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Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and European Security: Preserving the Western Consensus on How to Deal with Russia

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What has been the impact on European security of Russia's invasion of Ukraine? This is, undoubtedly, a complex question and the ultimate answer will depend on the outcome of that war. There has been considerable pessimism in that regard, even among analysts who wholeheartedly support Ukraine's war effort.¹ Ukraine's defeat would result in an emboldened and more assertive Russia. A frozen conflict would most likely become a source of instability in Europe. Even Ukraine's victory may not necessarily mean the end of war, because ultimately, it will be up to Russia to give up its imperial pretensions and accept that its neighbours are sovereign states which are entitled to choose their own economic and security partners. Russia may end up choosing peace with its neighbours, but it is unlikely to happen any time soon. It is most unlikely if Russia comes up with some sort of victory in its war against Ukraine, justifying its current violent maximalist policy goals. This has led many to conclude that Ukraine's victory in the war – perilous as it is due to Russia's formidable nuclear capabilities – is the only viable path to a more peaceful Russia.

The specifics of the ongoing war fall beyond the scope of this paper, as the main emphasis of the analysis is on the war's implications for European security, not the war itself. The aim of the paper is to take stock of the extent to which Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has facilitated the convergence of EU and NATO member states' views on Russia. Thus, the impact of the war will be viewed through the lens of the extent to which the states that are members of the EU or NATO have managed to develop a shared understanding on

the security challenges that Russia poses to Europe, and the Baltic states in particular.

The underlying assumption of this study is that a shared understanding of the external threat and how to address it is the key to successful security policy. The subsequent sections focus on three key aspects of European security. The first section looks at the significance of strategic clarity in addressing a common threat. The second section examines the empirical evidence supporting the claim that European states now have a shared understanding of Russia and how to deal with it. Most EU states have come a long way since 2007, which is taken as the point of departure for the subsequent analysis. Indeed, EU member states' positions on Russia have hardened and become more aligned with the views of Poland and the Baltic states. The third section, however, looks at the implications for the Baltic states' security and potential problems with sustaining the consensus on how to deal with Russia. Although, at a very basic level, the positions of EU states are similar, and the military and economic aid to Ukraine has been almost unprecedented, it is likely that EU-wide consensus on Russia may prove to be elusive.

1. Strategic clarity

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its aftermath, heart-breaking as it is for Ukraine and its people, has revealed useful information to Western policymakers about Russia's intentions. There was already evidence that Russia was a revisionist power prior to 2022, but the evidence could be interpreted in a variety of ways, and there was little clarity as to the lengths to which Russia was prepared

¹ The authors of this article are clearly among those who wish Ukraine well and hope that it will defeat Russia and then win ensuing peace by becoming a prosperous and democratic country, firmly rooted in Western institutions.

to go to challenge the existing security order.² Revisionism is hard to detect in advance, albeit it seems that its sources are primarily domestic.³ Through their actions, however, states reveal information about their intentions. That information is precious in the sense that states would normally keep that information to themselves⁴ or manipulate it to deceive others.⁵ There is little wonder that international relations literature places such an emphasis on the clarity of the strategic environment that states may face.⁶ This clearly had far-reaching implications for EU and NATO member states, when they were in the process of estimating Russia's intentions.

Russia's key decision-makers had made it clear from 2007, that Russia was dissatisfied with the Western rules-based order and alleged US hegemony.⁷ It was clear that Russia's aim was to facilitate a global transition to multipolarity, which, in its view was inevitable⁸ and represented a more democratic form of global governance.⁹ The real question, however, was always about Russia's timeframe for transitioning to multipolarity and the means that Russia was willing to use to keep its sphere of influence in Europe and beyond.¹⁰ Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine largely provided answers to questions about what Russia wanted to accomplish in its foreign policy and the means that it was ready to use.

There were plenty of indications of Russia's greater foreign policy assertiveness in

the years that preceded its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. A key aim for Russia was to prevent European states from joining NATO, and Russia largely succeeded in achieving this aim by going to war against Georgia and then annexing Crimea in the wake of Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity. The frozen conflict in Moldova – a legacy from the times when the Soviet Union broke up in the early 1990s – effectively prevented Moldova from seeking EU and NATO membership. These measures, however, could be interpreted in a variety of ways. On the one hand, these could be seen as precursors of aggressive measures to roll-back Western influence in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, they could be interpreted as defensive measures driven by regime insecurity and aimed against the expansion of Western influence in states that are Russia's neighbours.¹¹

Moreover, attempts by Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia to facilitate closer relations with the EU and NATO went against Russia's growing military power. Russia not only wanted to keep its neighbours within its sphere of influence, but also increasingly had the means to do so¹², as was demonstrated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ensuing war in Ukraine's Donbas region. The use of military power came at the expense of Russia's soft power,¹³ but from Moscow's perspective, this was probably just the cost of doing business. Although Western policymakers were reluctant to accept Russia's *de facto* veto power over

² Angela Stent, "Russia and China: The Axis of Revisionists?" The Brookings Institution, February 2020, accessed on 2.10.2023, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FP_202002_russia_china_stent.pdf

³ Jason Davidson, "The Origins of Revisionist and Status Quo States", Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁴ James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations of War", *International Organization* 49:3, 1995, pp. 379-414.

⁵ Robert Jervis, "The Logic of Images in International Relations", Columbia University Press, 1989.

⁶ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, "Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics", Oxford University Press, 2016 (chapter 2).

⁷ Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference, February 10, 2007, accessed on 4.10.2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-Q58Yv6kP44&t=1s>

⁸ Samuel Charap, Dara Massicot, Miranda Priebe, Alyssa Demus, Clint Reach, Mark Stalczyński, Eugeniu Han, Lynn E. Davis, "Russian Grand Strategy: Rhetoric and Reality", RAND Corporation, 2019.

⁹ This is ironic, because Russia seemed to be in favour of a more inclusive global order, while President Putin simultaneously oversaw a deterioration of Russia's feeble democracy at home.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the aim of preventing further enlargement of NATO and the EU is not a sufficient indicator of malign intentions and foreign policy revisionism. That is, instead, a defensive strategy. Revisionist powers, however, are tempted to represent their interests as being defensive because that may elicit lesser opposition to its policies. Thus, Russia's policies towards its neighbours in the post-Soviet space were primarily aimed at retaining control, but Russia's foreign policy objectives may extend well-beyond that.

¹¹ Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin", *Foreign Affairs* 95:3, 2016, pp. 47-54.

¹² Dmitri Trenin, "The Revival of the Russian Military: How Moscow Reloaded", *Foreign Affairs* 95:3, 2016, pp. 23-29.

¹³ Toms Rostoks and Andris Sprūds, "The Different Faces of 'Soft Power': The Baltic States and Eastern Neighbourhood between Russia and the EU", Latvian Institute of International Relations, 2015

further EU and NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe, there was little that could be done to challenge Russia's policies. There was not enough evidence, however, that Russia was planning a major war in Europe and that it was ready to challenge NATO over its presence in frontline states such as the Baltic states and Poland. Russia could also be an opportunistic power that would actively use below-threshold instruments to weaken its neighbours and the West more generally. It might exploit existing fault lines and polarize societies, but it was unlikely to confront the West openly. An assessment of military and economic capabilities may not offer sufficient proof of a state's revisionist intentions, because great powers accumulate military power to defend their interests and intervene on behalf of their allies and clients. Thus, the debate prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, largely reflects uncertainty about Russia's intentions.¹⁴

The assessment of Russia's intentions began to change throughout 2021, when Russia amassed its forces near Ukraine's borders and issued a series of demands in mid-December to NATO. Putin's leverage Belarus grew considerably due to the deterioration of relations between EU/NATO and Belarus after the fraudulent presidential election in Belarus in August 2020. This provided Russia with the opportunity to threaten Ukraine, not just from the east and the south, but also from the north. This was the missing piece in Putin's invasion plan. Lukashenko's weakness and his dependence on Russia meant that Russia could use Belarus as the staging ground for the invasion. And yet, despite public warnings from the US intelligence community and political leaders,¹⁵ there was still some ambiguity about Russia's intentions and specific war plans. It was alarming that Russia was using its military to threaten Ukraine, but its actions could be interpreted as an exercise in coercive diplo-

macy, rather than a determination to invade. After all, the key aspect of coercive diplomacy¹⁶ is that a plausible military threat can be used to extract a concession from the adversary to avoid war. Since Russia had not been able to achieve its key objectives in Ukraine, it had the motivation to try to coerce Ukraine by using the threat of military invasion to that end.

The above considerations were put to rest by Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine. Three aspects of the invasion were of key importance when it comes to an assessment of Russia's intentions. First, the scale and audacity of Russia's invasion was astounding, and it soon became clear that Russia aimed at replacing Ukraine's pro-Western political leadership. Russia was not just aiming to coerce Ukraine into fulfilling Russia's demands. It wanted to assert control over Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies with potentially catastrophic consequences for Ukraine's citizens and frontline NATO members.

Second, the brutality of the invasion was shocking as evidenced by the horrific atrocities committed by Russian troops against both Ukraine's military and civilians. Torture and mass graves in Bucha and Irpin, as well as the brutal destruction of Mariupol, and deportation of Ukrainian children from the occupied territories bore evidence of what Russia's rule in Ukraine would be like if it were to succeed. Ominously, Russia's war against Ukraine includes elements of genocide.¹⁷

Third, Russia's invasion of Ukraine rang alarm bells in Western capitals because Russia had issued an ultimatum to NATO two months before the invasion. In the absence of this, one could still assume that Russia was a limited aims revisionist, and that it mainly wanted to keep hold of Ukraine,

¹⁴ John R. Deni, "What's Russia Doing in Ukraine? Its Latest Military Drills Provide Critical Clues", Atlantic Council, 23 November 2021, accessed on 03.10.2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/whats-russia-doing-in-ukraine-its-latest-military-drills-provide-critical-clues/>

¹⁵ Alberto Nardelli, Jennifer Jacobs, and Nick Wadhams, "U.S. Warns Europe that Russia May Be Planning Ukraine Invasion", Bloomberg, 11 November 2021, accessed on 25.9.2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-11/u-s-warns-europe-that-russian-troops-may-plan-ukraine-invasion?embedded-checkout=true>

¹⁶ Alexander L. George, "Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War", United States Institute of Peace Press, 1991.

¹⁷ Azeem Ibrahim, "Russia Is Attempting Genocide in Ukraine", Foreign Policy, August 3, 2023, accessed on 5.10.2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/03/russia-ukraine-war-genocide-bucha-izium-icc-war-crimes/>

Belarus, Moldova, and some other parts of the post-Soviet space, and that its revisionism did not apply to the states that had joined the EU and NATO in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It turned out that this was not the case. Had Ukraine collapsed in the early days of Russia's invasion, an emboldened Putin may have pressed further and demanded a reduction in NATO's military presence in Central and Eastern Europe, thus giving Russia a free hand in this region.

When it comes to a characterization of the specific ways in which Russia operates, its actions have two key characteristics. First, after Russia had identified the West as an adversary, it pursued behaviour that has been largely unconstrained. While the policy options of the Western states were limited by self-imposed constraints, Russia's behaviour was not. Importantly, Russia's repression at home has enabled aggression abroad.¹⁸ Over the past two decades, Russia has assassinated (or tried to assassinate) individuals on Western soil (Alexander Litvinenko and Sergei Skripal), annexed the territory of a sovereign state (Crimea), reduced cities to rubble by aerial bombing (Syrian war), and interfered in the electoral processes of other states (intervention in the 2016 US presidential election). To be fair, Russia's attempts to influence the West, undermine its unity, and to polarize its societies have often been conducted from a position of weakness, and Russia has tried to avoid retaliation for its actions. The point, however, is that Russia's behaviour has been largely unconstrained, which Moscow probably regards as a strength in its attempts to assert control over the post-Soviet space and undermine its Western adversaries.

The invasion of Ukraine offers substantial evidence of Russia's unconstrained behaviour. Its troops have committed mass atrocities, and its crimes against the civilian population appear to be widespread in occupied territories. Russia has targeted

railway stations crowded with people, trying to evacuate from Ukrainian cities, and has also launched missile strikes against shopping malls in broad daylight. In its attempts to break Ukraine's resistance, Russia has resorted to nuclear blackmail which included vague threats of a nuclear Armageddon and holding the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe, at risk. In the winter of 2022/23, Russia used coordinated missile strikes against Ukraine's energy infrastructure to attempt to make living conditions for Ukraine's citizens unbearable. In the spring of 2023, Russia blew up the Nova Kakhovka dam and flooded large swaths of Ukraine's territory, thus creating an ecological catastrophe. These actions demonstrate that Russia is ready to go to great lengths to achieve victory in its war against Ukraine, and probably sees the lack of clear limitations on its behaviour as a strategic advantage. Although Putin's conduct of the war against Ukraine is somewhat constrained by Russia's limited military capabilities,¹⁹ in terms of the menu for behaviour, it has few limitations.

Second, Russia has consistently demonstrated an ability to absorb the high costs of confrontation. Economic sanctions against Russia were imposed in 2014 after the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 by Russian-controlled separatist forces and intensification of the military conflict in Ukraine's Donbas region. Those sanctions have remained in place ever since, and unprecedented economic sanctions were imposed on Russia after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russia has tried to limit the damage of sanctions to its economy, but it has also doubled down on the policies that produced the sanctions in the first place.

Russia's readiness to absorb costs is even more apparent when its military casualties are taken into consideration. Although precise numbers of Russian troop losses are not available at this point, the total number of casualties – killed or wounded –

¹⁸ Daniel Treisman, "Putin Unbound." *Foreign Affairs*, April 6, 2022, accessed on 6.10.2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-06/putin-russia-ukraine-war-unbound>

¹⁹ Samuel Charap and Kaspar Pucek, "Rightsizing the Russia Threat: Whatever Putin's Intentions Are, He Is Hemmed In by Limited Capabilities", *Foreign Affairs*, October 3, 2023, accessed on 6.10.2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/eastern-europe-and-former-soviet-union/rightsizing-russia-threat>

extends into the hundreds of thousands. Russia's military recruited contract soldiers, starting from the spring of 2022. Partial mobilization was then announced in September that same year. Later, inmates from Russia's prisons were recruited to support the war effort. Although Putin's decision to start the war was a miscalculation, he was right about the readiness of ordinary Russians to endure suffering on behalf of Putin's regime.²⁰

As Russia was preparing for a long war, it demonstrated that neither high economic nor military costs could dissuade it from continuing the war. The war has revealed that Russia's weapons systems are technologically less advanced than those that have been provided to Ukraine by its Western partners. In addition, Russia's soldiers are less motivated and worse equipped than those of Ukraine. It seems though that the difficulties that Russia is facing on the battlefield will supposedly be compensated for by Russia's ability to incur higher costs than Ukraine can afford to suffer in this conflict. Although losing military equipment and troops negatively affects Russia's ability to attain its objectives in Ukraine, its readiness to absorb the high costs of the war also demonstrates resolve and may prompt political leaders in Western capitals to question the utility of continuing to support Ukraine in the coming years. Although it seems unlikely that Russia's capacity to absorb the costs will help it to prevail over Ukraine, it may still prolong the war.

All in all, Russia's behaviour in the past 15 years has gradually (and then suddenly) provided Western policymakers with strategic clarity regarding Russia's intentions and persistent behavioural patterns. The confrontational policies pursued by Russia were a cause for concern long before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, Rus-

sia's readiness to start and sustain a brutal war, the atrocities committed by its troops, and foreign policy ambitions extending beyond Ukraine, made it clear to Western policymakers that Russia was a major threat that had to be confronted despite the risks inherent in such a policy.²¹

As the war has gradually evolved into a war of attrition, a consensus that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was provoked by NATO's weakness rather than Russia's fear of a powerful NATO has begun to emerge among Western analysts and policy-makers.²² Although there is still room for debate on specific aspects of Russia's actions and the circumstances under which Russia would be ready to escalate beyond the current state of confrontation, strategic clarity has allowed Western policymakers to arrive at a shared understanding of the security challenges posed by Russia and the responses needed to deal with them. Thus, on the one hand, Russia has potentially become a more serious threat to European security, but, on the other hand, there is now a consensus within the transatlantic community that this is the case and that the threat posed by Russia requires a strong military, economic, and political response. As the next section demonstrates, however, disagreement on how to deal with Russia ran deep within the EU and NATO. The shared view that Russia must be confronted is a relatively recent phenomenon.

2. Political and practical assistance to Ukraine

This section looks at the origins of the West's Russia policy and traces its evolution over the past decades. It then looks at the assistance that has been provided to Ukraine and how the positions of EU and NATO member states on Russia have

²⁰ Stephen Walt, "What Putin Got Right", Foreign Policy, February 15, 2023, accessed on 6.10.2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/15/putin-right-ukraine-war/>

²¹ Bryan Frederick, Mark Cozad, Alexandra Stark, "Understanding the Risk of Escalation in the War in Ukraine", RAND Corporation, 2023, accessed on 4.10.2023, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RBA2807-1.html

²² Nataliya Bugayova, Kateryna Stepanenko, Frederick W. Kagan, "Weakness is Lethal: Why Putin Invaded Ukraine and How the War Must End", Institute for the Study of War & AEI's Critical Threats Project 2023.

changed over time. Overall, the threat that is posed by Russia to European security is neither new, nor unique. The cornerstone for European security has been transatlantic security cooperation. The emergence of NATO was the result of three security challenges to European security: the successful Soviet nuclear test in September of 1949, the communist takeover in China, and the communist invasion of South Korea in 1950. This resulted in NATO's policy that was aptly characterized by Lord Ismay: keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.²³

Europeans and Americans were capable and willing to adapt to the security challenges posed by the Soviet Union in the past. They have, however, been reluctant to confront the challenges posed to European security by Putin's Russia since the early 2000s, including Russia's invasion of Georgia since August of 2008, hybrid war and the occupation of parts of Ukraine since March of 2014. It was only when Russia launched an overt full-scale attack against Ukraine to fully occupy the country in February of 2022, that the European and American position on Russia changed.

Before Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it was tacitly acknowledged by many in Western Europe that Ukraine belonged to the sphere of Russia's special interests and privileges.²⁴ Germany pursued a special relationship with Russia for decades and developed a close economic relationship with it, thus funnelling billions of euros into Putin's pockets. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005) developed a close personal relationship with Russia's president and agreed to represent the interests of Russian companies after the end of his tenure as Chancellor. This Schröderization of German politics by having close ties with Russia received much criticism from such Central Eastern Europe-

an states as Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine. Even after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and aides like Jens Plötner, the foreign policy advisor to Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and Andreas Michaelis, State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have tried to make the case for closer ties with Russia, "a strong inclination towards Moscow" per the words of major Polish officials.²⁵

The change in Russia's relations with the West from the previous era, however, has been notable. In 2007, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) published "A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations" outlining the positions of European countries towards Russia. This report was published before Russia's attack against Georgia in 2008. The report identified five major diverging groups of states in Europe, based on the preferred relationship with Russia: 'Trojan Horses' (Greece and Cyprus), 'Strategic Partners' (France, Germany, Italy and Spain), 'Friendly Pragmatists' (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia), 'Frosty Pragmatists' (Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and 'New Cold Warriors' (Poland and Lithuania).²⁶ Although this division coincided roughly with the geographical location of EU member states and their proximity to Russia (with Russia's neighbours being more concerned about Russia's intentions and ambitions in Europe), there was more complexity to the states' positions vis-à-vis Russia than meets the eye.

The following paragraphs look at the subsequent trajectories of the EU member states in greater detail. The paradigm change will be assessed along the criteria which follows: countries which have remained strategic partners and the extent

²³ Tony Judt, "Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945", Penguin Books, 2006, pp. 150, 302.

²⁴ Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (President of the Republic of Latvia 1999-2007) shared the details of her conversation with French President Chirac in Élysée Palace during the annual Conference on Russia 2022 (panel discussion "The Return of History or the End of the World? The Russian Ultimatum to the West"), March 4, 2022.

²⁵ DW, "Germany: President Steinmeier Criticized for Russia Ties", 4.3.2022, accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-president-frank-walter-steinmeier-under-fire-for-russia-ties/a-61344699>

²⁶ Nicu Popescu and Mark Leonard, "A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations", ECFR, November 2007, accessed on 20.9.2023, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/a_power_audit_of_eu_russia_relations.

to which European powers have moved from friendly-frosty relations to new Cold-War warrior positions. The assessment looks firstly at the European countries which were the first to provide military aid to Ukraine for its defence against Russia's attack, the share of GDP that Europe committed to Ukraine, as well as the speed of delivery of military support and overall support to Ukraine. The second part focuses on how the European states have changed their political discourse toward Russia, which is underlined by their practical support to Ukraine. The subsequent analysis takes the ECFR report from 2007 as the starting point in assessing the extent to which the positions of European states have moved away from their pre-2008 positions.

2.1. Ukraine support alliance

Ukraine has received tens of billions of euros in military and economic aid since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. There are, however, only a few countries that have committed more than 0.75 percent from their GDP, up till now, to overall support for Ukraine.²⁷ These are, in descending order, Norway (1.7 percent of GDP), Lithuania (1.4 percent), Estonia (1.3 percent), Latvia (1.2 percent), and Denmark (1.1 percent). There is also a substantial group of countries that have sent 0.45 to 0.75 percent of their GDP in overall aid to Ukraine. Again, in descending order, these are Poland and Slovakia (0.7 percent), the Czech Republic and Germany (0.6 percent), and the United Kingdom and Finland (0.5 percent). These are the ten countries that have pledged the largest share of their GDP to provide overall support to Ukraine during wartime. Across the Atlantic Ocean, the United States and Canada have spent more than 0.3 percent each in their support to Ukraine while major European powers such as France, Italy and Spain have not even

pledged 0.1 percent to assist Ukraine during wartime (which is similar to Australia's and New Zealand's support to Ukraine while being physically located more than 10 time zones away from Europe).

The coalition of states which are supporting Ukraine more than others include the North American NATO partners, Germany, the Visegrad Group, the Baltic states and the Scandinavian countries. Southern and Western Europe are committing a many times smaller share of their GDP than the top ten Central and Eastern European and Scandinavian states which are in closer proximity to Russia.

By February 23 of 2023, or one year into the war, the Baltic states and Poland had not only been the first to deliver military aid to Ukraine, but have also been the leaders in providing military assistance to Ukraine. For example, Estonia had sent 1.1 percent of its GDP, Latvia – 1 percent, Lithuania - 0.7 percent, and Poland - 0.6 percent to directly support Ukraine's defence efforts. The importance part of this is not just the share of military aid, but also the speed of delivery in the most crucial first days of war.

Latvia and Estonia have topped the main donors. Each has sent around 1 percent of their GDP in military aid to Ukraine in just over six months from the beginning of the full-scale war, while Poland and Lithuania have sent more than 0.5 percent of GDP in military aid to Ukraine. Britain, the United States, Norway, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have been amongst the most ardent supporters.²⁸ While France and Germany were initially reluctant and have provided a much lower share of their GDP in terms of their military support to Ukraine, both of these major European powers have provided important air-defence capabilities.²⁹

²⁷ Christoph Trebesh et.al., "The Ukraine Support Tracker", 2023, accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/top-ics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

²⁸ Bilateral and EU financial, humanitarian and military aid from January to October of 2022 from the Statista Report "The Countries Pulling Their Weight in Ukraine Aid", accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.statista.com/chart/27331/countries-committing-the-most-of-their-gdp-to-ukraine-aid/>

²⁹ Visit Ukraine, "Struggle for Freedom: Which Countries have been Supporting Ukraine Since the Beginning of the Full-scale War and in What Way?", accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://visitukraine.today/blog/1532/struggle-for-freedom-which-countries-have-been-supporting-ukraine-since-the-beginning-of-the-full-scale-war-and-in-what-way>

Among non-EU member states, while Turkey has provided Bayraktar attack drones to Ukraine, it has also significantly delayed Sweden's accession to NATO. Furthermore, the United States is the top supporter to Ukraine politically and in terms of its aggregate aid, which includes such important military items as HIMARS MLRS, M2 Bradley armoured vehicles, Abrams tanks, and Patriot air defence systems, and now also ATACMS long-range missiles. Moreover, political support from the United States through NATO has rallied many of NATO's European members to support Ukraine more actively. The United Kingdom was among the most important early supporters of Ukraine. The British people and government were Ukraine's main allies both politically and in terms of military support. With the help of British weapons and London's political clout, it was possible to launch myriad Western military support activities. A very important form of support was the supply of Western tanks, which Ukraine needs so desperately to liberate its occupied territories.

One side of support is commitment (the speed and the share of support that each of the allies are willing to give to Ukraine to support it in its defence against Russia). Another side is the aggregate military aid that major NATO and EU countries (including the EU itself) have provided to Ukraine. The United States ranks as the top supporter with 47bn USD in military aid and equipment delivered to Ukraine from January 2022 to May 2023. Signifying a breach with pacifism against revisionist powers and its previous reluctance to embrace security principles in a bolder way, the EU stands as the second major supporter with 30bn USD in military aid to Ukraine. Germany is the third major supporter to Ukraine (8bn USD) while the United Kingdom is the fourth (7bn USD). Poland and the Netherlands have

spent more than 2bn USD on military aid to Ukraine, while Denmark, Canada, Finland and Sweden have spent more than 1bn USD to aid Ukraine's defence against Russia with military support.³⁰ In comparison, Europe has spent much more on Ukraine's and its own security than the aggregate support from the United States (including Canada), which is a significant indicator in assessing Europe's responsibility toward Ukraine's defence and its own security.

2.2. Changing course – a European shift

There has been a change in the perception of security within Europe that goes beyond military aid to Ukraine. The positions of key European powers on Russia have changed notably since ECFR's "power audit" report of 2007. Nowhere has this change been more notable than in France and Germany. France has always attempted to facilitate negotiations and talk to Russian's leaders, even when Russia has launched wars against its neighbours. Firstly, French President Nicolas Sarkozy in negotiations with then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, said Russia had agreed to pull back its troops from Georgia, but this agreement left the Russian military within Abkhazia and South Ossetia (allowing the occupation of around 20 percent of Georgian territory after the August 2008 war). Even if French President Francois Hollande called the seizing of Crimea "unacceptable annexation" and urged Putin to stop, it did not change anything.³¹ Furthermore, even though Emmanuel Macron has been a strong supporter of a bolder European defence pillar, his statements and actions at the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine only weakened his standing among his European allies, and degraded his credibility in the eyes of Putin.³²

³⁰ David Brown, Jake Horton, Tural Ahmedzade, "Ukraine Weapons: What Tanks and other Equipment are the World Giving?" BBC News, September 22, 2023, accessed on 25.9.2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62002218>

³¹ Reuters Staff, "France's Hollande tells Putin to Stop Crimea Joining Russia", Reuters, March 12, 2014, accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-hollande-idUSBREA2B15D20140312>

³² "Macron's Response to Russia's War in Ukraine," IISS, January 2023, accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2023/macrons-response-to-russias-war-in-ukraine>

With respect to Putin and Medvedev, successive French Presidents have pursued talks with them and embraced rational-pacifist policies. Even when Russia was using military aggression against its neighbours, the French leadership urged other European states to treat Russia with respect. It was only after more than a year into the full-scale war that Macron made a U-turn in his approach to Putin and Russia. Even though he missed his “Churchillian moment” at the outset of the war, Macron is now supporting Ukraine not only militarily, but also in its joining both NATO and the EU in the future.³³

With Germany, the turning point came with Olaf Scholz’s *Zeitenwende* speech. This was the moment that Germany abandoned its long-standing strategic thinking “*Wandel-durch-Handel*” principle, which had advocated for the engagement of Russia into European pacifist thinking through trade and cultural exchanges. In his remarks just a few days after Russia launched its full war against Ukraine Scholz asserted that “Putin is not just seeking to wipe an independent country off the map” but also that the Kremlin’s intent is “the demolishing of the European security order that had prevailed for almost half a century.”³⁴ He announced three important policy adjustments in response to this attempt by Russia to colonize an independent European country – Ukraine.

First, Germany would support Ukraine militarily in its effort to defend against Putin’s Russia which wants to restore or rebuild the Russian Empire. Second, Germany is committed to sending its troops to Lithuania, Romania, or the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean, or the North Sea to deter Putin and contain Russia, and to ensure efficient airspace policing within NATO.

Third, and most importantly, Germany would finally abandon its pacifist stance and commit to NATO defence principles by embracing the two percent spending rule. Moreover, in his remarks, Scholz mentioned the urgent need to reinvest in German military capabilities to compensate for the complacency the German government had shown as a NATO member.

Even though the initial vocal turn and novel policy declaration was sound and surprising, delivering on these promises has turned out to be rather difficult. In terms of military assistance to Ukraine, Germany has displayed a reluctance to take the initiative and assume leadership in supporting Ukraine. Instead, Scholz has been deferring to the United States to take the lead. This was very apparent in the Scholz government’s decision-making process in sending Leopard II tanks to Ukraine: he conditioned the contribution to the participation of Washington and the provision of Abrams tanks.³⁵

Furthermore, Germany’s constitution imposes direct and structural limits on spending, the so called “debt brake.” This obstacle is a principle designed to restrict structural deficits and safeguard the economy from overbearing debt.³⁶ Again, overcoming its pacifist thinking is one side of the story. Political debates and structural caveats are other obstacles on Germany’s road to overcoming its freeriding within NATO and committing to at least the two percent spending rule. The German economy would most certainly allow for the addressing of such shared European security interests.

Finally, successive governments have drastically reduced the capabilities of the

³³ Clea Caulcut, “Macron’s Slow but Bold U-turn on Ukraine”, Politico, September 12, 2023, accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-emmanuel-macron-ukraine-war-russia-uturn-vladimir-putin/>

³⁴ “Policy Statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin,” The Federal Government of Germany, February 27, 2022, accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

³⁵ Roland Freudenstein, “The Political Debate on Defence in Germany”, GLOBSEC Report, How Committed is Germany to a *Zeitenwende* in Defence? accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/How%20Committed%20is%20Germany%20to%20a%20Zeitenwende%20in%20Defence.pdf>

³⁶ David McAllister, “Structural Challenges Hindering Progress”, GLOBSEC Report, How Committed is Germany to a *Zeitenwende* in Defence? accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/How%20Committed%20is%20Germany%20to%20a%20Zeitenwende%20in%20Defence.pdf>

Bundeswehr since the end of the Cold War. The Bundeswehr faces severe deficiencies in equipment, and its operational capabilities are in dire need of modernization. The country's military stocks have reached alarmingly low levels, and Germany could only sustain combat operations for a few days, well below NATO's standard of 30 days.³⁷ This condition within the German military and the country's rather slow and sluggish approach to increasing military spending to the promised two percent, make us question the aptness of German military capabilities for military challenges in places like the Baltic States.

Up till now and presently as well, Germany has fallen short of meeting this objective, with its defence spending averaging 1.2 percent of its GDP.³⁸ While there is a war raging in Europe, the German military presence and its inability to provide necessary capabilities is undermining the European security objective, although the opposite had been promised by Scholz's *Zeitenwende*, much more than a year ago. The presence of 40-year-old analogue radios, which are easily intercepted, have only a short range, and lower power, imposes risks on such crucial battlefield functions as command and control, aside from the possibility that the enemy could even intercept its communications.

There has been a positive defence spending trend within NATO, especially since the beginning of Russia's overt attempt to occupy the whole of Ukraine. In descending order, Poland (3.9 percent of GDP for defence), the United States, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Romania, Hungary, Latvia, the United Kingdom, and Slovakia are committing to a level higher than the two percent spending rule.³⁹ A significant improvement when compared to just three NATO members having committed to the spending rule by 2014, these transatlantic partners are also the fastest and most ardent supporters of

Ukraine, militarily, financially, and politically against Russia's aggression. A positive trend in terms of European commitment to its own security is in place, but the political, military, and economic leaders of the EU, such as France (1.9 percent of GDP for the military) and Germany (1.6 percent) are still dealing with domestic structural, political and will obstacles in embracing the rules of the transatlantic security community.

Even though France's U-turn came rather late, and Germany's policy adjustments heralded by *Zeitenwende* have been difficult to implement, they are still substantial policy adjustments for these major EU powers. Even though the policy change for both major powers is slow, neither are even close to strategic partnership with Russia. One of the major reasons is Russia ignoring French and German leadership-clout within Europe. The United States and the United Kingdom are proving to be the politically decisive forces for Europe through NATO.

Even though there have been debates inside the United States-led NATO about the degree and duration of its support to Ukraine, more than 80 percent of Americans agree that the United States must stand up for vulnerable people globally. More than 60 percent agree that there should be enduring military support to Ukraine until Russia abandons Ukraine completely and Putin and his regime are defeated.⁴⁰ Although some ambiguity still remains, there has been a notable change of course by states which previously embraced strategic ambiguity and pragmatism. Support for Cold War containment in Europe has grown considerably.

There has been a shift away from friendly relations with Russia within Europe (See Table 1) Most of the Visegrad countries, the Baltic States and the Scandinavian countries have been the staunchest military, and overall, supporters of Ukraine – a new coalition inside

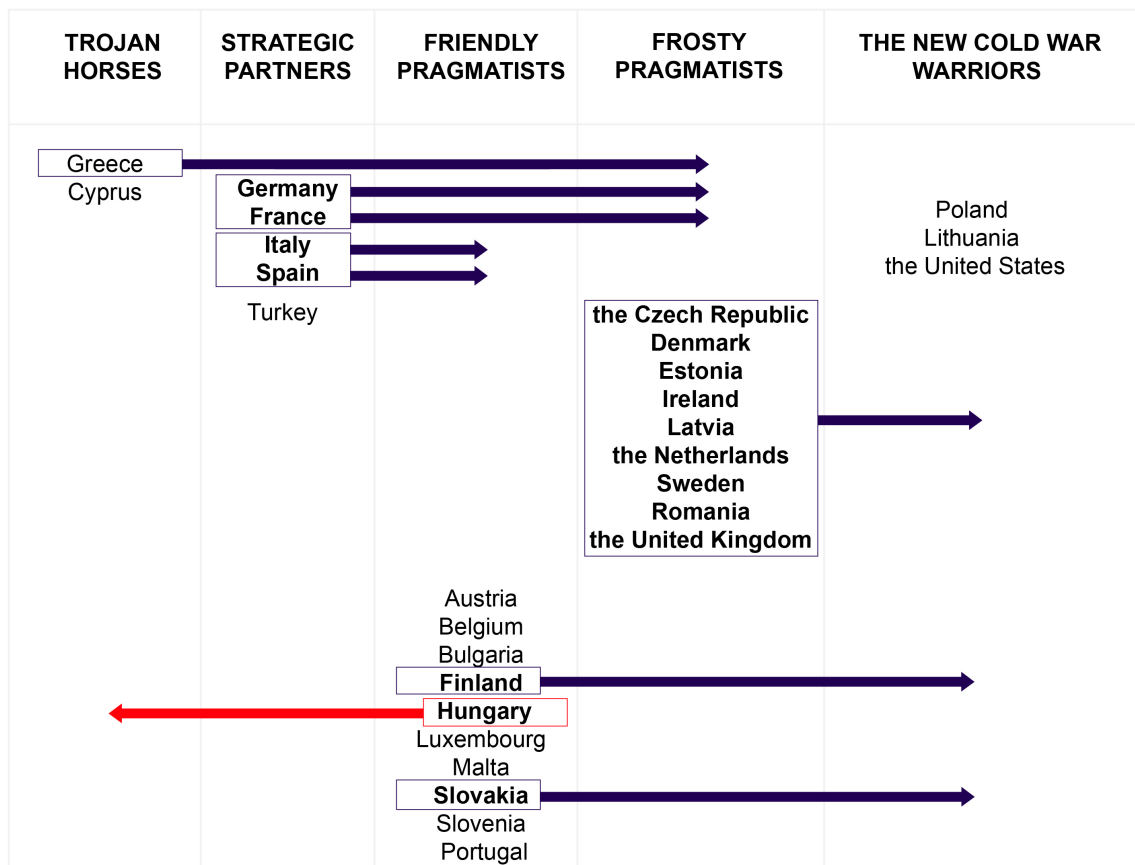
³⁷ David McAllister, "Gaps in Military Capabilities", GLOBSEC Report, How Committed is Germany to a *Zeitenwende* in Defence?, accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/How%20Committed%20is%20Germany%20to%20a%20Zeitenwende%20in%20Defence.pdf>

³⁸ Justyna Gotkowska, "Challenges and Progress: Navigating One Year of Change" GLOBSEC Report, How Committed is Germany to a *Zeitenwende* in Defence? accessed on 20.9.2023, <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/How%20Committed%20is%20Germany%20to%20a%20Zeitenwende%20in%20Defence.pdf>

³⁹ "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2023)" NATO's Press Release, accessed on 20.9.2023, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf

⁴⁰ "Majority of Americans Want the U.S. to Stand Up to Russia and Continue Aid to Ukraine", Razom, accessed on 26.9.2023, <https://www.razomforukraine.org/2023poll/>

Table 1. Changes in Europe: From Partnerships to Containment



Europe with a strong voice and political influence within the EU and NATO to support Ukraine. Importantly, formerly non-aligned Sweden and Finland are among the top supporters of Ukraine. They have also decided to join the transatlantic security community and Finland is now a NATO member, while Sweden's membership has been hostage to Hungary's and Turkey's political support in allowing other states to join NATO.

While both formerly non-aligned Scandinavian states are no more pragmatic, frosty or friendly, the formerly friendly and pragmatic Hungary has turned into a political and strategic asset for Putin against NATO enlargement even if only for a short time (in spite of its compliance with NATO's 2 percent spending rule). The political position of Hungary against European states joining NATO and against the EU's support for Ukraine has rendered this country a Trojan horse – leverage which Putin's Russia can utilize to frustrate EU decisions, the most recent example of this being the meeting between the Hun-

garian prime minister Victor Orban and the Russian president Vladimir Putin in China in mid-October 2023.

The Southern and Western European states are not very staunch or rapid providers of support of various kinds to Ukraine; thus, they remain pragmatic Europeans, due to the absence of salient support to Ukraine indicated in this report. The bottom line is that there are no more strategic partners for Russia in Europe anymore, only one salient state which has undermined support to Ukraine by vetoing EU support packages to Ukraine.⁴¹ Partnerships and pragmatism would only mean the search for an opening, when and if any political change occurs within Russia, that can end the war against Ukraine.

Conclusion – Implications for the Baltic states

What are the implications of the chang-

⁴¹ Jorge Liboreiro and Shona Murray, "Impasse Continues over Hungarian Veto on EU Military Aid for Ukraine," Euronews (October 2, 2023), accessed on 9.10.2023, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/10/02/impasse-continues-over-hungarian-veto-on-eu-military-aid-for-ukraine>.

ing European security environment for the Baltic states? This is a difficult question to answer during the best of times, and it is even harder to answer at a time when a major war is being fought on the European continent. The outcome of this war will determine what lies ahead for the Baltic states, because the outcome of the war will be the difference between a defeated or victorious Russia. A defeated Russia, as dangerous as it may be, will constitute a lesser threat to its neighbours. In addition, a defeat in its war against Ukraine may become the catalyst for domestic political change in Russia. A less aggressive and imperialist Russia may emerge as a result, although that is likely to be a lengthy process even in a best-case scenario.

The implications for the Baltic states, however, extend beyond the dynamics of the war between Russia and Ukraine. As much as the war has brought EU and NATO states together and facilitated the emergence of a shared understanding of the security challenge that Russia represents to European security, there are still two points for concern. First, the consensus on Russia that has formed since 2022, may turn out to be more fragile than it seems. The collective West has rallied to support Ukraine since the start of the war, and the above analysis demonstrates that political positions on Russia have converged with the original “Cold Warriors” Poland and Lithuania. There are still differences when it comes to their preferred outcomes of the war and the extent to which they are ready to provide military and economic aid to Ukraine, which can become a hostage to democratic election cycles, local preferences, and war fatigue. While political promises must be tested against practical implementation, one vivid example in Europe is the election of a pro-Russian political establishment in Slovakia. This domestic political adjustment could change military-political support to Ukraine from a key ally, Slovakia.⁴²

The Visegrad nations and the Baltic states want Ukraine to win the war and return to its 1991 territorial borders. Such an

outcome would reinforce the norm prohibiting territorial conquest, strengthen the ruled-based international order, deter potential aggressors who might contemplate territorial conquest elsewhere, establish preconditions for the revival of Ukraine’s economy after the war, and would partially redeem the suffering through which Ukraine has been dragged by Russia’s aggression. Although these are all desirable outcomes, there is seemingly no agreement among the EU and NATO states about the viability of such an outcome.

There are concerns that Ukraine may not have the strength to prevail over Russia militarily (even with Western military and economic support). In addition, there are concerns that Ukraine’s military victory would be highly destabilizing at that stage of the war when Russian forces are defeated and forced to retreat. Russia has repeatedly issued nuclear threats, both at the start of the “special military operation”, and also at various later stages of the war. Russia’s nuclear threats have also deterred Western allies from moving more quickly with deliveries of certain weapon systems, such as ATACMs, main battle tanks, and fighter jets.

Overall, there has been a notable reluctance on the part of Ukraine’s Western partners to do everything possible to ensure Ukraine’s victory. This was partly the reason why Ukraine’s much-anticipated spring counter-offensive could only begin in early June 2023. In addition, Ukrainian forces had to attack Russian positions without close air support. Germany’s reluctance to provide Ukraine with Taurus missiles is another case in point. Germany has not delivered Taurus missiles despite the United Kingdom and France having already sent Storm Shadow and Scalp-EG missiles to Ukraine. Germany’s reluctance, however, has been the result of concerns that Taurus missiles could be used by Ukraine to make the Crimean Bridge inoperable. Potentially, this boils down to the unwillingness of the German chancellor Olaf Scholtz to see German missiles striking the Russian bridge, which is a notable symbol of

⁴² Ketrin Johecová, “Slovakia Halts Ukraine Aid After Pro-Russia Fico’s Election Win” Politico (October 6, 2023), accessed on 9.10.2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-president-caputova-says-no-military-package-ukraine-aid-after-elections-results/>

Russian occupation to Ukrainians. In sum, there are still notable differences between the Baltic states and their NATO allies with regard to whether Ukraine can win the war and the extent and speed of military assistance to Ukraine.

There is some disagreement on issues that are already vital for Ukraine, but it is quite likely that there is more to come. Russia's unwillingness to scale down its ambitions in Ukraine has made assistance to Ukraine relatively easy. The sheer brutality of Russia's invasion has created a strong moral foundation for helping Ukraine. The voices advocating in favour of freezing the conflict have been made irrelevant by Russia's conduct of its military operation. Russia has targeted hospitals, shopping malls and energy infrastructure with the clear intent of making life for Ukrainians unbearable. Although unlikely at this point, this may, however, change in the coming months or years, and Russia may reach out with proposals on how to end the war. Russia has not attempted meaningful diplomacy to settle the conflict. Russia's intransigence has made helping Ukraine the only viable policy option. If this were to change, it may become more difficult to maintain the shared position on how to deal with Russia.

The postwar relationship with Russia and Ukraine is another issue where disagreement is to be expected. Although a decisive defeat of Russia and the collapse of Putin's regime is still possible, such outcomes are not likely. Support for Putin's regime might be shallow, but opposition to the regime and its confrontation with Ukraine and the West is still too weak. This means that Putin's regime may endure even after the active phase of the military conflict comes to an end. In this scenario, Ukraine would still be insisting on reparations for the damage that it has incurred during the war. Ukraine would also keep pressing the issue of prosecuting Russian war criminals for the crimes that were perpetrated during the war. And Ukraine would still expect to move ahead with EU and

NATO membership. If Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership has become a contentious issue, then Ukraine's EU and NATO membership has the potential to become an even more divisive issue within the EU and NATO. None of these issues will be simple to deal with, and disagreements among Western allies are likely to surface at every step. Nevertheless, what is clear at the moment is the present coalition that is supporting Ukraine and is being supported through enhanced cooperation between Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the Baltic states, as well as the Scandinavian countries.

Second, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has underlined the significance of maintaining a credible NATO deterrence and defence posture in the vulnerable frontline allies that may potentially become victims of Russia's aggression. Thus, the Baltic states were forced to pursue two objectives from the start of the invasion. First, the provision of military and economic assistance to Ukraine and, second, working with allies to bolster the NATO military presence in the Baltic region when the build-up of defence capabilities in the frontline states was lagging. While the main emphasis for the Baltic states has been on helping Ukraine and facilitating consensus within NATO in this regard, there has also been considerable progress in strengthening NATO deterrence in the Baltic region.

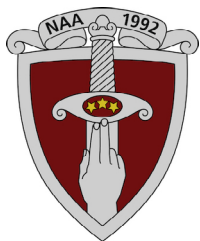
The outline for a stronger NATO defence posture was laid out during the Madrid summit. Moving from battlegroups to brigade-sized units "where and when required"⁴³ made a lot of sense, and helped the Alliance to maintain some flexibility in this regard. After all, if the war was to be over quickly with ensuing catastrophic consequences for Russia, keeping large forces in-place in the Baltic states may not even be necessary. As Russia has settled in for a long war and shows no signs of relenting, moving ahead with an increased NATO presence in the Baltic region has become

⁴³ "Madrid Summit Declaration: Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid 29 June 2022", NATO, June 29, 2022, accessed on October 6.10.2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm

necessary, although it may take several more years for the brigade-size units to materialize in the Baltics.

It is noteworthy, however, that the Baltic states have had to put pressure on their NATO allies for the brigades to eventually materialize. Although the NATO military presence in the Baltic region increased considerably after Russia had invaded Ukraine, there was a reluctance to commit brigade-size units for permanent stationing in the Baltic states. It took considerable time and pressure for Lithuania to convince Germany that it should contribute the entire brigade that would be deployed in Lithuania on a permanent basis. Latvia's dealings with Canada have also not been without disagreement about the size of the contribution that Canada should make to Latvia's security, and

it appears that Estonia has not been successful in convincing the United Kingdom to deploy a brigade-size unit on a permanent basis. Although there is little doubt that NATO allies would do whatever it takes to help the Baltic states if they become targets of Russia's aggression, the lack of permanently stationed forces weakens the NATO deterrence posture. In addition, much more needs to be done to re-equip and increase the size of armed forces in most NATO member states. Simply put, the difficulty in supplying the Baltics with brigade-size units comes as a result of years of underinvestment in the armed forces. This will have to change for NATO to succeed in deterring Russia, once its military has recovered from the catastrophic impact of the war in Ukraine.



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