NIAS-Europe Studies Brief

Ukraine crisis: Relooking the Security Debates in Europe

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The European defence architecture has been defined by its quest for balance between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as established by the European Union (EU) post-1993.[*] In the past few decades, NATO and the EU have worked together, in accordance with their respective strengths and capabilities to handle different crises. While NATO has assumed the tasks related to combat, the EU has focused on post-conflict stabilisation with Afghanistan being the most cogent example of this division of labour. However, the geopolitical churnings in the past few years - such as the Crimean Crisis of 2014 and the Trump Presidency - have led the European leadership to re-look at the security architectures established in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Cold War. The conversations regarding an independent and strategic security architecture were already underway when the Ukrainian crisis of 2022 added renewed momentum for defence integration within the EU.

This paper looks at development of the security architecture of Europe and analyses the impact of the Ukrainian crisis on the EU's defence integration. It highlights the steps taken by the member states individually and collectively, and provides major takeaways from the security debates in Europe following the outbreak of the crisis.

Development of European Security Architecture
The devastation in the aftermath of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War resulted in a European security architecture that was centred on a balance of conventional power backed by nuclear deterrence. The idea was to not only prevent large-scale aggression but also to limit conflicts within the continent. The architecture was developed at two distinct levels - first at the transatlantic level with NATO and second at the European level with the initiatives first taken by the European Community and later by the EU.

The development of the European security architecture can be understood by analysing various periods of its development with each period defined by the era's most pressing geopolitical challenges. The first period during the Cold War (1947-1989) was defined by antagonism between two superpowers and the security guarantees for Europe were provided under the combined umbrella of the US and NATO. The second period from 1990-1999 was the decade following the end of the Cold War which saw a rapid expansion of NATO to include members from central and eastern Europe, the establishment of the EU, and a reappraisal of security structures under the Common Security and Foreign Policy.

The third period from 2000-2013 witnessed the only time Article 5 was invoked (by the US) in the history of NATO in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The period saw a resurgence of

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NATO as its role expanded and it took part in operations outside its traditional geographical space. For the Europeans, the period was marked by the expansion of the Union to include ten central and eastern European countries in 2004. The period also witnessed divergences emerge within the EU over its response to the US actions in Iraq - the new members pushed the EU to play a proactive role in the American mission compared to the older members, such as France and Germany, who favoured restraint. This period also saw the beginning of the economic crisis in the EU in 2007-8 that led to a reorientation of the attention of member states towards economic recovery, with security policies taking a backseat. The fourth period from 2014-2022 began with the European leadership re-focusing on security issues following the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. The NATO allies committed to spending two per cent of their GDP[1] on security and defence at the Wales Summit. Moreover, with the growing ambivalence of the US's commitment towards European security during the Trump Presidency, a strategic rethinking over security began in Europe. The period also saw the release of the Global Strategy of the EU in 2016 which set in motion the integration of European defence structures. The current fifth period commenced with the Ukrainian crisis in February 2022 which moved the debate from security integration to the need for a drastic overhaul of the European security architecture to better reflect the shifting priorities of contemporary European security.

The following section provides a brief analysis of the structures as they developed at the transatlantic and European levels.

NATO

Twelve founding members[2] of NATO "resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security,"[3] when they signed the North Atlantic Treaty on 04 April 1949, making the alliance the core security provider for the West. The North Atlantic Alliance (another term for NATO) was established to counter the threats posed by the Soviet Union[4] and was backed by the nuclear deterrence provided by the US. For 45 years during the Cold War period, this was the sole purpose of NATO. However, with the end of the Cold War, the challenges before NATO have diversified to include hybrid and cyber warfare. However, the core of the Alliance continues to rest on three integrated pillars[5] comprising collective defence, common interest, and values and faith in the UN Charter.

In the post-Cold War period, the Alliance evolved into an outward-looking organisation from its Cold War character of a military coalition designed for warfare against the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. During this period, NATO expanded to become an organisation of 30 member states and undertook varied operations beyond its traditional areas of interest. It has also adapted itself for expeditionary interventions and acting as the force integrator in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Closer home, it worked to strengthen its eastern borders following the 2014 Crimean crisis by establishing new command centres in eight member states (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) and bolstered its maritime defences in the Black Sea region by creating a new multinational force in Romania.

European Security Initiatives

During the Cold War period, European security was guaranteed by the US and NATO, giving the fragile European Community time to integrate politically and economically. The European Community also made attempts to carve out a defence identity for the region. One such attempt was made in the 1950s with the French proposal of establishing a European

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[1] "The Wales Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond," NATO, 5 September 2014,
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112985.htm
[2] Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States
[3] "The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C.," 04 April 1949, nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm
[4] "A Short History of NATO," NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm
[5] "The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C.," 04 April 1949, nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

Defence Community; however, the initiative did not gather enough support from other members as their focus was on economic and political stability and integration. Another attempt was made in the 1970s with the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which defined the security principles for the European regions as respecting the territorial integrity of each of the participating states and refraining from making each other's territory the object of military occupation, as no such occupation or acquisition will be recognised as legal.[6] With the end of the Cold War, signatories of the CSCE signed the Charter of Paris for New Europe which added an important caveat that the signatories "fully recognised the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements."[7] This clause is particularly significant as this (freedom of a state to choose whatever security arrangement it wants) has been cited to have been breached by Russia in the current Ukraine crisis.

With the establishment of the EU in 1993, European defence integration gained momentum with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) becoming a critical pillar. The idea behind the common policy was that "the Member States of the EU make their weight felt internationally."[8] The next step towards the integration of European defence was taken in 1999 at the Cologne European Council and the establishment of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) which enabled the EU to "use civilian, police and military instruments to cover the full spectrum of crisis prevention, crisis management and post-crisis rehabilitation."[9] Under this mandate, the EU launched multiple crisis management operations in Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa, and eastern Europe. Thus far, it has launched over 30 missions including military, civil, and police missions.

Period of Stagnation

However, from 2005 onwards, there was a period of stagnation due to the failure of the adoption of the Constitutional Treaty which was followed by the economic crisis in 2008. While the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 institutionalised the achievements of the CSDP and further expanded the Union's policy and scope, the economic crisis led to the reprioritisation of the economic integration and stabilisation of its currency, the Euro. This led to security concerns taking a back seat.

This reprioritisation also led to chronic disinvestment by the member states in their respective defence expenses resulting in their militaries losing their capabilities. According to Pierre Morcos and Colin Wall,[10] "European navies lost 32 percent of their main surface combatants (frigates and destroyers) between 1999 and 2018. Collectively, Europeans had 197 large surface combatants and 129 submarines in 1990 but only 116 and 66 respectively in 2021. Europe's combat power at sea is considered to be half of what it was during the height of the Cold War." The reduction of military budgets also created substantial defence capability gaps in European states. This was witnessed during the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 where the European allies were unable to evacuate their citizens without logistical help from the US. These shortcomings were further exposed during the recent Ukraine crisis[11] where the European countries were struggling to supply Ukraine with weapons and ammunition.

Towards Strategic Autonomy

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[6] 'The Helsinki Process and the OSCE', https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/c/39501.pdf

[7] 'Charter of Paris for a New Europe', OSCE, Paris, 1990, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/6/39516.pdf

[8] 'Aims and characteristics of the CFSP', Federal Foreign Office, Germany, https://www.auswaertigesamt.de/en/aussenpolitik/europa/aussenpolitik/gasp/-/228304

[9] 'Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)', Federal Foreign Office, Germany, Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) - Federal Foreign Office (auswaertiges-amt.de)

[10] Pierre Morcos and Colin Wall, 'Are European Navies Ready For High-Intensity Warfare?' War on the Rocks, January 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/are-european-navies-ready-for-high-intensity-warfare/

[11] *Financial Times*, 1 December 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/a781fb71-49bb-4052-ab05-a87386bf3d5e

Over the course of the past decade, several issues led the EU to seriously contemplate the revival of its defence programme. First, the 2014 Crimean crisis catalysed NATO's European allies to commit at the Wales Summit to meet the Alliance's target of spending two per cent of GDP on defence. Second, the 2016 Brexit vote proved to be a rude awakening for the Union regarding the implications of its main security and military contributor exiting, thereby creating a substantial capability gap. Third, the growing ambivalence of the US policies towards Europe as it refocused its attention towards the Indo-Pacific. The cumulative impact of these developments was the strategic rethink within the EU regarding its defence policies and integration. The release of the *Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* in 2016 was the first step towards articulating the EU's vision of an independent security architecture.

With the release of the policy and the election of President Trump increasing uncertainty in the US policy towards Europe, the idea of an independent European defence policymaking gathered renewed pace in 2017. To increase its military capabilities, the EU launched a comprehensive defence package in 2017 which included four components. First, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) aimed at enhancing cooperation among EU member states in different formats such as joint training and exercise or acquisition and development of military equipment. Its scope varied extremely, from developing new capabilities to the harmonisation of requirements or training.[12] Currently, there are over 60 projects at various levels being implemented under PESCO. Second, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) aimed at monitoring the defence plans of member states to help coordinate their spending and identify possible collaborative projects. The first CARD was launched in 2019 and completed in 2020.[13] Through this review, a total of 55 collaborative opportunities throughout the whole capability spectrum were identified. The second CARD cycle (2020-2022) called for an increase in defence spending following Russia's aggression against Ukraine which represented both an opportunity and a challenge for European defence.

Third, a European Defence Fund (EDF) was set up to coordinate and increase national investment in defence research and improve interoperability between national armed forces through annual work programmes structured along thematic and horizontal categories of actions. The Fund has been allocated EUR eight billion[14] for 2021-2027 of which EUR 2.7 billion was meant for collaborative defence research and EUR 5.3 billion for collaborative capability development projects complementing national contributions. Fourth, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) was established as a permanent operational headquarters for military operations of up to 2500 troops deployed as part of the CSDP. The MPCC assumed command of non-executive EU military missions, which currently include the EU Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia, EUTM République Centrale Africaine (RCA), EUTM Mozambique, and EUTM Mali.[15]

While the EU was in the process of implementing these initiatives, the Ukraine crisis added momentum to the idea that European defence needs to be strengthened through its independent efforts and by strengthening NATO.

Ukrainian Conflict - A Crisis of Many Firsts

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[12] 'Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)', Europa, https://www.pesco.europa.eu/

[13] 'Coordinated Annual Review on Defence', European Defence Agency, https://eda.europa.eu/what-we- do/EU-defence-initiatives/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-(card)#:~:text=CARD%20provides%20an%20overview%20of,pathfinder%20for%20defence%20cooperative%20activities.

[14] 'European Defence Fund', European Commission, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf_en

[15] 'The Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)', EEAS, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/military-planning-and-conduct-capability-mpcc_en

There is no denying that the Ukraine crisis has led the debates on a complete overhaul of European security structures and the need for independent decision-making on defence within Europe. The urgency for defence integration was visible in French President Macron's remarks at the Versailles Summit in March 2022 where he said "Europe must prepare itself for all scenarios…Europe must prepare itself to be independent of Russian gas, to be independent to ensure its own defence".[16] Even as the crisis initiated the process of strengthening NATO, it has also provided a fresh impetus to the EU and its member states to take key policy decisions in terms of defence integration.

A Unified and Strengthened NATO

The relevance of NATO as a security alliance has been questioned since the end of the Cold War. While the Alliance worked towards remaining a crucial security provider for the European countries, it faced its severest criticisms in the past few years ranging from the French President's comment on the 'brain death' of NATO in 2019, to former US President Trump discrediting the Alliance altogether and the destabilisation it faced due to US' unilateral exit from Afghanistan. With the Ukraine crisis, NATO is facing its most difficult challenge since its inception. However, the crisis has resulted in strengthening the Alliance, which was evident by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's statement, "If Kremlin's aim is to have less NATO on Russia's borders, it will only get more NATO. And if it wants to divide NATO, it will only get an even more united Alliance."[17]

Part of strengthening the Alliance included fortifying NATO's eastern borders. At its March 2022 summit, NATO announced the increase in the number of its Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) missions to eight, with new battlegroups for Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria to "reinforce Allied deterrence and defence"[18] in the region; in 2017, NATO had approved four EFPs to be deployed in the Baltic countries and Poland. Moreover, in response to the Ukraine crisis, it activated, for the first time, part of its Rapid Reaction Force, which is a multinational force consisting of air, sea, land, and special operation forces that can be deployed quickly to support the allies. It also increased the strength of the Force from 40,000 to 300,000 troops and enhanced its prepositioned forward equipment. In addition, NATO has been helping the member states in the delivery of humanitarian and non-lethal aid to Ukraine. To further strengthen itself, NATO adopted its new Strategic Concept[19] in June 2022 which outlined the priorities for the Alliance in the next decade. One of the key assessments made in the Strategic Concept was the realisation that "the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace…We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity." The document also made a marked reference to the enlargement of the Alliance and reaffirmed the decision taken at the 2008 Bucharest Summit and all subsequent decisions concerning Georgia and Ukraine; at its 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO had welcomed Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership and agreed that these countries would become members of NATO. However, it remains to be seen how the process would pan out given the emerging security situation.

While these initiatives represent a renewed push towards strengthening the Alliance, the critical issue of burden sharing remains. There is no denying that the members have committed to a robust NATO, however, many of them fall short of their commitment to spend two per cent of their GDP on defence. While this is not a new commitment, only nine

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[16] *Euronews*, 10 March 2022, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/03/10/eu-leaders-meet-in- versailles-to-discuss-the-ukraine-war-and-energy-independence

[17] 'Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg', Munich Security Conference, 19 February 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_192204.htm

[18] 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg', Extraordinary Summit of NATO Heads of State and Government, 24 March 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_193613.htm

[19] NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, Madrid Summit, NATO, June 2022, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

states out of 30 have met the threshold[20] (see Figure 1 for defence spending by NATO member states). Burden sharing and increase in defence spending remain critical issues in the wider transatlantic relations with the US pushing its European allies to fulfil their commitments.

Figure 1 - Defence Spending by NATO Member States
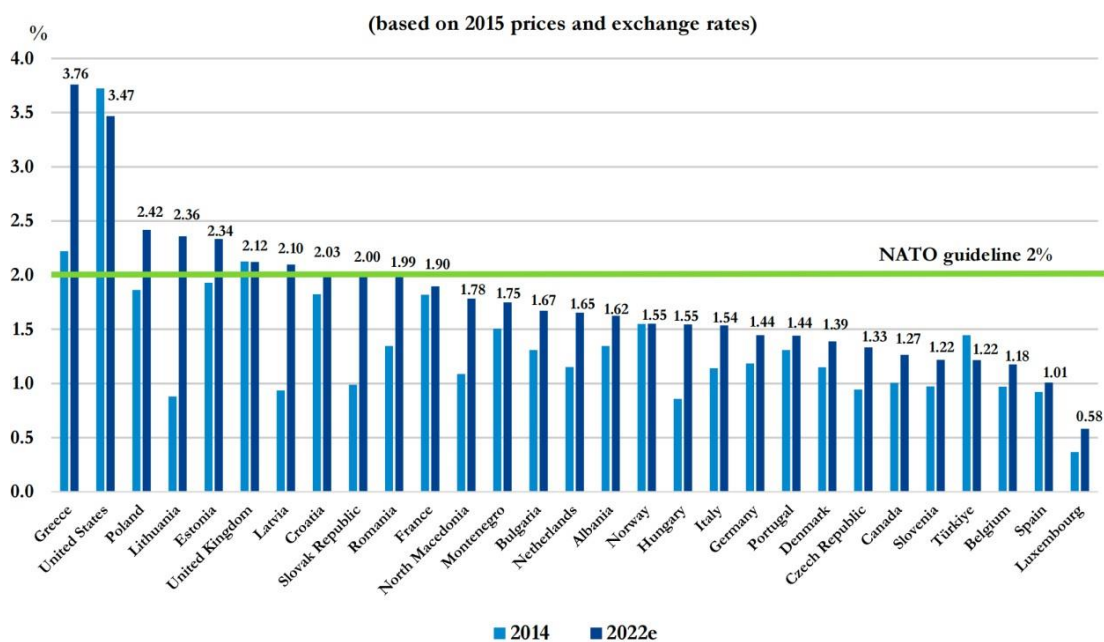
Source: NATO. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf

The Ukraine crisis has also compelled the neutral countries in the continent to re-evaluate their security architecture as evidenced by the prospects of NATO expanding towards northern Europe. Iceland, Denmark, and Norway have been part of the Alliance since 1949, but Sweden and Finland have remained neutral. Though they were part of various initiatives under the EU, they were not members of NATO. Following the crisis, the Prime Ministers of Sweden and Finland reiterated that "Russia's invasion of Ukraine had changed Europe's whole security landscape and dramatically shaped mindsets in the Nordic countries"[21] and formally applied to join the Alliance in May 2022. Following the signing of a trilateral memorandum with Turkey,[22] which had initially objected to Finland and Sweden joining NATO, all 30 members signed the accession protocols at their June 2022 Summit.

Both countries would bring highly advanced military and civil defence capacities and expertise at sea, land, and air to the Alliance. Their accession would expand NATO's border

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[20] Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2022), Press Release, NATO, 27 June 2022, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf

[21] *The Guardian*, 13 April 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/13/finland-and-sweden-could-apply-for-nato-membership-in-weeks,

[22] After the initial opposition to Sweden and Finland's membership application by Turkiye – the three countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 28 June 2022. In the MoU, Stockholm and Helsinki committed to extend their full support to Turkiye against threats to its national security. To that effect, Finland and Sweden will not provide support to YPG (People's Protection Units)/PYD (Democratic Union Party), and the organisation described as FETO (Fethullah Terrorist Organization) in Turkiye. Both countries also confirmed that the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) is a proscribed terrorist organisation and committed to prevent activities of the PKK and all other terrorist organisations and their extensions. The agreement further stated that both the Nordic states will have no national arms embargoes in place for Turkiye. Additionally, they will address Ankara's pending deportation or extradition requests of terror suspects, which is to be done in line with European treaties.[v] With the signing of the MoU, Turkiye withdrew its opposition to the membership application of the Nordic countries, paving way for NATO to formally invite them to join the Alliance.

with Russia and bolster the Alliance's collective defence in northern Europe. Russia has already warned Sweden and Finland against joining the Alliance arguing that "it would not bring stability to Europe as the alliance remains a tool geared towards confrontation."[23] With both countries now pushing for membership, it symbolises a critical re-posturing in Europe as it marks the end of neutrality and military non-alignment that Sweden has followed for more than 200 years and Finland, since its defeat by the Soviet Union during World War II. In addition, both countries also overturned their policy of not supplying arms to war zones. They were the first to announce their intent to support Ukraine through arms transfer. Sweden provided 10,000 anti-tank weapons and other military equipment along with EUR 572 million in military aid.[24] Finland[2525] has sent 11 tranches of military aid to Ukraine bringing its total contributions to EUR 189.2 million.

EU - Towards a Geopolitical Union

As the crisis unfolded, the EU has emerged as a proactive player showing unprecedented unity and rapid decision-making. It utilised all the available tools be it sanctions, diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and military support. What stands out in its response is that it activated the European Peace Facility to support the Ukrainian army. It introduced the possibility of the EU delivering lethal aid to a third country. Thus far, through the EPF, the EU has provided over EUR 3.1 billion[26] in financial support to Ukraine's armed forces. It also invoked the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time in the EU's history which granted protection to the Ukrainian refugees, including rights to residence, labour market, medical assistance, and education. To support people in Ukraine directly, the EU also announced a significant package of humanitarian and financial aid. The EU also implemented coordinated sanctions on Russia along with its allies. It has put in place ten rounds of sanctions[27] on Russia that cover economic and individual measures, a ban on transactions with the Central Bank of Russia, expulsion of Russian banks from the international SWIFT system, and most importantly, a ban on Russian coal and oil imports among others. In addition, along with its allies, the EU also implemented a price ban on Russian oil.

It also released its most awaited Strategic Compass for Security and Defence[28] in March 2022. The document outlined four key directives: -

> 1. *Act* - under this EU will establish a Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5000 troops for different types of crises and will become ready to deploy 200 fully equipped CSDP mission experts within 30 days, including in complex environment.

> 2. *Secure*, so as to anticipate, deter and respond to current and fast-emerging threats and challenges, and safeguard the EU's security interest, the EU will boost intelligence analysis capacities, further develop the Cyber Diplomatic Toolbox and set up an EU Cyber Defence Policy, develop an EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence and strengthen the EU's role as a maritime security actor.

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[23] *BBC*, 11 April 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61066503,

[24] 'Sweden will allocate an additional €17.9 million to support Ukraine', 27 December 2022, https://mil.in.ua/en/news/sweden-will-allocate-an-additional-e17-9-million-to-support-ukraine/#:~:text=In%20total%2C%20since%20February%202022,was%20allocated%20for%20military%20aid.&text=The%20Swedish%20government%20also%20allocated,%2C%20reconstruction%2C%20and%20reform%20support.

[25] *Euractiv*, 22 December 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/finland-sends-11th-military-aid-package-to-ukraine/

[26] Press Release, European Council, 17 October 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/17/ukraine-council-agrees-on-further-support-under-the-european-peace-facility/

[27] 'History of Restrictive Measures Against Russia over Ukraine', European Council, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over- ukraine/history-restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/

[28] 'A Strategic Compass for Defence and Security', EEAS, March 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf

3. *Invest* - to enhance defence expenditures to match the collective ambition to reduce critical military and civilian capability gaps and strengthen our European Defence Technological and Industrial Base.

4. *Partner* - in order to address common threats and challenges, the EU will: strengthen cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO, the UN and regional partners, including the OSCE, AU and ASEAN; develop more tailored bilateral partnerships with like-minded countries and strategic partners, such as the US, Canada, Norway, the UK, Japan and others; develop tailored partnerships in the Western Balkans, our eastern and southern neighbourhood, Africa, Asia and Latin America, including through enhancing dialogue and cooperation, promoting participation in CSDP missions and operations and supporting capacity- building.

At the national level, member states have committed to increasing their defence budgets. For example, eastern European countries such as Poland and Romania along with Baltic countries like Latvia have announced an increase in their defence budgets by 2.5-three per cent. In addition, countries that are considered neutral, like Ireland, have also declared their intent to increase their defence spending. However, the biggest development has been in Germany which reversed a few of its key policies such as its policy of not transferring lethal weapons to a conflict zone. Chancellor Scholz also announced a one-off sum of EUR 100 billion for investments and armament projects within the 2022 federal budget, in addition to committing to increase Germany's defence expenditure to two per cent of its economic output by 2024. Currently, the EU is well placed with all the required instruments for a European Defence Union. It has a single market, formulates its own industrial policies, and implements multi-annual budgets. The European Defence Fund, CARD, the Joint Task Force for Short-Term Procurement, etc. all demonstrate the EU's efforts towards defence integration. In addition, the EU's Strategic Compass brings together the different strands of initiatives and developments onto a single platform. It has all the pieces in place for effectuating the integration needed for a true Defence Union. The key question is whether this momentum and political will can be maintained.

Key Takeaways from the Conflict
The Ukraine crisis has altered the strategic outlook for European defence integration by highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of security and has provided the member states with a renewed impetus to further enhance their defence capabilities. Though it remains to be seen how much of this momentum can be sustained, the changes brought about to the security and defence landscape are set to define the future of defence integration in Europe.

While the EU has been working towards a comprehensive defence integration since 2017, the crisis has led to a realisation that the EU needs to bolster its defence capabilities to be recognised as a credible security actor. Even though the members have currently come together to support Ukraine through various measures, in the long term, significant efforts are required to strengthen NATO's and EU's deterrence and to formulate a comprehensive security framework with increased investments for enhancing their respective defence capabilities.

Second, the Ukrainian crisis has provided a fresh impetus to the member states to push for reforms, as evident from the reactions across Europe, but as the crisis drags on, the question that emerges is whether these initiatives will be sustained beyond just a knee-jerk reaction to the crisis. For instance, the push for increased European defence spending and defence integration is not new and French President Macron has been advocating for independent defence structures for the EU since 2017. However, budgetary allocations have been reduced for initiatives such as the European Defence Fund (from EUR 13 billion in 2018 to EUR

eight billion)[29] and Military Mobility Initiative (from EUR 6.5 billion in 2018 to EUR 1.5 billion)[30] under the multiannual financial framework for 2021–27.

Third, the push for comprehensive action on European defence will not remain forever. This is because, Europe has many other policy priorities such as post-Covid economic recovery, migration, climate change and the energy transition, and tackling inflation. This is further compounded by the fact that decades of declining defence budgets have led to a dramatic downsizing of European armed forces and generated major capability gaps. As witnessed with military engagements in Afghanistan, European armed forces had to rely on American support for critical capabilities such as air-to-air refuelling, strategic airlift, and reconnaissance and intelligence. The chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan highlighted these limitations, and European states were incapable of evacuating their citizens and allies without logistical support from Washington.

Fourth, despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US Department of Defense has continued to prioritise China, which the unclassified summary of the National Defense Strategy calls "our most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge." In short, the US pivot to the Indo-Pacific may have paused due to events in Europe, but it has not been cancelled. The need for the US to provide precious military assets to defend Europe against Russia, support its allies in Asia, and maintain other global commitments, such as in the Middle East, is set to strain Washington which will most likely require Europe to shoulder more responsibility in terms of its defence and security.

Fifth, while European countries, even those who had traditionally favoured normalisation of relations with Russia, showed exemplary unity in implementing the sanctions on Russia, the fissures in the unity have started to appear. The case in point is the ban on Russian oil imports. Even after intense negotiations, the member states initially failed to reach an agreement on the oil embargo. The unity on the crisis, and in particular, the future of defence integration, therefore, remains perilous.

Sixth, as the European states move towards a more independent defence policy, the question arises of the relevance of NATO for the European partners. Critics have argued that the policies initiated by the EU have made the member states divide their limited resources between the EU and NATO, thereby making them competitors. For example, the EU's defence initiative PESCO prioritises the development of the EU's defence requirements over NATO's by allowing member states to jointly develop new weapons. As many EU member states are part of the Alliance, it will be imperative that NATO collaborate with the European strategic institutions to bolster European security.

The range of developments in the defence and security sector within Europe over the past decade is significant, but it would be too early to say whether they represent a paradigm shift in European defence integration. There are fundamental challenges in sustaining the political will, developing the technical capabilities, and committing to the financial resources required to transform the EU into a militarily independent bloc capable of countering Russia, and acting independently of the US. Although the EU leaders are pushing for an independent defence policy, there is a realisation that it is going to be a long process for a credible European defence to emerge.

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[29] 'EU budget: Stepping up the EU's role as a security and defence provider', European Commission, 13 June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_4121
[30] Multiannual Financial Framework 2021 2027, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/mff_2021-2027_breakdown_current_prices.pdf

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