Policy Paper

Building European Security Against Russia

A View from Estonia

| Kristi Raik | Martin Hurt |

November 2022

RKK ICDS
RAHVUSVAHELINE KAITSEUURINGUTE KESKUS
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR DEFENCE AND SECURITY
EESTI • ESTONIA

Title: Building European Security Against Russia – A View from Estonia
Authors: Raik, Kristi; Hurt, Martin
Publication date: November 2022
Category: Policy Paper

Cover page photo: A statue depicting St. Michael, the patron saint of the Ukrainian capital in Kyiv, Ukraine (by Vadim Ghirda/AP/Scanpix)

Keywords: geopolitics, security, war, defence, deterrence, military capabilities, Europe, European Union, NATO, United States of America, Ukraine, Russia

ISSN 2228-2068

63/4 Narva Rd., 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
info@icds.ee, www.icds.ee

About the Authors

Kristi Raik

Dr Kristi Raik is the Director of the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute at the International Centre for Defence and Security since February 2018. She is also an Adjunct Professor of International Relations at the University of Turku. She has previously served inter alia as a Senior Research Fellow and Acting Programme Director at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki and an official at the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union in Brussels. Kristi has published, lectured and commented widely on European security and EU foreign policy, including the EU's relations with Russia, Ukraine and other Eastern neighbours. Kristi is also an expert of the foreign and security policies of the Baltic states and Finland. She has provided expert contributions to the Estonian, Finnish, EU and NATO institutions. Kristi has a PhD from the University of Turku.

Martin Hurt

Martin Hurt, a former Estonian Ministry of Defence official, worked at the ICDS from September 2019 till October 2022. His areas of research included developments in NATO and the EU, as well as national security and defence related topics in the Nordic-Baltic region. He worked as Defence Counsellor to the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Estonia to NATO (2016-2019), at the ICDS as a Research Fellow and Deputy Director (2010-2016), and at the Estonian Ministry of Defence on various positions: as Undersecretary for Defence Investments/National Armaments Director (2005-2010), as Undersecretary for Defence Planning (2004-2005), and (Deputy) Director of the Defence Policy and Planning Department (2002-2004). From 1998 to 2000, he served as an adviser of the Swedish Armed Forces to the Republic of Estonia; first in the Ministry of Defence, Defence Policy, and Planning Department and later in the Headquarters of the Estonian Defence Forces, J5/8. From 1995 to 1998, he worked in the Headquarters of the Swedish Armed Forces Land Forces directorate as a desk officer with budgeting and financial reporting. Martin Hurt holds an M.A. in Social Sciences from the Estonian Business School and a BBA from Stockholm University.

Introduction

With Russia's barbaric invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, major conventional war returned to Europe in a manner unseen since World War II. The invasion is widely seen as a breaking point of the post-Cold War security order in Europe and a serious blow to the broader rules-based international order. Similar judgements had been made regarding Russia's war against Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which were the first instances of the use of force to redraw borders in Europe since the end of WWII and thus serious breaches of the basic principles of international security. However, the West did not react strongly enough to stop further Russian aggression. Now Europe is at a turning point comparable to the two world wars and the end of the Cold War – three occasions during the 20th century when the borders, norms, institutions, and balance of power ordering interstate relations on the continent and beyond experienced an upheaval.

This paper explores lessons that can be learnt from the war in Ukraine and suggests elements of a new strategic approach of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EU to European security in the face of the Russian threat. While the future trajectory of Western-Russian relations will depend on domestic developments in Russia, the starting point of this analysis is that, in the foreseeable future, Russia is likely to remain a major threat to European security for two main reasons: it will not give up its imperial ambitions to (re-) establish a sphere of influence, using force if necessary, and it will not become a stable democracy.

These are realistic assumptions in light of modern history. Russia has been an empire formally since 1721, but de facto since the late 16th century when the tsardom of Muscovy started to expand. It has never been a stable, functioning democracy, despite some degree of democratisation in the 1990s, which many Russians remember as a humiliating period of chaos and decline. Furthermore, although Russia has been significantly weakened militarily by its war against Ukraine, one should not underestimate its ability to inflict damage on adversaries and to rebuild and reorient its forces. If positive surprises occur and, after President Vladimir Putin's reign ends, Russia does in fact embark on a post-imperial, democratic course, the West will no doubt adjust its strategy accordingly and support this development. However, the West's Russia policy for the future must not be built on unrealistic expectations and hopes, as was the case during the post-Cold War era. Therefore, a key question for NATO and the EU – the two major pillars of European security – is how to safeguard Europe against the Russian threat.

In the following, we outline seven points on which NATO and the EU should revise their approach to Russia and European security, learning from the war in Ukraine, as well as the mistakes and failures of the past three decades.

1. Strengthen the European Security Architecture without Russia

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine was preceded by Russia's explicit demands for the European security architecture to be redesigned. The aggression leaves no doubt that Russia no longer considers itself bound by previously agreed norms and has chosen the path of extensive use of force in order to impose its own vision of order. As often occurs in history, the seeds of the current turmoil were sown in the settlement of the previous conflict. It is a common view in Russia that in the 1990s the West exploited Russia's weakness to impose its views of European security, although the diplomatic record provides ample evidence contradicting it. The expressions of Russia's discontent with the post-Cold War order were visible even in the early 1990s, when it tried to

maintain control over former Soviet republics by instigating separatist conflicts and dragged its feet on withdrawing its military from the Baltic states, eventually pulling out in August 1994 as a result of Western pressure.

The discontent became more visible in 2007, when President Putin first strongly articulated his bitterness towards the US-led international order at the Munich Security Conference. The solutions proposed in 2009 by then-President Dmitry Medvedev for a new European security architecture were rather ambiguous but could be read as an expression of Russia's desire for fundamental amendments.[1] Twelve years later, in the Russian proposals of December 2021, the ambiguity was gone and Russia was explicitly aiming at restoring its sphere of influence and driving NATO's presence in Europe back to pre-1997 levels.[2] The new order was to be agreed on among the major powers, over the heads of smaller ones.[3] The US and NATO made clear in their response that it was inconceivable to even enter negotiations on the basis of Russia's core demands, although the US was open to talks on certain issues, such as arms control, nuclear treaties and transparency measures.[4] However, for 30 years, the West has not imposed clear limits on Russia's growing imperial ambitions.

Failure to respond strongly to the Russian aggression in 2008 and 2014 has encouraged Russia to move ahead with efforts to violently impose its vision of European security

Its failure to respond strongly to the Russian aggression in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine since 2014 has encouraged Russia to move ahead with efforts to violently impose its vision of European security.

The Russian aspiration to re-establish its sphere of influence and agree on a new balance between major powers is incompatible with the Western commitment to defending the rules-based security order that is manifestly supported by the states of Europe. The latter is rooted in the post-WWII settlement and was strengthened and expanded after the end of the Cold War. The UN is the most universal – albeit evidently imperfect – embodiment of this model, as it lays down a set of norms but lacks the mechanisms to ensure their implementation, especially when the violator is a member of the Security Council. The flaws of the UN system can be seen in the organisation's timid response to Russia's war against Ukraine, which is a blatant violation of the core principles of the UN Charter. In Europe, the most comprehensive institution establishing continent-wide security norms is the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), whose credibility has also been severely damaged, if not destroyed, by Russia's aggression.

During the Cold War, Western efforts to build the liberal rules-based order were accompanied by "the containment order, which was based on the balance of power, nuclear deterrence, and political and ideological competition" with the Soviet Union.[5] Europe was de facto divided into spheres of influence controlled by the two superpowers. There were Western organisations built on the principles of pluralistic democracy and open economies, such as the EU and NATO, and structures dominated by the totalitarian Soviet regime, such as the Comecon and Warsaw Pact. Although the UN and OSCE included Russia as a founding member, the liberal order was a Western-led undertaking that entailed a more comprehensive set of norms relying on more binding institutional mechanisms that only encompassed Western states.

The end of the Cold War ended the containment policy and enabled – initially with Russia's full participation – the strengthening and widening of the liberal democratic order with its political, economic and security institutions. At the same time, the balance of power was replaced with a de facto US hegemony that – while rooted in multilateral institutions and international norms – was nonetheless a hegemony in terms of

1 President of Russia, *The draft of the European Security Treaty* (Moscow: President of Russia, 29 November 2009).

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (Moscow: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2021).

3 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees* (Moscow: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2021).

4 David M. Herszenhorn, "US, NATO deliver written replies to Russia on security demands," *Politico*, 26 January 2022.

5 G. John Ikenberry, "The Myth of Post-Cold War Chaos," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1996.

predominant military, economic, technological, and cultural power. For a brief moment after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the possibility that Russia might one day join Western organisations emerged on the horizon. It did join the Group of Eight (G8), but beyond that, this prospect did not materialise. Russia, meanwhile, was expecting a more radical change where Western organisations, most notably NATO, would cease to exist and be replaced with new pan-European structures.[6]

Contrary to Western expectations, post-Soviet Russia did not adopt liberal values and norms either in its domestic politics or in its relations with neighbours

However, contrary to Western expectations, post-Soviet Russia did not adopt liberal values and norms either in its domestic politics or in its relations with neighbours. This impeded the creation of common structures based on shared values and norms, as well as the inclusion of Russia in Western structures.

Furthermore, the deepening autocracy of the Russian regime under President Putin was an important factor behind its increasingly aggressive foreign policy.[7] Russia developed a growing resentment towards US hegemony and called for a multipolar system based on a balance of power between 'poles' in the international system. Since 2014, Russian representatives have repeatedly presented historical models of the balance of power in Europe as something worth emulating. For Russia, the Congress of Vienna of 1814–15 and the Yalta Conference of February 1945 are examples of establishing decades-long stability in Europe through agreement among great powers.[8]

Thus, the Russian and Western visions for the European security order have become incompatible, making a compromise impossible unless one of them gives up on its core principles. In practice, however, they do coexist, as they did during the Cold War. The Russian views are rooted in its understanding of its great power status and previous models in Europe's modern history that established a balance of power among major powers. The Western views, by contrast, see the liberal rules-based order – created after WWII and further strengthened after the Cold War – as a progressive model that has brought unprecedented levels of stability and security to Europe and is worth defending. The rapid development of the Baltic states since the restoration of their independence in 1991 is a great example of how the extension of this model has improved the lives of millions of people. Russia must not be allowed to turn back these achievements.

Today Europe is again entering a Cold War-like situation where the liberal rules-based order of the West coexists with containment, nuclear deterrence, and ideological and political competition with Russia. A key difference between the Cold War and today, however, is that back then, the Soviet Union gradually – if reluctantly – accepted the de facto balance of power and the limitations of its sphere of influence. Today, Russia would like to restore a much older, pre-1914 idea of great power 'concert' and balance and regain control over what it sees as lost territories. It has been trying to impose its vision by war and 'hybrid' means designed to fragment, destabilise, and undermine the cohesion of the West. Ironically, it is one of the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine that both NATO and the EU are expanding and strengthening the European security architecture, excluding Russia. Grey zones and buffer zones are being diminished, as they have turned out to be sources of instability. Thus, both the EU and NATO should work towards granting Ukraine membership in order to achieve sustainable security on the continent and decisively stop Russia's imperial aggression.

Russia would like to restore a pre-1914 idea of great power 'concert'

[6] James Sherr, "Russia's View of Interdependence: The Security Dimension," in *Post-Crimea Shift in EU-Russia Relations: From Fostering Interdependence to Managing Vulnerabilities*, ed. Kristi Raik and András Rácz (Tallinn: EFPI/ICDS, May 2019), 79-100.

[7] Kathryn E. Stoner, *Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, April 2021), 256-265.

[8] Tuomas Forsberg, "Russia and the European security order revisited: from the congress of Vienna to the post-cold war," *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2 (30 November 2018): 154-171.

2. Back Up Diplomacy with Hard Power

As efforts to build a common security order with Russia have failed, it is necessary to reassess the role of military force and its relationship to diplomacy and soft power. Facing the new reality of power politics, it is high time Europe abandoned the slogan proclaiming that "there can be no military solution." The war in Ukraine provides painful evidence that this statement does not hold (of course, it is also easy to find other, earlier evidence from Russia's involvement in Georgia, Syria, etc.). Russia has been trying to create a new reality in Ukraine with military force, and it can be pushed out of Ukraine only with a military response. It has been difficult for Europe and the US to acknowledge this harsh reality and change their policies accordingly.

Russia has been trying to create a new reality in Ukraine with military force, and it can be pushed out only with a military response

Since the end of the Cold War, the West has invested a lot in diplomacy and dialogue with Russia, hoping that this would prevent the use of force and convince Russia of the virtues of a cooperative relationship. There was an abundance of fora and mechanisms for dialogue, including the OSCE, NATO-Russia Council, biannual EU-Russia summits, and the G8 (of which Russia was a member until 2014), as well as close bilateral relations between many Western countries and Russia. Dialogue with Russia was often treated as a value in itself, whereas the purpose and aims of the dialogue were not always clear. In spite of all the diplomatic exchanges, Western countries did not take Russia's demands at their word. For many years, the West was in denial about Russia's increasing aggression in pursuit of these demands, as described above.

From 2014, the European focus in responding to the war in Ukraine was on the implementation of the Minsk agreements, negotiated in September 2014 and February 2015, which could be interpreted in contradictory ways and lacked an enforcement mechanism. When Russia tried to turn the agreements into a tool to break Ukraine's sovereignty and continued to establish new realities on the ground by force, Ukraine came under pressure from its European partners to adapt and make concessions.[9] At the same time, the US stood back and expected the Europeans to take more responsibility for their own security and lead the management of the conflict. A positive reading of the European focus on the Minsk agreements is that this did stabilise the military situation for a while and allowed Ukraine to build up its defence forces, which were in a poor state in 2014.

However, the need for a proper military response by Ukraine and the self-interest of Western countries to provide military support to Ukraine were broadly acknowledged only after 24 February 2022. Prior to that, Ukraine only received defensive weaponry from a small number of countries, including the US, the UK, and the Baltic states.[10] The mass graves discovered in Bucha and other liberated areas, with abundant evidence of civilians being tortured and killed, demonstrated that the ultimate goal cannot be peace at all costs or a third Minsk agreement, but must be the restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security. Even then, Western military support was offered in small steps and with significant, but rather randomly defined and constantly shifting self-imposed restrictions. The political unwillingness to deliver the significant amounts of modern Western tanks and infantry fighting vehicles needed to liberate temporarily occupied territories contradicts the stated political goal that Ukraine must win this war.

There is one obvious lesson from Russia's war in Ukraine for Estonia. The price for temporarily ceding territory, and relying on restoration of sovereignty and territorial integrity once sufficient allied forces become available, is too high for a front-line ally. This new knowledge warrants a revision of the previous approach that NATO based on the presence of 'tripwire' forces which were incapable of halting Russia's advance into the allied territory. The conclusion is that, the security of Europe must rely on forward defence.

[9] Duncan Allan, *The Minsk Conundrum: Western Policy and Russia's War in Eastern Ukraine* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs Chatham House, 22 May 2020).

[10] Claire Mills, *Military Assistance to Ukraine since the Russian Invasion* (London: House of Commons Library, 14 October 2022).

There has been a tendency in European debates to see military force and diplomacy as separate, alternative ways to build security. However, the two are inextricably linked.

Ability of the Europeans to advance a diplomatic solution has been hampered by the weakness of their hard-power capabilities

Wishing to prioritise diplomacy and hoping that major military conflicts are no longer possible in Europe, the Europeans have invested a lot in diplomatic tools and processes, while allowing their military forces to decay. Now that a major war has returned to Europe, the ability of the Europeans to advance a diplomatic solution has been hampered by the weakness of their hard-power capabilities. Ukraine is a reminder that in a situation of war, the timing and possible outcomes of diplomatic efforts are determined by military realities on the battlefield. Furthermore, the Western ability to prevent the expansion of the war and direct military conflict between NATO and Russia depends heavily on credible deterrence and defence.

3. Close the Gaps in NATO's Defence Capabilities

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has revealed that Moscow's conventional military power is weaker than the assessments before the invasion indicated. The Russian military has proven to be poorly trained, with some important exceptions such as the air assault forces. Its equipment is often old and not well maintained, and the number of modern systems is insufficient to improve the overall performance of the armed forces. Corruption has contributed to the low quality of the Russian forces. The discrepancy between Russian strategic communication before 24 February 2022 and its actual performance on the battleground in Ukraine is striking. US and other allies' assessments of Russian (and Ukrainian) military capabilities were significantly mistaken, while the errors were systemic in nature and scale. Unless there are systemic remedies, the miscalculation is bound to repeat.

The Ukrainian Armed Forces have inflicted significant material losses and human casualties on the Russian military. It will take years for Russia to replace the lost equipment and rebuild its stocks of ammunition, whereas its ability to do so will depend on the availability of modern foreign technology. Replacing experienced officers – especially captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels who have been killed or wounded – will take even more time. It will depend on how many junior officers are motivated to continue to serve in an organisation that has failed so miserably to meet its objectives.

That said, there is no reason to believe that Russia's strategic nuclear forces would suffer from the same problems as its army, air force, and navy. Also, it is highly likely that Russia is still able to pose a threat to critical infrastructure, including energy and underwater cables that are crucial to global communication systems.

There is room for neither Western optimism nor complacency. European nations slashed their defence budgets and armed forces structures after the end of the Cold War. They did not invest in future advanced capabilities and continued to use their remaining forces in yesterday's wars: low-intensity counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa. Legacy equipment was in many cases not put in long-term storage – like in Russia – but exported. It is, therefore, unavailable today, when European nations are looking to build heavier forces, equipped with main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and artillery.

After 2014, most European countries – as well as Canada – embarked on the long road to redeveloping capabilities for collective defence but have in many cases not yet succeeded due to limited political will to allocate the necessary funds. Also, a lack of urgency has led many European allies to postpone the delivery of modern capabilities, often well beyond 2030. Hence, instead of buying off-the-shelf weapons systems, significant investments have been made that may deliver results only in the distant future. More often than not, modern weapons systems and platforms are acquired with insufficient ammunition stocks and spare parts needed for a sustained armed

conflict.[11] These limited stocks are now under pressure because they have to be used to support Ukraine. The damage that Ukraine, with Western support, is now inflicting on the Russian military gives Europeans additional time to finish their modernisation programmes and be prepared before Russia can reconstitute its battered forces.

Ukraine gives Europeans additional time to finish their modernisation programmes and be prepared before Russia can reconstitute its battered forces

The decisions taken at the 2022 Madrid Summit to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence posture only partially addressed the Baltic states' concerns related to heavy dependence on rapid reinforcements to deter and defend against Russian aggression. While the new generation of military plans will make reinforcement a more credible option, the notion of forward defence that was discussed publicly in the run-up to the Madrid Summit has not fully materialised.

A key lesson of the war is that industrial-scale warfare is back. Despite its manifest deficiencies, Russia's defence-industrial complex is better suited to prosecute war at such a scale than most of its Western equivalents. The character of Russia's war in Ukraine – high-intensity warfare with excessive consumption rates that drive the requirement for defence equipment, ammunition, and other supplies – has revealed critical bottlenecks related to European and US defence-industrial production capacity. This capacity has been sufficient for the small-scale production needed for low-intensity operations but does not meet wartime requirements. Also, rapidly increasing defence spending has brought to light red tape and other deficiencies of defence procurement organisations that prevent them from executing high-volume orders to the industry. Furthermore, recent issues related to the export of military equipment from Switzerland, Israel, and Germany to Ukraine are likely to have an impact on the future procurement decisions of European nations. While Germany, in principle, would also be expected to export military equipment and supplies to other EU and NATO member states in wartime, the demonstrated slow decision-making of German authorities and the relatively close integration of the largest Swiss defence companies with, for example, German Rheinmetall will not make bids from German companies look particularly attractive.[12]

Despite its manifest deficiencies, Russia's defence-industrial complex is better suited to prosecute war at such a scale than most Western equivalents

4. (Re)learn Rapid Decision-Making and Escalation Management

During the past three decades, military and political decision-makers in Western capitals have often taken for granted that there will be time for lengthy deliberations before taking decisions about the use of force. Despite having recognised the need for more exercises to improve decision-making that involve NATO Headquarters and the capitals, NATO allies still have a long way to go to improve responsiveness.

One takeaway from the invasion of Ukraine was that decision-makers – even when presented with intelligence about an imminent Russian attack – lost valuable time and/or failed to act. Ukraine itself could have mobilised earlier and dispersed its forces to a greater extent than it did prior to 24 February 2022. Thus, while the strong intelligence capability of the US and the UK is a positive takeaway, the failure of many allies to take that intelligence seriously is something to be avoided in the future.

[11] Tobias Heimbach, "Bundeswehr will smarte Munition für 900 Millionen Euro kaufen, die auch in der Ukraine zum Einsatz kommt [Bundeswehr wants to buy smart ammunition for 900 million euros, which is also used in Ukraine]," *Business Insider*, 12 October 2022; Joseph P Chacko, "Minister exposes how much ammunition France holds for a long conflict," *Frontier India*, 18 March 2022.

[12] Steve Hendrix, "As missiles strike Ukraine, Israel won't sell its vaunted air defense," *The Washington Post*, 12 October 2022; Michael Shields, "Swiss veto Danish request to send armoured vehicles to Ukraine," *Reuters*, 1 June 2022.

Another observation has been the fear, visible among some Western nations, to further escalate matters by supporting Ukraine with the military equipment and supplies that it needs to liberate temporarily occupied territories and restore its sovereignty. The fear of escalation has prevented faster, more extensive military assistance to Ukraine, which has prolonged the war and cost many Ukrainian lives. NATO allies have understandably wished to avoid two things, which in theory could happen together or separately: a direct NATO-Russia military conflict and a nuclear war. Yet contradictory messages from different allies regarding Western commitments and possible responses to the use of nuclear weapons by Russia have weakened Western nuclear deterrence and been unhelpful in terms of preventing escalation. Furthermore, Western restraint has not changed Russia's determination to destroy Ukraine's independent statehood and its readiness to use all means necessary to achieve this goal. Western uneasiness with escalation as such and the perceived inability to manage it weakens NATO's deterrence and raises legitimate concerns among NATO members bordering Russia about how hesitant allies would be in a collective defence scenario.

One takeaway from the invasion was that decision-makers – even when presented with intelligence about an imminent Russian attack – lost valuable time and/or failed to act

Western restraint has not changed Russia's determination to destroy Ukraine's independent statehood and its readiness to use all means necessary

A third observation is the incoherent Western messaging regarding Russia, both before and after 24 February 2022. NATO's dual-track approach, consisting of deterrence and defence combined with openness to dialogue, is interpreted differently by individual allies. Some nations have underinvested in defence while increasing their dependence on Russian energy and maintaining economic relations with Moscow. This led Russia to underestimate the potential Western response both in 2014 and 2022, and undermined NATO's deterrence, as well as the security of Ukraine and other allies.

This experience calls for more NATO Crisis Management Exercises, tabletop exercises, and scenario-based discussions to improve decision-making and therefore the credibility of NATO's deterrence and collective defence. It also underlines the need for more delegated authorities to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who must be provided with the tools to respond to Russian aggression against the alliance. Allies should coordinate their contacts with Russia in NATO and in the EU to minimise misunderstanding and avoid negative effects for Ukraine and other allies.

5. Strengthen the EU as a Geopolitical Actor Complementary to NATO

In the past few years, the EU has been actively debating the prospect of European strategic autonomy. The unexpected (by most Europeans) return of full-scale war to Europe has brought a new sense of realism to these discussions. The concept of strategic autonomy has been controversial and divisive. The Eastern member states in particular have stressed the indispensable role of the US in European defence and pointed to the failure of most EU member states to take defence seriously. Perhaps the most confusing aspect of the EU debate on strategic autonomy is that there has always been agreement among member states that EU defence policy is "complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members," and the EU has not aimed to take over this role.[13] Therefore, the EU has had neither serious intention nor capability to become an autonomous entity taking care of its own security and defence – and yet the concept of strategic autonomy has been extensively used. However, it has been a commonly agreed upon goal in the EU – strongly supported by the US – to work towards strengthening European defence capabilities and increasing its ability to take more responsibility for its own security.

[13] The European External Action Service, *EU Strategic Compass for security and defence* (Brussels: The European External Action Service, March 2022).

The war in Ukraine has underscored the indispensable role of the US in European security. The US has provided more military, economic, and humanitarian support to Ukraine than all the EU countries and EU institutions combined.[14] Those who call for a stronger Europe will not be taken seriously until they address this discrepancy. Not only do European states possess less military equipment than Ukraine requires, but many – including the largest EU member states – have also been more politically hesitant than the US to provide strong military assistance. This reflects the tendency of Europeans, described above, to view diplomacy and the use of military force as alternative approaches. Furthermore, France and Germany in particular still hope that by limiting their military assistance to Ukraine they can keep the door open to talks with Russia and improve their chances of reaching a diplomatic solution. At the same time, Russia has continued to create new reality on the ground through force and sees the US as the only serious partner in possible negotiations, as European security depends heavily on it.

The war has underscored the indispensable role of the US in European security

Nevertheless, despite not being a military power – or partly because of this – the EU has played an unexpectedly strong role in responding to the war and supporting Ukraine.

The EU and NATO have played complementary roles in Europe's efforts to respond to the war

The EU's strong involvement stands in contrast to NATO, which has placed renewed emphasis on strengthening the defence of its members, while making it very clear that it wants to avoid the war in Ukraine expanding into a NATO-Russia war. The EU and NATO have played complementary roles in Europe's efforts to respond to the war. The EU has contributed in three important ways.

First, the EU has clearly been on Ukraine's side and has provided support from the early stages of the war, which is not a self-evident choice for an organisation that has usually taken the role of a mediator, crisis manager, and peacebuilder in external conflicts. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has been among the most visible and consistent European leaders in supporting Ukraine. It is of great symbolic importance that the EU has decided to fund military assistance to Ukraine using the European Peace Facility, which would have been unimaginable before 24 February.[15]

Second, the EU was quick to harness its economic power and impose unprecedented sanctions on Russia. From February 2022 onwards, the EU has adopted eight packages of sanctions, which came on top of the more limited restrictive measures applied since 2014. In the medium to long term, these measures will cause severe damage to the Russian economy and constrain Russia's ability to maintain its military power.[16] The obvious limitation of sanctions is that their impact is gradual and long-term, and they have thus far not decisively reduced Russia's ability to wage war in Ukraine.

Third, the EU took a major strategic decision in June 2022 to grant candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova. Ukraine has been asking for EU membership perspective ever since the 2004 Orange Revolution. The EU's refusal until June 2022 was partly motivated by justifiable concerns about its capacity to absorb new members and Ukraine's readiness to meet the accession criteria. However, geopolitical considerations also played an important role, with several member states being reluctant to provoke Russia by expanding the EU to include countries that the Kremlin saw as part of its sphere of influence. The Kremlin most likely saw the EU's caution as encouragement, as it indirectly acknowledged Russia's right to a privileged role in the post-Soviet space and showed the EU's reluctance to support the right

[14] Kiel Institute for the World Economy, "Ukraine Support Tracker: A Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine," last modified on 11 October 2022.

[15] EU military assistance through the European Peace Facility totals €3.1 billion; European Council, Council of the European Union, "EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine," 20 October 2022; US military assistance since January 2021 has been $18.5 billion, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military affairs, *U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military affairs, 4 November 2022).

[16] Maria Demertzis, Benjamin Hilgenstock, Ben McWilliams, Elina Ribakova, and Simone Tagliapietra, "How have sanctions impacted Russia?," *Bruegel Policy Contribution*, no. 18/22 (October 2022).

of Ukrainians (and other Eastern European countries) to choose their own orientation. Now that caution has been replaced by a clear strategic goal that anchors Ukraine to the EU.

In the coming years, Ukraine will remain at the top of the EU's new geopolitical agenda. The EU has to tackle three major tasks simultaneously: continue military support to help Ukraine restore its territorial integrity and defend itself; assist the country to rebuild from the ruins of war; and launch accession negotiations. Ukraine's successful integration into the EU is an important element of building sustainable security in Europe. Russia's war against Ukraine has pushed the EU to become a stronger geopolitical actor, despite it not being strategically autonomous.

Ukraine's successful integration into the EU is an important element of building sustainable security in Europe

The war is also having an impact on EU defence policy. Member states have made major commitments to increase their defence spending, and there is scope to utilise the EU's defence cooperation instruments in this process. Previously, EU defence policy had focused on (potential) crisis management operations outside the Union. However, nothing prevents the use of the European Defence Fund (EDF), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and other EU defence instruments to strengthen the capabilities also needed for NATO defence – and in any case, all capabilities developed in the EU framework are in principle also available for use in the NATO framework. It is more important than ever to strengthen EU-NATO cooperation and the role of EU defence policy complementing NATO.

6. Minimise Economic Dependence on Russia and Ensure the Long-Term Weakening of Russia's Military Capability

The idea of positive economic interdependence played an important role in the EU's approach to Russia during the past decades. Even before the end of the Cold War, the German *Ostpolitik* initiated by Chancellor Willy Brandt advanced economic cooperation with the Soviet Union and its satellites, expecting trade to have a positive impact on political relations and security. The same thinking motivated the growing dependence of Germany and several other European countries on Russian oil and gas, leading to the construction of the Nord Stream pipelines. Economic interdependence and integration had greatly helped foster peace and security among EU member states after WWII, so the idea of extending this model beyond the EU seemed attractive. The US also believed in the positive political impact of economic integration. After the end of the Cold War, it was a shared goal of the West to integrate Russia and China into the global economy, hoping that this would promote economic – as well as political – liberalisation. However, the development of Russia and China has defied such expectations.

The preconditions for positive interdependence to develop in EU-Russia relations were always weak. Trade relations were hugely unbalanced and asymmetrical: in recent years, Russia accounted for approximately 6% of total EU trade, while the EU's share of Russian trade was 37%.[17] At the same time, the EU's most significant imports from Russia were fossil fuels, which created an unhealthy dependence that Russia was willing to exploit for geopolitical purposes. The Russian understanding of interdependence was fundamentally different from that of the EU – rather than believing in the virtues of interdependence, Russia was keen to strengthen its autonomy (with limited success) and see dependencies as tools of influence. It was also part of Russian strategic thinking to see economic interests as subordinate to the state's security interests and geopolitical goals.[18] Unlike most Western countries, the Baltic states saw economic dependence on Russia as a security risk and made a strategic choice in the early 1990s to reduce economic ties with Russia and replace them with a Western orientation. By 2003, on the eve of Estonia's accession into the EU and

[17] European Commission, "EU trade relations with Russia," accessed on 16 October 2022.

[18] András Rácz and Kristi Raik, "Weakened Preconditions for Positive Interdependence," *Post-Crimea Shift in EU-Russia Relations: From Fostering Interdependence to Managing Vulnerabilities*, ed. Kristi Raik and András Rácz (Tallinn: EFPI/ICDS, May 2019), 269-276.

NATO, Russia only accounted for 3.9% of its exports and 8.6% of its imports.[19]

Rather than believing in the virtues of interdependence, Russia was keen to strengthen its autonomy and see dependencies as tools of influence

Tightening great power rivalry has forced Western countries to reassess their understanding of the relationship between an open economy and security, as well as to make efforts to reduce the vulnerabilities created by dependencies on authoritarian powers. The EU's efforts to eliminate its dependence on Russian fossil fuels is an important part of this process. It should lead to lasting change, irrespective of the outcome of the war in Ukraine.

Severe trade restrictions should be pursued until Russia abandons its imperialist stance

Russia's poor performance and losses in Ukraine should be no reason to underestimate its potential to inflict damage and rebuild its capabilities. EU and US sanctions must be maintained after the war with Ukraine to limit Russia's ability to rebuild its military and threaten transatlantic security. During the Cold War, the US applied severe trade restrictions against the Soviet Union, targeting strategic goods. The sanctions limited the military capability of the Soviet Union and contributed to the fall of the Soviet empire. A similar approach is needed now and should be pursued until Russia abandons its imperialist stance towards its neighbouring countries.

7. Don't Try to Democratise Russia

The end of the Cold War unleashed a major wave of democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe. In the early 1990s, that wave also seemed to embrace Russia. However, the democratisation process soon experienced setbacks. In 1993, President Boris Yeltsin violently crushed public protests and dissolved the Congress of People's Deputies by decree in order to be able to push through a new constitution with very strong presidential powers.[20] In 1996, Yeltsin won the presidential elections through manipulation, legitimising the idea of controlled elections and paving the way for Russia's turn to authoritarianism under Putin's leadership from 2000 onwards.[21] The market-economic reforms implemented during the 1990s created huge socioeconomic inequalities and rampant corruption, delegitimising the new system and discrediting the very idea of democracy. The democratic experiment of the 1990s is associated in Russia with chaos and degradation – a perception that Putin has been keen to reinforce in order to solidify his authoritarian rule as a guarantor of stability. It is also noteworthy that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the efforts to establish a democratic system in Russia did not lead to the dissolution of the KGB, the main agency of Soviet-era repression, which resumed that role under Putin, himself a product and representative of the KGB system.[22] As a colleague noted, democratic principles such as "individual liberty, property rights, and judicial autonomy never struck deep roots in Russia."[23]

West's Russia policy continued to be based on wishful thinking about Russia's eventual democratisation and modernisation

In the 1990s, the West was keen to support Yeltsin as a liberal and reform-minded leader, challenged by the communists as the main opposition force at the time (and to this day). In so doing, it accepted and even supported Yeltsin's actions that in fact undermined Russia's democratisation. In the early years of Putin's rule, and again when Medvedev took

[19] Alari Purju, "Foreign trade between the Baltic States and Russia: trends, institutional settings and impact of the EU enlargement," *Electronic Publications of Pan-European Institute*, no. 14/2004 (2004).

[20] Michael McFaul, "Russia's Road to Autocracy," *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (October 2021): 11-26.

[21] Andrei Kolesnikov, "The Road From 1996: Russia's Failure of Democracy," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* 22 June 2016.

[22] Catherine Belton, *Putin's people: How the KGB took back Russia and then took on the West* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

[23] James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013), 117.

over the presidency in 2008, the West's Russia policy continued to be based on wishful thinking about Russia's eventual democratisation and modernisation, while in reality, Russia was gradually becoming more authoritarian. In the 1990s, the West had some influence on Russia because of the latter's strong dependence on Western economic support. In the 2000s, Western influence waned as the Russian economy entered a period of strong growth, supporting Putin's aspiration to restore Russia's great power status and sphere of influence.

The West should acknowledge that it has limited influence on Russia's domestic developments

Learning from the post-Cold War era, the West should acknowledge, first, that it has limited influence on Russia's domestic developments. The direction of Russia's future development will be chosen by the Russians themselves. Second, there is limited support for democracy in Russian society.[24] The past two decades of tightening authoritarian rule have suppressed civil society and created a high level of apathy and mistrust among citizens, which has been evident in the low level of protests against the war in Ukraine and mobilisation. It is hard to see strong pro-democracy forces emerging in Russia any time soon. Although such forces do exist, they are small in size; moreover, many of their representatives have emigrated from Russia in recent months and years. The eventual end of Putin's regime will not change this reality overnight. Rather, it is likely that Putin's successor will emerge from within the system and represent a similar worldview and values. In such circumstances, a Western strategy to democratise Russia would not be viable or realistic.

Conclusions

It is high time to abandon yet another slogan, popular in post-Cold War Europe, that "there can be no European security without Russia." If this were the case, Europe would be doomed to live with insecurity for years, possibly generations to come. In fact, the opposite is true: there can be no security *with* Russia until profound transformations take place. Thanks to the NATO umbrella supported by the US, Western Europe was relatively secure, stable, and prosperous during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union was a far stronger power than Russia is today. In the coming years, the US and Europe – working through NATO and the EU – will have to rebuild and reinforce their ability to defend and protect themselves against the threat posed by a weakened, but no less dangerous Russia. What is required today is clear strategic choices, maintenance of transatlantic and European unity, and serious investment in European defence capabilities. Finally, looking to the future beyond Putin's regime, it will be crucial to base Western forward strategy on an objective assessment of Russia's actual development and not wishful thinking.

There can be no security with Russia until profound transformations take place

[24] According to a survey conducted by Levada in 2021, 44 % of Russians considered themselves to hold democratic beliefs, while 47 % had the opposite view. See: Yuri Levada Analytical Center, "Democracy, socialism and market reforms," 20 October 2020. However, some of the Russians who expressed support to democracy thought that Russia was a democracy, whereas just over 10 % supported Western-style liberal democracy. See: BTI Transformation Index, "Russia Country Report 2022," accessed on 9 November 2022.

RECENT ICDS PUBLICATIONS

REPORTS

Teperik, Dmitri, Solvita Denisa-Liepniece, Dalia Bankauskaitė, and Kaarel Kullamaa. ***Resilience Against Disinformation: A New Baltic Way to Follow?***. October 2022.

Jermalavičius, Tomas, Max Bergmann, Peter Crail, Thomas O'Donnell, Tomas Janeliūnas, and Tõnis Idarand. ***Developing Nuclear Energy in Estonia: An Amplifier of Strategic Partnership with the United States?***. September 2022.

Arjakas, Merili, Hille Hanso, Kristi Raik, Peeter Raudsik, and Vladimir Sazonov. ***Estonia's Co-operation with the EU's Southern Neighbourhood: Strategic Objectives and Focus***. August 2022.

Jermalavičius, Tomas, Tomas Janeliūnas, Andrian Prokip, Iliya Kusa, Alan Riley, Pier Paolo Raimondi, Andrei Beliy, and Miguel Sainz de Vicuña. ***Geopolitics of Europe's Hydrogen Aspirations: Creating Sustainable Equilibrium or a Combustible Mix?***. May 2022.

Haugevik, Kristin, Piret Kuusik, Kristi Raik, and Niels Nagelhus Schia. ***Small States, Different Approaches: Estonia and Norway on the UN Security Council***. November 2021.

Teperik, Dmitri, Grigori Senkiv, Dmytro Dubov, Oleh Pokalchuk, Illia Miroshkin, Oksana Iliuk, Anastasiia Apetyk, and Larysa Snihur. ***Resilient Ukraine – A Delicate Mosaic? Society, Media, Security, and Future Prospects.*** November 2021.

Stoicescu, Kalev, with contributions from Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean, Liana Fix, Artūrs Bikovs, Agnieszka Legucka, and Keir Giles. ***Dialogue with Russia. Russia Needs to Reset Relations with the West.*** June 2021.

BOOKS

Raik, Kristi, Frank Jüris, and Bart Gaens, eds. ***Nordic-Baltic Connectivity with Asia via the Arctic: Assessing Opportunities and Risks***. Tallinn: ICDS Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, 2021.

POLICY PAPERS

Klyszcz, Ivan U. K. "**Russia's Federal Subjects at War: Background and Implications**." October 2022.

Blockmans, Steven, and Kristi Raik. "**Ukraine's Path to EU Membership: How to Turn a Geopolitical Necessity into a Viable Process**." June 2022.

Shestopalova, Alona. "**Forgotten and Potentially Vulnerable: Why the Online Activity of Middle-Aged Women Matters During Global Information Warfare**." April 2022.

Denisa-Liepniece, Solvita, and Dmitri Teperik. "**Local Russian-language Journalism in the Baltics: Challenges and Perspectives for Building Resilient Communities of Media Professionals**." March 2022.

Raik, Kristi, Frank Jüris, Aimar Ventsel, and Tõnis Idarand. "**Estonia's Interests and Opportunities in the Arctic.**" June 2021.

ANALYSES

Juurvee, Ivo. "**Civil Defence in Ukraine: Preliminary Lessons From the First Months of War**." November 2022.

Värk, René. "**Russia's Conduct of Hostilities in Ukraine**." November 2022.

Värk, René. "**Russia's Legal Arguments to Justify its Aggression against Ukraine**." November 2022.

Heins, Jonas. "**Putin and Assad, Partners in Crime: Why Russian Forces Steal Wheat from Ukraine**." November 2022.

Gretskiy, Igor. "**A War of the Final Soviet Generation: Russia's Demography, Society, and Aggression Against Ukraine**." August 2022.

Crippa, Lorenzo. "**From Rome to Kyiv, Passing Through Moscow: Russian Strategic Narratives in the Italian Public Discourse on Ukraine**." April 2022.

Gowan, Richard. "**Estonia in the Security Council: A History in Three Crises**." March 2022.

Weitz, Richard. "**NATO's Hypersonic Challenge**." February 2022.

Lawrence, Tony. "**Command and Control for the CSDP: A Permanent Operation Headquarters for the EU?**" ICDS Analysis, January 2022.

All ICDS publications are available from https://icds.ee/category/publications/.


ICDS.Tallinn


@ICDS _ Tallinn


ICDS-Tallinn


www.icds.ee

International Centre for Defence and Security
63/4 Narva Rd., 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
info@icds.ee

ISSN 2228-2068