



# One Year on from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine – Priorities for European Security and Defence

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## Executive Summary

On Thursday, 9 March 2023, the IIEA and the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung co-hosted a half-day symposium reflecting on *One Year on from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Priorities for European Security and Defence*. The symposium was divided into two panels. The first was entitled *Defending Europe: Adapting to a New Threat Landscape* and the second was called *The Transatlantic Relationship*.

The first panel reflected on the direct military implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for European security and defence. The panel discussed how Europe faces a dynamic threat environment with dangers arising not only from direct armed attack against the state, but also from attacks against critical subsea infrastructure and from attacks occurring via cyber means. The panel discussed the need for European states to increase their investment in their security and defence capacities, not only over the short term in response to Russia's war, but also in the longer term to ensure that Europe is protected from future threats.

The second panel reflected on changing dynamics in the transatlantic relationship. This panel noted that Europe can no longer take American involvement in European security for granted. The panel noted that there is an increasingly large isolationist instinct within the American public and that this is filtering into American politics. The panel noted that this trend would affect both the current Biden Presidency as well as whoever takes office following the 2024 presidential elections. This panel also highlighted the need for Europe to shoulder a greater proportion of the burden when it comes to Europe's defence to ensure American commitment to European security in the medium to long term.

## Opening Remarks

At this event, co-hosted by the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) and the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), both the Director General of the IIEA, Alex White, and the Director of KAS UK Ireland, Matthias Barner, delivered brief opening remarks to welcome participants and attendees. In their remarks, both speakers thanked the organisers of the event for bringing an informed and expert audience together to discuss one of the greatest challenges which Europe has faced in the post-World War II era.

The importance of the role of think tanks in civil society was noted. In a world where there is an ever-increasing proliferation of platforms for debate, particular in the arena of social media, there are ever more limited spaces to engage in deep and informed discussion. Think tanks can create a space for informed debate and, importantly, can enable this debate to take place without discrimination. Think tanks are also well placed to bring dissenting voices together in a neutral space to discuss the challenges which Ireland, Germany, Europe, and the wider world face together, while simultaneously providing access to insight, information, and expertise.

Perhaps predictably, the implications of Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine loomed large in the discussion. It was noted that the Russian invasion of Ukraine began in 2014, and that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is best understood as a new phase of a conflict that has been raging for eight years. During those eight years, refugees from Ukraine as well as other Eastern European states had been warning Western European and North American states that Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its activities in the Donbass region of Ukraine were only the beginning and that conflict would inevitably escalate into the high intensity conflict which we can observe today. Furthermore, Europeans have had to come to terms with a lesson which it has learned previously, that policies of appeasement only lead to more violence from hostile revisionist states such as Russia.

## Panel 1: Defending Europe Adapting to a New Threat Landscape

This panel discussed the direct implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for European Security. It was noted that Russia's invasion was "Europe's own 9/11." In the context of Vladimir Putin refusing to acknowledge Ukraine's sovereignty and working to return Russia to its aggressive and imperialist past, Europe faces a choice of either a democratic or an authoritarian future. On this issue, it was noted that Ireland cannot be – and is not – neutral.

The invasion has had consequences for every European Member State. For Sweden and Finland, it has prompted them to apply to join NATO, as they seek to deter Russian aggression; for Denmark, the conflict has prompted deeper engagement with EU Common Security and Defence Policy; and for Ireland, the state has fundamentally reflected on all aspects of its security and defence policy, ranging from its neutrality to its outward defence posture.

It was acknowledged that the ambition of EU security and defence is only moving in one direction and that direction is up. There will likely be more pressure on Ireland to spend more on defence as well as to engage more on PESCO and initiatives such as the European Defence Fund.

Expanding the geostrategic picture, it was noted that the world itself is changing. The rapid advance of new technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI), virtual reality systems, blockchain technologies, and quantum computing are generating new threats at a rate faster than we can respond to them. Globalisation and the interconnectedness of the international system has transformed the realities of state sovereignty from simply being about protecting territorial integrity to ensuring the safety of society and the capacity to ensure that services such as power, internet, and water are maintained.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, with the notable exception of the Balkan Wars, Europe has enjoyed a prolonged period of relative stability, prosperity, and peace. Through the work of people like Robert Schumann, but also initiatives such as the Marshall Plan, Europe has been able to reconstitute itself into a bastion of stability, while also cementing the partnership between Europe and the United States.

Yet, over the past decade, Russia has worked to enhance its own power by seeking to erode the cohesion of Europe and the US. It has sought to exploit fissures in the relationship that were forming around some in the US who believe that Europe was "freeriding" when it comes to security, around Europe's fears surrounding the US pivot to Asia, as well as tensions between the EU and NATO. Yet, Russia's war in Ukraine, rather than seeding division, has in fact sowed unity amongst the allies and has engendered a renewed sense of common purpose.

Ireland's neutrality featured strongly in the debate. It was argued that Ireland's neutrality had historically been one of necessity, underpinned by its limited capacity for action. Yet, for some, over time, it has moved to become something of a convenience, justifying the refusal to invest in national security, before crystallising into expediency: Ireland used its neutrality to shape multilateral agendas.

Ireland's obligations to others in the defence space were highlighted, particularly around the need to invest in surveillance capacity and in protecting the state's maritime and air spaces. Ireland is responsible for 500,000km<sup>2</sup> of maritime space and over 90% of transatlantic flights move through Ireland's airspace. Yet, Ireland still does not possess a primary radar capability nor the means to intercept hostile aircraft in this space. To fill these gaps, the need to cooperate with others was noted and highlighted.

The panel also reflected on the important changes that were happening in Germany in response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. It was noted that often events in Berlin have implications which go far beyond Germany. It was acknowledged that in Germany, many did not see the war in Ukraine coming. Even in the lead up to the war, there were attempts to revive Minsk 2, talks designed to bring about an end to the fighting in Eastern Ukraine, and the Normandy format in order to attempt to diplomatically solve the crisis. Some in Germany were under the mistaken belief that Russia could be induced to be a responsible actor in global politics through appeasement and by adjusting agreements around the edges.

However, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked what has been termed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz as the *Zeitenwende*, a sea-change in how Germany not only approaches defence, but simultaneously in how it approaches geopolitics. What perhaps is most significant here, according to contributors to this panel, is that the *Zeitenwende* was not a self-contained foreign policy decision, rather Chancellor Scholz was noting that global politics itself was undergoing a *Zeitenwende* to which Germany would have to respond and adapt. Germany's response has been marked. Germany went from being initially only willing to send 5000 helmets to support the Ukrainian forces to ultimately sending advanced Leopard 2 tanks. In response to Russia's war in Ukraine, Germany has reaffirmed its commitment to reaching NATO's 2% spending target while announcing the creation of a 100 billion special fund to modernise the German Armed Forces.

Contributors to this panel reflected on how sustainable the *Zeitenwende* will be and what role Germany will ultimately have in any future European defence and security activities. It was acknowledged that there are ongoing fears that the German defence budget itself may not increase and that the special fund itself may already be becoming eroded by the effects of inflation. Meanwhile, it was also remarked that Europe lacks a natural leader in the arena of defence: the post-Brexit UK cannot bring Europeans together and is viewed by some as a divisive force; and France, though it may wish to lead, is seen by some as a leader without followers.

The panel's discussion was not limited to the consequences of kinetic conflict, and it also examined the implications of hybrid warfare and grey zone conflict. It was highlighted that we could see ever greater targeting of critical infrastructure in Europe in the context of Russia's war. Moreover, the technological race was simultaneously discussed. The risks of Europe falling behind in areas such as quantum computing, AI, and hypersonic missile capabilities were highlighted as an existential risk to Europe and Europeans. As Europe seeks to enhance its military capabilities in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it may not be enough to simply purchase equipment 'off the shelf', Europe may have to look to potential future threats and begin developing its own capabilities to best protect its citizens.



## Panel 2: The Transatlantic Relationship: Current State and Future Challenges

The second panel concentrated on how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has impacted the Transatlantic partnership both in terms of US-EU relations as well as the NATO alliance. Indeed, amongst the most optimistic elements of the symposium was the agreement that the invasion has revived the Transatlantic partnership. It has highlighted that the idea of 'the West', which stands for freedom, democracy, liberalism, and an open market economy, is not in decline as many had previously believed. Instead, the liberal order is very alive, but it exists within a multipolar world where alternative worldviews coexist and are growing stronger. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted that the so-called *Pax Americana* is an instrumental source of peace in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific regions.

Meanwhile, successfully managing and implementing sanctions, refugee flows and the fallout of Russia's attempt to instrumentalise energy markets, has enabled the EU to become a major security policy player, albeit one that is not leading the military element of the response, which remains largely in the hands of NATO countries. It was noted that the future of EU Strategic Autonomy in the arena of defence is very much in doubt, as no EU Member State wishes to foot the bill for it. The imperative of making the Transatlantic relationship more stable in the long term and less dependent on the personalities of individual US presidents was highlighted. Allegations that Europe was not paying for its own security invited criticism from Donald Trump and other Republicans, potentially undermining US commitment to NATO. Germany's 100 billion fund goes a long way to addressing this issue, but it is not enough. Sustained action and investment will be required, with suggestions that NATO's 2% of GDP recommendation should be a floor and not a ceiling for defence spending.

Burden-sharing between NATO's European and North American allies featured prominently in this panel. The US is not as willing to continue to invest in European defence and security as they have been previously. Many in the US expect European allies to shoulder the bulk of the kinetic defence provisions for the war in Ukraine and European NATO allies are going to be expected to provide 70% of conventional non-nuclear capabilities for the defence of Europe. Moreover, the NATO force structures are indeed changing to reflect this new expectation. In this new model, 300,000 troops will have to be made available to the alliance by 2025 with the bulk of these forces coming from European NATO allies. Though at present only ten out of thirty NATO allies meet the 2% NATO expectation, France, Germany, and many European countries along NATO's eastern flank have committed to increasing their military spending. Should Europeans fail to adequately provide for their own security, the US may indeed turn its back on Europe, leaving the continent with a major defence deficit. Given Europe's historic dependencies on the US security umbrella, NATO's European allies should work towards a fairer distribution of the military and financial burden for keeping Europe safe. The debate surrounding the need to discuss a nuclear Euro-deterrent, in the context of fears around US commitment to European security was also raised, however it was not the focus of any single discussion.

Turning to US Domestic Politics, the panel noted the increasing isolationist tendencies among the US electorate. It was noted that the American public is (perhaps predictably) on average not as concerned by Russia's invasion of Ukraine as Europeans are. The US' experience of failed interventions in the Middle East as well as the negative consequences of globalisation for American manufacturing has made portions of the American public less internationalist in its outlook and more inclined towards an 'America first' approach. Though Joe Biden has maintained a commitment to assist Ukraine in its defence, increasingly hard-right elements within the US Congress are working to stop the flow of arms and money from the US to Ukraine. Though these elements remain on or near the fringes of US politics, it was noted that this group does in fact hold considerable sway in the House of Representatives and amongst a certain segment of the US population.

In addressing the issue of a return of Donald Trump to the Presidency, it was noted that Mr Trump is not the only potential threat to the Transatlantic relationship nor the only Republican with isolationist tendencies. It was noted that the likes of Ron DeSantis, a contender for the Republican nomination, may move towards a more isolationist position in order to attract support from among Donald Trump's support base to win the Republican nomination for the presidential election in 2024.

As the public grows more fatigued by the war and increasingly isolationist, and as the 2024 election approaches, President Joe Biden may have to become more responsive to the domestic mood. This may have implications for the ways and means by which the US continues to support Ukraine in its war with Russia. Consequently, we may see a change in the level of support for the Transatlantic alliance under President Biden, though it would be expected to be less of a change should a more isolationist president take office.

The Transatlantic relationship has not been without its rocky moments and has managed to work through difficulties in the past. The panel noted the difficulties in NATO following Germany's and France's decision not to support the US in their invasion of Iraq in 2003, but the alliance ultimately survived.

The differences in the European and American approaches to China was also noted. Europe may have to choose sides in its economic relationships as the world undergoes a geopolitical realignment. As the challenge of navigating the present geopolitical environment divides the interests of Europeans and Americans, it will become even more important to focus on shared values and shared principles in maintaining a strong Transatlantic partnership.

# Conclusions

It is clear that Ireland, Germany and indeed Europe are responding to a *Zeitenwende* in global politics. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has ushered in a new security reality for Europe, and all European states will have to adapt to meet the new challenges posed by this environment.

## 1. Europe Faces a More Dynamic and Dangerous Threat Environment

Indeed, it has become increasingly clear that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not the only threat that Europeans must face. Rapid advancements in technology, in particular in the area of hypersonic missile systems, the challenges associated with AI, and developments in quantum computing have created a far more hazardous security environment and have created new threats apace. Likewise, states are threatened not just with potential direct armed attacks but must also face dangers from actors seeking to disrupt the normal functioning of society through cyber means or by targeting critical infrastructure. No one state possesses the ability to unilaterally defend themselves in this environment, and it will be necessary to work together to ensure that Europeans are protected from harm.

## 2. American Involvement in European Defence Can No Longer be Taken for Granted

Indeed, the involvement of the United States in Europe's Security and Defence can no longer be taken for granted. The American public is becoming less interested in being involved in international affairs and does not want to commit American soldiers and dollars to wars in faraway places. American politics is responding to this changing public mood too. Though perhaps most closely associated with the presidency of Donald Trump, this inclination towards isolationism is increasingly forming a more regular part of American politics. Even if Donald Trump does not receive the Republican nomination for the 2024 Presidential Election, it is possible that whatever candidate receives the nomination might have similar isolationist tendencies. As the election grows nearer, President Biden may also have to recalibrate his support for Ukraine in order to position himself for the 2024 election race.

## 3. Europeans will have to take ownership of their security and defence

Ultimately, the developments and issues raised at the symposium highlight an increasing need for Europeans to take more responsibility for their security and defence. European NATO members will likely have to shoulder a much greater financial and military burden for defending Europe. NATO's 2% spending target may increasingly serve as a floor, rather than a ceiling, for the defence spending of European NATO allies. Russia's war in Ukraine may temporarily increase defence budgets, but European states will likely also have to engage in long term investments in their militaries in order to ensure that they are able to adequately respond to both present and future threats.

Finally, a sense of responsibility reverberated throughout the two panels. There was an acknowledgement by several contributors that Europeans had neglected their responsibilities in ensuring that Europe was adequately defended and that, ultimately, those who have something to contribute must contribute to European defence and security into the future.

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