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# The Ukraine War and Its Implications for European Security

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## Summary

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The war in Ukraine has highlighted many uncertainties and raised many questions concerning Europe's future security and defence requirements. Has the world now been forced to accept that interstate war is no longer a phenomenon of the past? Have the EU's relations—and hopes for partnership—with Russia irrevocably ended? Has a new eastern-leaning centre of gravity been established within the EU? How has the war affected the nature and trajectory of transatlantic security relations? How might the EU conceptualise and deliver on its new requirements in the field of military capacity? What are the prospects for a peace settlement and a new Eurasian security order? These profound questions require a major *aggiornamento* in the EU's approach to security and defence policy.

**Keywords** EU – Ukraine War – Russia – China – Transatlantic relations – NATO – EU enlargement – Eurasian security order



# Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2023 has upended many aspects of Europe's arrangements for—and its thinking about—collective security and defence. This policy brief begins by assessing the overall geostrategic framework suggested by the renewal of interstate war on European soil. Should the EU discard its previous self-definition as a 'normative power' or a 'civilian power' and accept that, in the emerging multipolar world, war will once again become a familiar feature of statecraft? As the competition between the US and China risks spilling over into military confrontation, how will the EU respond?

The brief examines the implications of the war for the EU's (and indeed Europe's) relations with Russia. Illusions of a hypothetical partnership have given way to a generalised rupture of relations with Moscow. Whether that confrontation will become permanent depends to some extent on post-war geostrategic arrangements. What many observers have seen as a shift in the EU's centre of gravity would be significantly reinforced by Ukrainian accession to the EU—with complicated consequences for the future balances within the Union.

The brief then assesses the implications of the conflict for transatlantic security relations. On the surface, there seems little doubt that the US has emerged once again as the European 'defender of last resort'. NATO has been significantly strengthened, and not just by the accession of Finland and Sweden. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and particularly the quest for strategic autonomy, would appear to have been concomitantly downgraded. Yet, in the context of the clear US prioritisation of its competition with China, all EU member states have declared their intention to considerably ramp up their defence spending and military resources. Much thought has been given to the maximisation of EU military capacity. But the jury remains out on what this might amount to. Meanwhile, given the poor performance of the Russian military, a lively debate has emerged about precisely how vulnerable the EU might be to any broader Russian threat. Finally, this policy brief looks at the prospects for a lasting peace settlement. How might security guarantees be crafted for the warring parties?



# Assumptions about peace and preparations for war

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At the broadest macro level, the war has exploded what had become, in Europe, a tacit consensus since the end of the Cold War: that interstate war around the globe was a phenomenon of the past. The assertion that interstate war was a nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon that had become unthinkable in the twenty-first century was not only an item of faith in the EU's self-assertion as a 'normative power',<sup>1</sup> but was also substantially theorised by leading international relations scholars in the US.<sup>2</sup> Echoes of this rippled across the political class. On 1 March 2014, at the height of the initial crisis over Ukraine, then US Secretary of State John Kerry said, 'You just don't, in the 21st century, behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped-up pretext.'<sup>3</sup> Other experts, from the theoretical school of realism, nevertheless continued to argue that major war is hardwired into the international system.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as the American historian Andrew Bacevich reminds us in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, where invasion of sovereign countries is concerned, the US is a cardinal offender. Ever since the highly classified US document NSC-68 was drawn up in 1950 in the context of the escalating Cold War, the US has set itself the task of imposing 'order and justice' around the world. For Washington, 'statecraft became an adjunct of military might'.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the key geostrategic question for the EU concerns its readiness and ability to think strategically about China. If the Ukraine conflict means that interstate war is firmly back on the geopolitical agenda, this augurs badly for the prospect of conflict between China and Taiwan. Such a conflict carries a serious risk of being extended to a direct US–China military confrontation, and many

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<sup>1</sup> I. Manners, 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40/2 (2005); R. Whitman (ed.), *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives* (London: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> J. Mueller, *Retreat From Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); J. S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Penguin, 2011); S. Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> R. Kaplan, 'John Kerry Warns of Consequences for Russia After Ukraine Invasion', *CBS News*, 2 March 2014.

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2002); G. Allison, *Destined For War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> A. J. Bacevich, 'The Reckoning That Wasn't', *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2023, 10.



experts consider this likely.<sup>6</sup> If that were to prove to be the case, how would the EU respond? The EU's 2022 Strategic Compass is exceedingly opaque on this issue. 'China is a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival',<sup>7</sup> it states. It goes on to note that 'China has been substantially developing its military means and aims to have completed the overall modernisation of its armed forces by 2035, impacting regional and global security... We need to ensure that this happens in a way that will contribute to uphold global security and not contradict the rules-based international order.'<sup>8</sup>

But what does this mean in practice? One major US assessment concludes that, in the context of a hypothetical conflict between the US and China, 'Europe will not opt for strict neutrality (let alone align with Beijing), but neither will it make a direct and significant military contribution to a U.S.-led effort to balance China's rising power in the Indo-Pacific region'.<sup>9</sup> This verdict is very much in line with President Macron's controversial remarks to the press after his visit to Xi Jinping on 9 April 2023.<sup>10</sup> The corollary to that conclusion is that there will have to be a more explicit division of labour in Europe, whereby the EU member states, in collaboration with the UK, will be required to take up a much greater share of the NATO defence burden in order to free up American military capacity for the Indo-Chinese theatre. During Ursula von der Leyen's visit to Washington in March 2023, some detected signs that the EU is moving closer to the US by accepting American prescriptions on the prohibition of dual-purpose high-tech exports to China.<sup>11</sup> The EU's positioning vis-à-vis American military confrontation with China will remain a dominant item on the transatlantic agenda in the coming years. It carries potentially significant military implications for Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> G. Allison and J. Glick-Unterman, *The Great Military Rivalry: China Versus the US*, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (Cambridge, December 2021); T. Christensen et al., 'How to Avoid a War Over Taiwan', *Foreign Affairs*, 13 October 2022; J. Crabtree, 'Biden and Xi Are Doomed to Escalation', *Foreign Policy*, 15 March 2023.

<sup>7</sup> EU External Action, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (Brussels, March 2022), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> S. S. Walt, 'Will Europe Balance China? Transatlantic Security Cooperation in an Era of Sino-American Rivalry', Paper presented at the Norwegian Nobel Institute Symposium, Oslo, July 2022.

<sup>10</sup> L. Abboud et al., 'Emmanuel Macron's Taiwan Remarks Spark International Backlash', *Financial Times*, 10 April 2023.

<sup>11</sup> V. Malingre, 'Dans leur conflit avec la Chine, les Etats-Unis entraînent un peu plus l'Europe', *Le Monde*, 13 March 2023.



# Relations with Russia: towards a new Iron Curtain?

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The war in Ukraine has also shattered the illusions of the many pundits and politicians in Europe who believed that Russia could be integrated into the European fold through trade and cultural interactions.<sup>12</sup> As far as perceptions—or illusions—about Russia as a ‘partner’ are concerned, this issue now seems to have been transcended. Europe has succeeded in weaning itself off Russian gas and has effectively broken off most of its commercial, financial and even political ties to the Russian Federation. One paradoxical exception to this trend is the supply of nuclear fuel to Europe’s civilian nuclear sector, where dependency on imports of enriched uranium from Russia remains strong.<sup>13</sup> A corollary to the European–Russian disconnect has been that Russia has now become exceptionally dependent, economically and commercially, as well as for diplomatic support, on China and, in a different way, India, as well as on a variety of states in Africa. The nature of Russia’s military relations with China will likely influence the trajectory of the US military confrontation with Beijing<sup>14</sup>—with inevitable implications for European security. Whether, after the war, Russia’s links with the EU will be re-established and trade and other flows renewed, is an open question. What does seem clear is that the EU will never again allow itself to become dependent on Russia for key components of its economic and commercial activity.

This is not to say that the divorce will be irrevocable. In theory, Emmanuel Macron’s brainchild of the European Political Community<sup>15</sup> remains open to Russia, should it one day embrace democracy and other liberal values. The advent of a new Eurasian security order acceptable to all parties cannot be entirely ruled out. But the more likely scenario is that we will see the re-establishment of a new dividing line across Europe, with a significant part of Ukraine firmly anchored to the West. I explore the implications of such a scenario below.

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<sup>12</sup> J. Ganesh, ‘The Year Europe’s Innocent Worldview Fell Apart’, *Financial Times*, 6 December 2022; M. Morawiecki, ‘War in Ukraine Has Exposed the Truth About Europe’, *The Spectator*, 8 August 2022.

<sup>13</sup> S. Tani, ‘Russia Retains Grip on Global Nuclear Energy Landscape’, *Financial Times*, 12 November 2022.

<sup>14</sup> P. M. Kim, ‘The Limits of the No-Limits Partnership’, *Foreign Affairs* 102/2 (2003), 94–105.

<sup>15</sup> C. Grant, ‘Macron Is Serious About the European Political Community’, *Centre for European Reform*, 1 August 2022.



In the context of Europe's *aggiornamento* with Russia, the war in Ukraine has further exposed a significant rift between those EU member states (broadly in the east and north) which had consistently warned about Russian aggression, and those (broadly in the west and south) which had nurtured hopes for Russia's transformation into a responsible regional partner. This has triggered much commentary suggesting that one lasting outcome of the war is that the EU's 'centre of gravity' has shifted from west to east.<sup>16</sup> Such a conclusion is probably misguided and certainly premature. The focus on the east is a direct but conjunctural result of the Russian invasion. Geography, arms shipments, refugee flows, political preferences and diplomatic jostling have all, inevitably, given greater visibility and audibility to Ukraine's immediate neighbours in the EU. The invasion has also thrown into confusion the EU's traditional (Western) leaders, such as France and Germany. President Macron has been obliged to back-pedal his attempts to demonstrate French leadership in keeping diplomatic channels open to Moscow. And Chancellor Scholz has been forced to abandon entire segments of Germany's previous policies with respect to Russia—not just oil and gas deals but also weapons transfers to countries in conflict.

Whether this shift in the EU's balance becomes more permanent will depend to a large extent on the nature of any post-war 'settlement'. If Ukraine, along with Moldova and eventually Georgia, succeeds in joining the EU, then indeed the overall balance of forces in the EU—geographic, demographic, political and institutional—would inevitably give greater voice to the east. This would be rendered even more tangible if a new 'Iron Curtain' came down across Eurasia, strengthening the clout of the front-line states in rather the same way as West Germany became the focus of Western attention during the Cold War. But there is no certainty that this will be the outcome. Any lasting peace in Eastern Europe would have to be underwritten by a large coalition of powers, including China, India and Turkey. Security guarantees would have to be agreed for both Ukraine and Russia, which only a new Concert of Powers could underwrite. Both developments would work against the establishment of a new Iron Curtain.

The EU has indicated its willingness to fast-track Ukrainian accession: 'The European Council... underlines the importance of Ukraine's EU accession pro-

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<sup>16</sup> J. Rupnik, 'L'Europe de l'Est à l'heure Atlantique', *Telos*, 27 February 2023; F. Petroni, 'The European Centre of Gravity is Shifting to the North East', *Geopolitical Futures*, 26 September 2026; J. Detsch, A. Mackinnon and R. Gramer, 'Europe's Centre of Gravity Shifts East', *Foreign Policy*, 29 March 2023.



cess, in line with its earlier conclusions, notably those of 23–24 June 2022'.<sup>17</sup> Yet, there remains a strong possibility that alternative arrangements to full accession will be worked out for the three states currently in limbo. Ukraine, in particular, has a long way to go before it meets the standards required for EU membership. President Macron has insisted that his European Political Community is not conceived as an alternative to EU membership. But that is precisely what it could well become. France and Germany, not to mention Italy and Spain, are not going to abandon their traditional influence over EU policy preferences, which are by no means limited to the eastern neighbourhood. Trade and economic policy in the EU will continue to be dominated by the traditional Western powerhouses. There is a strong possibility that any lasting shift in the centre of gravity of the EU would be more centrifugal than centripetal. How the war will affect the long-term balance of influence within the EU therefore remains a wide-open question.<sup>18</sup>

## The implications of the war for transatlantic relations

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The war has also called for a revision of some recent basic assumptions underlying transatlantic relations since the end of the Cold War. First, it has reasserted the US role as the dominant military power in Europe, that is, as the 'defender of last resort'. This has had an ancillary effect on the respective fortunes and status of NATO and of the EU's CSDP. Prior to the Ukraine crisis, the wind had seemed, to many, to be in the sails of the CSDP, which was aspiring to move towards 'strategic autonomy'.<sup>19</sup> NATO, on the other hand, was still searching for a clear role. Today, NATO, even though as an institution it has carefully sought to avoid any risk of direct confrontation with Russia,<sup>20</sup> appears to have been massively reinforced in its traditional role as the provider of collective defence in Europe.<sup>21</sup> It has been substantially strengthened by the membership

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<sup>17</sup> The European Council conclusions of June 2022 speak of the future of Ukraine and Moldova 'residing in the European Union'. See European Council, 'European Council Meeting (23 and 24 June 2022) – Conclusions', 24 June 2022; European Council, 'European Council Meeting (23 March 2023) – Conclusions', 23 March 2023.

<sup>18</sup> S. Kauffmann, 'La Vision de l'Europe 'à un tournant historique' défendue par la Pologne est à l'opposé de celle de ses partenaires français et allemands', *Le Monde*, 6 April 2023.

<sup>19</sup> J. Howorth, *Strategic Autonomy: Why It Is Not About Europe Going It Alone*, Martens Centre for European Studies (Brussels, June 2019).

<sup>20</sup> S. Pifer, 'Tacit Rules to Avoid a NATO-Russia War', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 14 March 2022.

<sup>21</sup> B. M. Jenkins, 'Consequences of the War in Ukraine: NATO's Future', *RAND*, 2 March 2023.





aspirations of Sweden and Finland.<sup>22</sup> These new accessions render NATO an unambiguously anti-Russian alliance and present a serious challenge to EU aspirations of strategic autonomy—which most commentators take to mean decreasing security dependence on the US.<sup>23</sup>

There remain, nevertheless, awkward questions about the strategic wisdom of offering membership to Ukraine and Georgia. It has been argued that Ukrainian membership of the Alliance might spark a wider war and would also constitute a propaganda victory for Putin, especially in his overtures to the Global South. Ukraine is well defended by the West as it is, without really needing formal Alliance membership. Moreover, Ukraine does not yet meet NATO's political, juridical and military standards for membership. Finally, there might be problems persuading all existing NATO member states—including the US itself<sup>24</sup>—to agree to Kyiv's accession.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, advocates of Ukraine's speedy accession argue that it has earned its place in the Alliance through its courageous resistance and that the long-term peace of Europe will be best ensured by Kyiv's membership.<sup>26</sup>

As a result of the war, most EU member states have begun to ramp up both their defence spending and their defence procurement.<sup>27</sup> But there is considerable disparity between the efforts made by the different member states. While all NATO member states are required to meet the alliance target for defence expenditure of 2% of GDP by 2024, only about half of them will, in fact, meet that target. Poland, for its part, has announced that it aims to raise defence spending to 3%. Sweden, Italy, Spain, Denmark and Germany are all unlikely to reach the 2% target until towards the end of the decade.<sup>28</sup> Germany's position has been the subject of much discussion. After Chancellor Scholz's

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<sup>22</sup> P. Poast, 'What NATO Needs to Do Before Sweden and Finland Join', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 7 June 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Z. Selden, 'Will Finland and Sweden Joining NATO Deepen the Alliance's Problems?', *War on the Rocks*, 31 May 2022.

<sup>24</sup> H. Foy and F. Schwartz, 'US Opposes Offering Ukraine a Road-Map to NATO Membership', *Financial Times*, 6 April 2023.

<sup>25</sup> J. Askew, 'Five Reasons Why Kyiv Won't Join the NATO Military Alliance Any Time Soon', *EuroNews*, 8 October 2022; E. Wong and L. Jakes, 'NATO Won't Let Ukraine Join Soon: Here's Why', *New York Times*, 16 March 2022.

<sup>26</sup> J. Elgot, 'Boris Johnson: Ukraine Must Join NATO for the Sake of Long-Term Peace', *The Guardian*, 24 January 2023.

<sup>27</sup> S. Besch, 'EU Defence Spending and the War in Ukraine', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 21 December 2022; *European Defence Agency*, 'European Defence Spending Surpasses €200 Billion for the First Time', 8 December 2022.

<sup>28</sup> D. Hutt, 'How European Countries Stand on 2% of GDP Defence Spending', *EuroNews*, 22 July 2022.





27 February 2022 speech hailing a *Zeitenwende*,<sup>29</sup> some analysts detected a ‘revolution’ in German military affairs.<sup>30</sup> In September 2022, Christine Lambrecht, Germany’s defence minister, spoke of Germany assuming a ‘leading role’ in European defence.<sup>31</sup> However, in a major report in March 2023, Eva Högl, the German parliamentary commissioner for the armed forces, claimed that Germany’s military upgrade, if it continued at its current snail’s pace, would take 50 years to complete.<sup>32</sup>

The EU has begun, following the approach adopted during Covid, to think in terms of joint procurement and has made headway in organising collective shipments of weapons and especially ammunition to Ukraine.<sup>33</sup> A lively debate has arisen about the optimum way forward for the reorganisation of European defences.<sup>34</sup> One of the most constructive approaches revolves around the creation of EU-wide force packages. ‘The key to maximise the efficiency, but also the interoperability and employability of Europe’s armed forces, lies in the creation of permanent multinational force packages, with national units as building-blocks.’<sup>35</sup> This would allow for shortfalls in one nation’s capacity to be met by contributions from other nations, with the result that a European division with full spectrum capacity could be forged from the diverse contributions of a range of member states.

However, there is clearly still a long way to go before the EU delivers even on the promises of the 2022 Strategic Compass. In a March 2023 report drafted by High Representative Josep Borrel to mark the first anniversary of the Compass,

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<sup>29</sup> O. Scholz, ‘Policy Statement’, Statement made in Berlin, 27 February 2022; O. Scholz, ‘The Global *Zeitenwende*: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era’, *Foreign Affairs*, January–February 2023.

<sup>30</sup> C. Mölling and C. Major, ‘The War in Ukraine Just Caused a Revolution in German Military Affairs’, *German Council on Foreign Relations*, 24 March 2022.

<sup>31</sup> G. Chazan, ‘Germany Outlines Aim to Take up Leading Military Role in Europe’, *Financial Times*, 12 September 2022.

<sup>32</sup> L. Pitel, ‘Germany’s Military Upgrade to Take “Half a Century” at Current Pace, Says Report’, *Financial Times*, 14 March 2023; G. Bogden, ‘A Year After Germany’s “Sea-Change”, Policy Change Remains Elusive’, *War on the Rocks*, 14 March 2022.

<sup>33</sup> A. Brzozowski, ‘EU Edges Towards Joint Arms Procurement for Ukraine, but Hurdles Remain’, *Euractiv*, 8 March 2023.

<sup>34</sup> See M. Dzurinda (ed.), *European View* 21/1 (2022); see also S. Giusti, ‘EU Security and Defence Policy in a Volatile Context’, in S. Giusti and G. Grevi (eds.), *Facing War: Rethinking Europe’s Security and Defence* (Milan: ISPI, 2022), 13–22; F. Coticchia, ‘A Watershed Moment? European Defence and the War in Ukraine’, in Giusti and Grevi (eds.), *Facing War*, 23–34; A. Locatelli, ‘EU Defence: Joint Capability Development’, in Giusti and Grevi (eds.), *Facing War*, 35–46; S. Biscop, ‘The EU’s Role in Security and Defence: Still Indispensable’, in Giusti and Grevi (eds.), *Facing War*, 47–60; G. Grevi, ‘European Defence: Quantum Leap or Limbo?’, in Giusti and Grevi (eds.), *Facing War*, 99–112; J. Hackett et al., ‘If New Looks Could Kill: Russia’s Military Capability in 2022’, *IJSS*, 15 February 2022.

<sup>35</sup> S. Biscop, ‘European Defence: The Full Package’, *Egmont Commentaries*, 23 November 2022.



some positive developments are highlighted: ‘the increase in speed, flexibility and responsiveness’ of missions and operations, the strengthening of the ability to anticipate threats and the ‘unprecedented increase in defence budgets’.<sup>36</sup> The European Peace Facility, a mechanism that finances weapons supplies, is hailed as a ‘game changer’<sup>37</sup> and the EU’s intelligence and space capacity are said to have proven their worth. But major weaknesses persist. The EU’s Military Planning and Conduct Capability remains far short of an operational headquarters. The EU’s Rapid Deployment Capability remains in limbo. There is no agreement on common costs. And the flagship Permanent Structured Cooperation is reported to have been badly neglected by the member states.<sup>38</sup> Above all, it remains quite unclear how the EU and NATO will enhance their cooperation in the coming years—and with precisely what strategic objective.<sup>39</sup>

In this regard, the war has posed new and important questions about the nature and reality of Russia’s military capacity. Prior to February 2022, the received wisdom in the West was that Russia had significantly modernised and upgraded its military—especially since the short war in Georgia in 2008, when it was perceived to have performed sub-optimally. In mid-February 2022, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) concluded that ‘the military modernisation process, that began in late 2008, has made Russia a far more capable military power today than at any time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union’.<sup>40</sup> In 2020 and 2021, a fierce debate erupted between international relations scholars over the EU’s ability to defend itself against Russia without American assistance. That debate was framed by the fears raised by President Trump that the US might even pull out of NATO.<sup>41</sup>

A 2019 report published by the IISS had argued—in response to those calling for European strategic autonomy—that any attempt by the EU to ensure its

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<sup>36</sup> EU External Action, *2023 Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (20 March 2023), 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> N. Gros-Verheyd, ‘One Year Later: The Balance Sheet of the Strategic Compass’, *Bruxelles 2*, 16 March 2023.

<sup>39</sup> B. Tangör, ‘NATO–EU Strategic Partnership: Where Is It Heading?’, *Perceptions* 26/1 (2021), 73–99; I. Bond and L. Scazzieri, *The EU, NATO and European Security in a Time of War*, Centre for European Reform (London, August 2022); N. Fasola and S. Lucarelli, ‘The EU–NATO Partnership’, in Giusti and Grevi (eds.), *Facing War*, 61–72.

<sup>40</sup> Hackett et al., ‘If New Looks Could Kill’.

<sup>41</sup> J. E. Barnes and H. Cooper, ‘Trump Discussed Pulling the US From NATO, Aides Say, Amid New Concerns Over Russia’, *New York Times*, 14 January 2019.



security without the US would involve costs that were impossibly prohibitive.<sup>42</sup> One scenario involved an attempt by the EU to recover lost territory following a hypothetical Russian military occupation of Lithuania and parts of Poland. In December 2020, Massachusetts Institute of Technology scholar Barry Posen, a leading member of the US school urging ‘restraint’ in US foreign policy,<sup>43</sup> published a major article in the journal *Survival*, responding to the IISS report and arguing that, if the EU prepared seriously to prevent any such Russian aggression, it could succeed in defending itself—without US assistance.<sup>44</sup> At the same time two prominent international relations scholars, Hugo Meijer and Stephen Brooks, offered an unqualified rebuttal to restraint scholars’ assertions that European states could deter or counter a Russian attack in the event of US withdrawal from NATO.<sup>45</sup> Posen’s *Survival* article launched a spirited debate about Europe’s real vulnerability. His article sparked no fewer than three rejoinders in a subsequent issue, as well as a response from Posen himself to his critics.<sup>46</sup> In addition, in May 2021 Stephen Walt published a robust critique of the Brooks and Meijer article, echoing many of Posen’s arguments.<sup>47</sup>

This burgeoning debate has significant relevance for Europe, both in the context of the Ukraine War and of the US prioritisation of the Asian theatre. The ‘special military operation’ launched by President Vladimir Putin has revealed massive dysfunctionality in the Russian military, including glaring weaknesses in planning, command, logistics and manpower.<sup>48</sup> As one expert recently observed, ‘Is Russia realistically poised to steamroll through Europe into Paris when it struggles to take Kharkiv, just twenty miles from the Russian border?’<sup>49</sup> This question has sparked a revival of the 2020–1 debates about the genuine

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<sup>42</sup> B. Barry et al., *Defending Europe: Scenario-Based Capability Requirements for NATO’s European Members*, IISS (10 May 2019).

<sup>43</sup> B. R. Posen, *Restraint. A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> B. R. Posen, ‘Europe Can Defend Itself’, *Survival* 62/6 (2020), 7–34.

<sup>45</sup> H. Meijer and S. G. Brooks, ‘Illusions of Autonomy: Why Europe Cannot Provide for Its Own Security if the U.S. Pulls Back’, *International Security* 45/4 (2021), 7–43.

<sup>46</sup> D. Barrie et al., ‘Europe’s Defence Requires Offence’, *Survival* 63/3 (2021); F. Heisbourg, ‘Europe Can Afford the Cost of Autonomy’, *Survival* 63/3 (2021); S. G. Brooks and H. Meijer, ‘Europe Cannot Defend Itself: The Challenge of Pooling Military Power’, *Survival* 63/3 (2021); B. Posen, ‘In Reply: To Repeat – Europe Can Defend Itself’, *Survival* 63/3 (2021).

<sup>47</sup> S. M. Walt, ‘Exactly How Helpless Is Europe?’, *Foreign Policy*, 21 May 2021.

<sup>48</sup> R. Johnson, ‘Dysfunctional Warfare: The Russian Invasion of Ukraine’, *The US Army Warfare Quarterly: Parameters* 52/2 (2022); T. Kuzio, ‘Putin’s Failing Ukraine Invasion Proves Russia Is No Superpower’, *Atlantic Council*, 1 November 2022.

<sup>49</sup> M. Abrahms, ‘I Teach International Relations. I Think We Are Making a Mistake in Ukraine’, *The Atlantic*, 7 March 2023.



vulnerability of the EU to any future Russian military incursions.<sup>50</sup> Of course, Russian military incompetence can be rectified, the lessons of the current war learned, and its armed forces upgraded and modernised. Europe can ill afford to be complacent. The stakes are huge. The debates over the scale and reliability of the US commitment to Europe, over the necessary level of the EU's own military ambition, and over cooperation between NATO and the EU will continue to dominate the European defence agenda in the coming decades. Behind those debates lies a quasi-theological conundrum concerning the role and utility of nuclear weapons, a debate with which the EU may find it increasingly difficult not to engage.<sup>51</sup>

## Prospects for a peace settlement or a new Eurasian security order?

Finally, the war has also raised serious questions about the nature and durability of any future peace negotiations or settlement. Many in the West have hoped that Ukrainian military successes and Russian military failures would lead to the downfall of the Putin regime. However, hope is not a strategy and there are few signs (to date) that Putin faces serious internal opposition.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, there is no guarantee that any hypothetical successor would prove to be a more amenable partner for the West. On the contrary, the main criticism of Putin seems to come from the nationalist right<sup>53</sup> rather than from the more liberal centre, even supposing such a constituency exists. Most experts appear to agree that there are (at the time of writing) no prospects for the opening of serious negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Both parties have declared 'maximalist' war aims that are mutually incompatible and allow for very little in the way of compromise. The war has morphed from a war of manoeuvre into a war of attrition—one in which neither side seems likely to

<sup>50</sup> R. Menon, 'Europe Doesn't Need the US Anymore', *Foreign Policy*, 30 January 2023.

<sup>51</sup> N. Novaky and J. Howorth, *Thinking the Unthinkable: How Might the EU Prepare for and React to a Russian Nuclear Strike on Ukraine?*, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (Brussels, October 2022).

<sup>52</sup> A. Prokopenko, 'A Year of War Has Left Russia's Elites Anchorless and Atomized', *Carnegie Politika*, 15 March 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Y. Chernova, 'In Russia, Far-Right Nationalists Offer Rare Criticism of Kremlin's War Effort', *Wall Street Journal*, 22 August 2022.



be able to prevail convincingly. There is a sombre debate in the West about the wisdom—and indeed the physical possibility—of giving Ukraine, in the official jargon used by both the EU and the US, ‘whatever it needs for however long it takes’ to allow it to defeat the aggressor.

Again, it has been widely hoped in the West that external great powers such as China, India and possibly Turkey will prove capable of pressuring Putin to agree to engage in some sort of peace talks. But that would, by the same token, require the West to pressurise Ukraine in the same direction. However, the Western mantra has long ruled out such an eventuality on the grounds that it is up to Ukraine and Ukraine alone to decide when—or indeed if—it wishes to discuss terms with Putin’s Russia. Any hope of bilateral—or indeed internationally sponsored or supervised—negotiations also appears to have been ruled out by current moves by the EU, the US and the International Criminal Court, not to mention Ukraine itself, to initiate war-crimes investigations and potentially to press charges against Russia’s leaders.<sup>54</sup>

There also remain considerable differences of opinion over the central question of security guarantees for the warring parties. In 1994, Ukraine was persuaded by both Russia and the US to abandon its nuclear weapons in return for the promise of international assurances concerning its borders and security—as detailed in the Budapest Memorandum.<sup>55</sup> Alas, that document, in the words of a US lawyer involved in drawing it up, amounted to ‘a worthless piece of paper’.<sup>56</sup> Ukraine then actively sought NATO membership as a more robust security guarantee, but this in turn generated security concerns in Russia, concerns which are a not negligible factor in the outbreak of the current war.<sup>57</sup> President Macron has consistently argued that any viable and lasting ‘peace settlement’ would have to take full account of Russia’s security concerns. At the same time, given Russia’s invasion, Ukraine will require guarantees that go way beyond those written into the Budapest Memorandum. Given the current state of the war, nothing can yet be concluded with any absolute certainty.

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<sup>54</sup> M. Simons, ‘International Court to Open War Crimes Cases Against Russia’, *New York Times*, 13 March 2023.

<sup>55</sup> A. Zammit Borda, ‘Ukraine War: What Is the Budapest Memorandum and Why Has Russia’s Invasion Torn It up?’, *The Conversation*, 22 March 2022.

<sup>56</sup> M. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 203.

<sup>57</sup> G. Roberts, “‘Now or Never’: The Immediate Origins of Putin’s Preventative War on Ukraine”, *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 22/2 (2023).



# Conclusion

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Under the circumstances, it behoves the EU to engage in a full-scale rethink of its security arrangements. The cosy mantras around CSDP, which dominated the discussions from the turn of the century to the late 2010s, are no longer appropriate or viable (if they ever were).<sup>58</sup> A far more rigorous *aggiornamento* is called for. Europe needs to decide whether it is planning for peace or for war. It needs to decide what sort of relationship is possible and/or viable with Russia in the medium to long term. It needs to decide precisely how it intends to partner with the US as the latter contemplates conflict with China. It needs to decide precisely on the respective trade-offs between offering full membership to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, or simply offering those countries some alternative form of association. And above all, it needs to decide what its essential military ambitions are and how to fulfil them. That is a very full agenda.

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<sup>58</sup> J. Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014).



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