo 5 del Trattato atlantico, escludendo determinate regioni in maniera arbitraria e *ad hoc* (come la Crimea o il Donbas). Al momento la principale urgenza sembra essere quella di definire un quadro di garanzie di sicurezza credibili e accettabili per Kyiv che possano facilitare un eventuale negoziato di pace con la Russia al momento opportuno.

**Tabella 2** | Le motivazioni di chi ritiene che l'Italia debba sostenere la candidatura ucraina sia alla Nato sia all'Ue

<b>L'allargamento dello spazio euro-atlantico e dei suoi principi</b>
«Si tratta di un processo storico di definizione dei confini della comunità euro-atlantica. Deve essere letto attraverso le lenti della storia e della cultura, non solo attraverso quelle della sicurezza e dell'economia.»
«Nello scenario internazionale attuale, è essenziale che sia affermata l'apertura dello spazio euro-atlantico a tutti i Paesi che si sentano di dividerne i principi fondamentali di rispetto per la democrazia, lo stato di diritto e i diritti della persona, inclusa dunque l'Ucraina o altri Paesi aggrediti o minacciati dalla Federazione Russa.»
<b>La stabilizzazione della regione</b>
«L'adesione all'Ue migliorerebbe le garanzie di stabilità della regione, quella alla Nato (non nel breve periodo), sancirebbe ulteriormente l'emancipazione dello Stato ucraino dal passato sovietico.»
«Più facile entrare nella Nato, specie nelle more di stabilizzazione del conflitto, che nella Ue. Condivido l'aspirazione di appartenenza alla "famiglia europea" ma ancora più lontana nel tempo. Paese meglio equipaggiato per integrazione nella Nato che nella Ue.»

**Tabella 3** | Le motivazioni di chi ritiene che l'Italia debba sostenere la candidatura ucraina all'Ue, ma non alla Nato

<b>I rischi dell'adesione alla Nato</b>
«L'Ucraina è in stato di guerra; finché questo persiste, un'adesione rischierebbe di comportare <i>de jure</i> la partecipazione diretta alle operazioni.»
«La membership ucraina alla Nato potrebbe generare più instabilità che vantaggi (equivarrebbe a sconfiggere completamente la Russia). Credo sia necessario far sì che l'Ucraina non divenga membro della Nato e non sarebbe la prima volta nella storia che un paese rinunci a parte dell'autonomia decisionale nazionale in virtù del mantenimento della sicurezza internazionale (e.g. Austria post Seconda guerra mondiale).»
<b>Una forma di appeasement verso la Russia?</b>
«È una questione di equilibri di sicurezza e deve essere concepita come concessione alla Federazione Russa a seguito del ritiro dai territori occupati in Ucraina.»
«Sostenere l'adesione alla Nato significa alimentare e rendere più credibile la propaganda di Putin.»
«Una adesione all'Unione europea e non alla Nato non sposterebbe i confini dell'Alleanza a Est e garantirebbe all'Ucraina la possibilità di appoggiare il suo futuro su una organizzazione maggiormente politico-economica che militare, non rappresentando una minaccia diretta per la Russia e figurando più come area cuscinetto tra le due super potenze.»

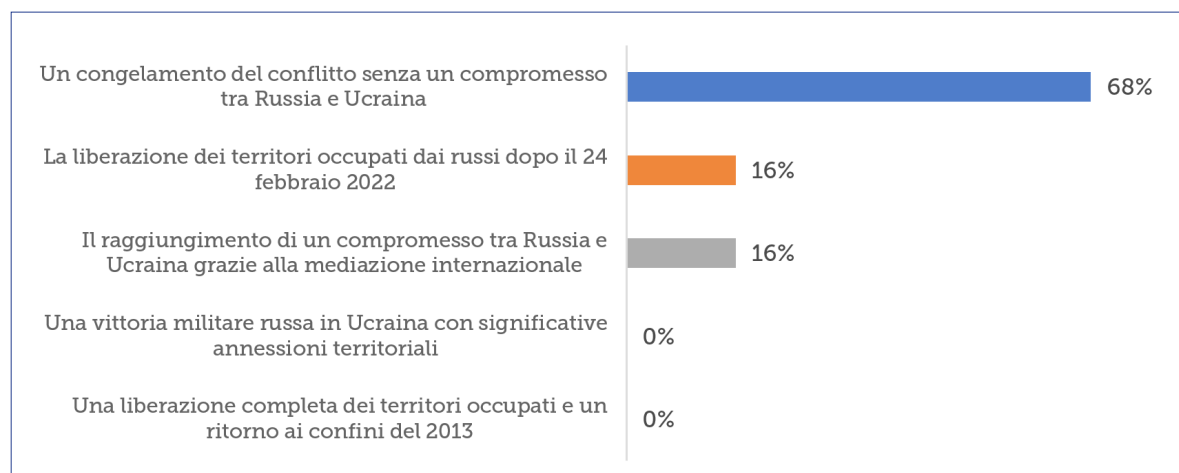
**Tabella 4** | Le motivazioni di chi ritiene che l'Italia non debba sostenere la candidatura ucraina né all'Ue, né alla Nato

<b>I vincoli dei trattati</b>
«Fino a quando il conflitto non sarà terminato è istituzionalmente impossibile l'ingresso dell'Ucraina sia nella Ue che nella Nato per gli impegni di intervento di sicurezza collettiva che entrambi i Trattati prevedono.»
<b>Una fonte di rischio e instabilità?</b>
«È importante considerare l'orizzonte temporale di riferimento. Al momento attuale, visto il conflitto in corso, non sarebbe auspicabile né realistico prevedere un ingresso dell'Ucraina nell'Ue e tanto meno nella Nato (cosa di fatto impossibile), dato che ciò comporterebbe più rischi che opportunità per i Paesi membri.»
«L'Ucraina sarebbe una fonte di estrema instabilità, sia in ambito Nato, sia in ambito Ue; ciò nondimeno, il sostegno alle capacità <i>warfighting</i> e all'economia dell'Ucraina deve essere comunque assolutamente assicurato.»

Per concludere, un'ultima domanda ha riguardato la possibile evoluzione della guerra nel medio periodo (2023-2025) e le sue implicazioni per la sicurezza e la difesa italiana ed europea. Lo scenario considerato più probabile, scelto dal 68 per cento dei rispondenti, è quello di un "congelamento" del conflitto senza un compromesso tra Ucraina e Russia; solo il 16 per cento ritiene che si potrà arrivare a un accordo tramite la mediazione internazionale, mentre un altro 16 per cento si aspetta una liberazione dei territori occupati dalla Russia a seguito dell'invasione del 24 febbraio 2022. Significativamente, nessun esperto valuta realistica una

vittoria militare russa con sostanziali annessioni territoriali o una liberazione completa dei territori occupati e un ritorno ai confini del 2013.

**Figura 9** | Le prospettive di medio periodo



*Domanda:* Quale dei seguenti scenari è a Suo avviso più probabile nel medio periodo (2023-2025) rispetto alla guerra contro l'Ucraina?

Alla luce di questi scenari, le implicazioni che il conflitto in Ucraina continuerà ad avere per la sicurezza europea e italiana nei prossimi anni sono, secondo gli esperti, molteplici, e su più livelli (Tabella 5). Il rischio più immediato è quello di una "instabilità di lungo termine" in Europa, a cui si assocerebbe una perdurante percezione di insicurezza e una conseguente tendenza alla "militarizzazione della politica europea", soprattutto a Est. In parallelo, crescerebbe molto il rischio di "proliferazione" di minacce di vario genere: dalla possibilità che i paesi del fianco Est accarezzino l'idea di un "possibile programma nucleare" a livello nazionale a quello di una diffusione incontrollata di "armi" e "criminalità" in tutta la regione.

Su un altro piano, la tenuta del "fronte interno" europeo sembra rappresentare un serio elemento di preoccupazione. Il rischio di "exhaustion", di un fiaccamento della "resistenza della società civile" viene evidenziato in molte risposte alla survey; questo, associato alle possibili campagne di disinformazione condotte da potenze ostili, potrebbe determinare un "indebolimento dell'Ue come attore geopolitico". Come sottolineato nel corso della discussione, uno stress test importante saranno da questo punto di vista le elezioni in programma nel 2024: non solo quelle per il Parlamento europeo, ma anche e soprattutto le elezioni presidenziali americane, che potrebbero portare a un ridimensionamento del sostegno a Kyiv a seconda di chi sarà il prossimo inquilino della Casa Bianca.

Sul piano dei rapporti con Mosca, l'aspettativa condivisa è che l'antagonismo con l'Occidente sia destinato a protrarsi. Alla necessità di continuare il percorso di "decoupling da qualunque forma di commercio strategico con la Russia" si associa la prospettiva di un'accresciuta cooperazione non solo economica, ma anche

politica, tra Mosca e Pechino – e, di conseguenza, la preoccupazione per una crescente conflittualità non solo tra Occidente e Russia, ma anche tra Occidente e Cina. Andranno inoltre attentamente valutate le potenziali ripercussioni di questa perdurante conflittualità su tutti i paesi cosiddetti “non allineati”, tenendo presente che molto spesso questi “non condividono posizioni così nette di condanna dell’aggressione russa”.

Rivolgendo lo sguardo al fianco Sud, considerato di cruciale interesse per l'Italia, il rischio è quello di una diffusione di “instabilità” e “turbolenza”, dal Golfo di Guinea al Sahel sino ai Balcani occidentali. Il possibile ripresentarsi di una “crisi alimentare” e livelli elevati di inflazione potrebbero avere un impatto profondo anche in Nord Africa (in particolare in Libia) e in Medio Oriente (in Siria e Libano). Tutto questo potrebbe avvenire, come già detto, nel contesto di un “continuo spostamento del baricentro della sicurezza europea verso Est”, che potrebbe lasciare il fianco Sud esposto, consentendo alle “potenze revisioniste” di prendere campo nella regione se non adeguatamente contenute. A livello strategico, tutto ciò conferma la necessità per l'Italia di “assumersi maggiori responsabilità” nelle aree di tradizionale proiezione, dai Balcani occidentali al Nord Africa.

Per quel che riguarda le politiche di sicurezza e difesa in senso più stretto, le direttrici da seguire che vengono prospettate dagli esperti sono molteplici. Da un lato viene sottolineata l'esigenza di un impegno maggiore e secondo logiche diverse sul terreno della difesa: non solo in termini di “aumento delle spese militari”, ma anche di “efficientamento [...] evitando sprechi e obsolescenze”. Anche gli ambiti di intervento andrebbero ripensati, prestando attenzione ad esempio alle forze corazzate terrestri, all'introduzione dei mini droni e all'integrazione interforze di intelligence, sorveglianza e ricognizione (Isr); più in generale, c'è chi mette in luce la necessità di una vera e propria “revisione del Modello di difesa, con rinnovata enfasi verso l'approntamento di capacità militari per conflitti ad alta intensità”. D'altro canto, emerge con forza la necessità di un approccio ampio e multilivello alla sicurezza nazionale, che si traduca anche in un impegno deciso nella “lotta alla disinformazione di matrice domestica e internazionale” e alle “minacce ibride e alla conflittualità interna alimentate da attori esterni”: priorità evidentemente non differibili alla luce delle già citate preoccupazioni riguardo a una possibile “*exhaustion*” dell'opinione pubblica italiana (e non solo).

**Tabella 5** | Le sfide di medio-lungo periodo

<b>La dimensione europea</b>
« <i>Instabilità di lungo termine nel continente europeo</i> »
«Un " <i>cold conflict</i> " in Ucraina sarebbe estremamente problematico per vari motivi. <i>In primis</i> , darebbe alla Russia un motivo per continuare a fomentare i gruppi pro russi interni all'Ucraina. Imporrebbe costi altissimi anche per la Polonia e tutti i paesi limitrofi che continuerebbero a vivere in <i>una situazione ibrida e non risolta</i> . Porterebbe alcuni paesi Nato anche a pensare a un possibile programma nucleare indigeno (specialmente i Paesi baltici).»
« <i>Militarizzazione della politica europea</i> (soprattutto degli stati geograficamente vicini al fronte)»
«Le sfide militari tradizionali hanno acquisito, dal febbraio 2022, una nuova valenza. Ma altrettanto rilevante è la <i>resistenza della società civile</i> . Occorre tenerne conto nelle valutazioni strategiche»
« <i>Exhaustion, erosione del consenso in Ue</i> »
« <i>Proliferazione di minacce ibride</i> (cyber e disinformazione) nello scenario europeo»
« <i>Proliferazione di armi, criminalità</i> anche transnazionale nella regione»
«Possibile <i>indebolimento dell'Ue come attore geopolitico</i> in conseguenza di crisi protratte e campagne di Fimi <sup>20</sup> per destabilizzare gli Stati europei.»
<b>I rapporti con Russia, Cina e non-West</b>
« <i>Necessità di ripensare completamente i rapporti con la Russia</i> »
« <i>Isolazionismo</i> da parte russa»
« <i>Minacce russe</i> , da quelle nucleari alla disinformazione»
« <i>Decoupling</i> da qualunque forma di commercio strategico con la Russia»
« <i>Acuirsi dello scontro tra Occidente e Russia</i> ma anche Cina»
« <i>Rafforzamento della cooperazione economica e politica Russia-Cina</i> »
« <i>Sorgere di una alleanza tra paesi non democratici</i> »
«Come sarà gestito un <i>cambio di leadership in Russia</i> dopo la sconfitta/cacciata di Putin»
« <i>Ripercussioni sul sistema complessivo di alleanze internazionali</i> e in particolare rapporto con i Paesi "non allineati" del " <i>Global South</i> " che non condividono posizioni così nette di condanna dell'aggressione russa.»
<b>Il Mediterraneo allargato</b>
« <i>Instabilità</i> maggiore anche in altri domini (spazio e domani sommerso) e aree del Mediterraneo allargato (Bosnia Erzegovina, Serbia, Sahel, Golfo Guinea)»
« <i>Maggiore turbolenza</i> nel quadrante geostrategico del Medio-Oriente»
«Elaborare un'efficace strategia di <i>diversificazione degli approvvigionamenti energetici</i> che sappia contemperare gli obiettivi di lungo periodo della transizione energetica e quelli di breve-medio periodo della stabilità politica nei Paesi della sponda sud del Mediterraneo»
« <i>Crisi alimentare</i> , aggravamento delle <i>pressioni inflazionistiche</i> , ulteriore destabilizzazione in Libia, Siria e Libano»

<sup>20</sup> Manipolazione straniera dell'informazione.

«Continuo spostamento del baricentro della sicurezza europea verso Est a discapito del fianco Sud»
«Badare al contenimento delle minacce poste dalle potenze revisioniste nel Mediterraneo allargato»
<b>L'Italia</b>
«Aumento spese militari (raggiungimento 2 per cento), razionalizzazione delle spese militari per evitare inefficienze»
«Efficientamento della difesa nazionale eliminando sprechi e obsolescenze»
«Rafforzare le capacità delle Forze Armate italiane con particolare attenzione alle forze terrestri corazzate, all'introduzione dei mini droni e integrazione joint Isr»
«Revisione del Modello di difesa, con rinnovata enfasi verso l'approntamento di capacità militari per conflitti ad alta intensità»
«Lotta alla disinformazione di matrice domestica e internazionale»
«Attenzione alle minacce ibride e alla conflittualità interna alimentate da attori esterni»
«Rischio di un focus geograficamente ristretto (i.e. è importante non trascurare Africa e Indo-Pacifico)»
«Assumersi maggiori responsabilità per la stabilità nei Balcani e nella sponda nord del Mediterraneo»
«Autonomia energetica e riposizionamento nel commercio internazionale»

*Domanda:* In un'ottica di medio-lungo periodo, e alla luce della Sua risposta alla domanda precedente, quali sfide pone a Suo avviso il nuovo scenario internazionale determinato dalla guerra in Ucraina per la sicurezza italiana (in bullet points)?

## Conclusioni

La guerra contro l'Ucraina sembra destinata a condizionare il quadro strategico e di sicurezza europeo, e la posizione dell'Italia in particolare, almeno nel medio periodo. La prospettiva considerata più realistica dagli esperti è quella di un congelamento del conflitto senza un compromesso tra le parti, con una perdurante conflittualità politica e strategica tra Occidente e Russia. Di conseguenza, riassumono centralità le forme convenzionali di deterrenza, mentre si registra un forte scetticismo riguardo non solo alle prospettive di mediazione internazionale del conflitto, ma più in generale a un possibile rilancio del dialogo sul controllo degli armamenti.

A questo scenario si associano una serie di opzioni di *policy*, le cui implicazioni vanno analizzate su vari livelli. Se da un lato emerge da più parti la richiesta di un ripensamento delle politiche della difesa (con una rinnovata attenzione per i conflitti ad alta intensità) e – conseguentemente – di maggiori investimenti, in linea con trend di lungo periodo a livello internazionale, dall'altro queste iniziative devono essere rese sostenibili e comunicate adeguatamente alle opinioni pubbliche, in ragione non solo di una prevedibile tendenza all'affaticamento di fronte a un conflitto prolungato, ma anche delle campagne di disinformazione condotte da paesi ostili. Non va inoltre dimenticato che le politiche di riarmo comportano una crescita del rischio di proliferazione di minacce di vario tipo,

soprattutto (ma non solo) in Europa orientale, che devono essere da subito gestite e contenute attraverso iniziative adeguate.

Su un piano strategico, per l'Italia è fondamentale mantenere vivo l'impegno dell'Alleanza atlantica a garanzia della sicurezza europea – non solo sul fianco Est, ma anche sul fianco Sud. La guerra contro l'Ucraina ha rilanciato la centralità del quadrante nordorientale, almeno nel breve-medio periodo; a ciò si associa il processo di medio-lungo periodo che vede gli Stati Uniti rivolgere progressivamente il proprio sguardo verso l'Indo-Pacifico a discapito in primo luogo del Medio Oriente e del Nord Africa, e che avrà inevitabilmente ripercussioni indirette anche in Europa.

Di fronte a questi sviluppi, l'Italia non può limitarsi a presentarsi come partner affidabile, ma deve farsi carico in prima persona di un ruolo guida a supporto di stabilità e sicurezza nel Mediterraneo allargato, dal Sahel ai Balcani occidentali. Fondamentale diventa non solo richiamare l'attenzione degli Alleati verso il sempre più complesso quadro di interdipendenze tra le regioni (anzitutto, il nesso tra Mediterraneo allargato e Indo-Pacifico), ma anche assumere una responsabilità diretta nel supportare la stabilizzazione dell'area, anche in partnership con paesi alleati con interessi strategici in loco. Questo impegno può e deve tradursi nella partecipazione a missioni bilaterali e multilaterali, che non possono però riproporre schemi fallimentari adottati in passato da alcuni alleati, ma devono trarre le lezioni del caso da quei fallimenti, facendo proprio un approccio in cui la sicurezza della regione venga declinata in modo ampio, in stretto dialogo con gli attori presenti sul campo e mettendo al centro le popolazioni locali.

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