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**AN INSIGHT INTO EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENSE
TWO SCENARIOS FOR THE DIRECTION OF EUROPEAN DEFENCE
STRATEGIES IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

AUTOR

Richard Lewis Ferguson

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Tutor	Dr. D. Ciro Milione
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AN INSIGHT INTO EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE

Two Scenarios for The Direction of European Defence Strategies in The Early Twenty-first Century

Author: Richard Lewis Ferguson

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Supervisor: Prof. Ciro Milione

*To those who believed.
To my Parents.*

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Abbreviations

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EDA	European Defence Agency
EU	European Union
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
GNI	Gross National Income
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PRC	People's Republic of China
RDC	Rapid Deployment Capacity
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WEU	Western European Union
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Abstract

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, after enjoying a prolonged period of peace and stability, Europe finds itself confronted with a multitude of security and defence challenges. The geopolitical landscape has swiftly shifted, shattering long-held assumptions from the post-Cold War era due to the actions and strategies employed by states such as Russia and China.

Throughout this period, Europe has relied on the steadfast support of the NATO alliance. However, the current discussion concerns what the potential consequences would be should this alliance's ability to fulfil its purpose be found wanting. How would Europe respond and step up to meet the challenge? Conversely, what if the alliance experienced a resurgence? This paper explores two scenarios: one in which NATO plays a reduced role in European security and defence, prompting the continent to adopt a self-reliant, autonomous stance towards safeguarding itself, and another in which NATO is reinvigorated and strengthened to confront future threats head-on.

Both scenarios are meticulously examined through the implementation of a SWOT analysis. This strategic analytical framework is employed to provide a perspective on the inherent strengths, weaknesses, potential opportunities, and imminent threats associated with each scenario. Through this detailed evaluation, an extensive understanding is offered of the multifaceted dynamics at play within both scenarios.

Keywords: security, defence, Europe, NATO, autonomy, EU, US, threats, challenges.

Resumen

En las primeras décadas del siglo XXI, Europa, que había disfrutado de un prolongado periodo de paz, se enfrenta a multitud de retos en materia de seguridad y defensa. El terreno geopolítico se ha transformado rápidamente, echando por tierra los supuestos de la era posterior a la Guerra Fría debido a las acciones y estrategias empleadas por estados como Rusia y China.

Durante todo este periodo, Europa ha contado con el firme apoyo de la alianza de la OTAN. Sin embargo, el debate actual se centra en cuáles serían las posibles consecuencias si se

descubriera que la capacidad de esta alianza para cumplir su propósito es insuficiente. ¿Cómo respondería Europa a este reto? Y a la inversa, ¿qué ocurriría si la alianza experimentase un resurgimiento? Este documento explora dos escenarios: uno en el que la OTAN desempeña un papel reducido en la seguridad y defensa europeas, lo que lleva al continente a adoptar una postura autosuficiente y autónoma para salvaguardarse a sí mismo, y otro en el que la OTAN se revitaliza y refuerza para enfrentarse de frente a las amenazas futuras.

Ambos escenarios se examinan meticulosamente mediante la aplicación de un exhaustivo análisis DAFO. Este marco analítico estratégico se emplea para proporcionar una perspectiva exhaustiva y detallada sobre las fortalezas, debilidades, oportunidades potenciales y amenazas inminentes inherentes a cada escenario. A través de esta evaluación detallada, se ofrece una comprensión global de la dinámica multifacética en juego dentro de ambos escenarios.

Palabras clave: seguridad, defensa, Europa, OTAN, autonomía, UE, EE.UU., amenazas, retos.

Introduction

After millennia marked by conflict, violence and territorial disputes, culminating in the Second World War, Europeans have made a pivotal decision to abandon age-old practices. Instead, they have sought common ground and collaboration to establish collective defence mechanisms. The aim of this approach has been to safeguard not only Europe's inhabitants and infrastructure, but also the values and way of life they have carved out since the 1945.

Now in the early decades of the twenty-first century, the peace of Europe is threatened in a way not seen since 1945. Complacency and a self-assured sense of security has settled over the continent in recent years, only briefly being interrupted by sporadic conflicts at Europe's fringes and through acts of terrorism in major cities. This has been laid bare by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. War and all its horrors have once again returned to the continent prompting Europeans to question the future of their security and defence.

To understand the importance of formulating strategies and policies for European defence in the twenty-first century and beyond, it is crucial to understand the historical context. Europe has been a theatre of conflict for centuries, with two devastating World Wars in the twentieth century serving as stark reminders of the cost of war and the need for peace and collective security. NATO, which was formed in 1949 and its subsequent evolution, has played a pivotal role in ensuring the security of Europe during the Cold War and beyond.

After the conclusion of the Cold War, geopolitical events outside Europe contributed to a gradual change of focus from the continent, as conflicts in other global regions garnered more prominence. This change engendered serious introspection and discussion regarding the prospective path to be taken by the nations of Europe.

In the twenty-first century, the security panorama presents a myriad of formidable challenges. While the spectre of conventional military aggression continues to loom large, increasing in intensity since 2022, Europe must also grapple with other threats, including cyberattacks, terrorism and the aftermath of humanitarian catastrophes that may emerge on Europe's borders.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the potential scenarios that could transpire in Europe in response to external factors. These scenarios could lead to significant shifts in the dynamics of the NATO alliance structure, potentially resulting in two distinct outcomes. As global dynamics evolve and new threats emerge, Europe must adapt and develop innovative means to protect its interests and overall security. What shape should such strategies take? What scenarios could affect the development of European security and defence policy? In other words, in the light of threats posed to the security of Europe and contexts that the continent could be faced with in the future, this paper seeks to provide a set of scenario-based pathways for European security and defence based on either a stronger NATO or a more autonomous and self-sufficient European region.

Through comprehensive study, this paper provides in-depth analysis of the complex implications of each scenario, exploring the potential advantages, disadvantages, and intricacies of each path in detail. This research aims to provide European security and defence stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the key concepts to be considered when creating a roadmap to guide their strategic choices in an increasingly uncertain world.

The first outcome envisages a scenario where external events lead to a substantial reduction in the strength and cohesion of the NATO alliance. Such a development could compel European nations to re-evaluate their approach to security and defence, ultimately fostering a growing sense of self-reliance and autonomy in addressing regional security needs. Conversely, the alternative outcome posits a reinvigorated and galvanised NATO alliance emerging as a response to external events. Under such circumstances, the alliance could experience a renewed sense of purpose and unity, driven by a collective commitment to addressing future threats effectively.

The pros and cons associated with the two strategic pathways outlined in this paper are discussed in detail in the following chapters. Furthermore, Europe's potential responses and developments in light of the continually changing geopolitical environment are explored, with potential outcomes emerging from Europe becoming more self-sufficient, to a bolstered and empowered NATO alliance ready to address forthcoming challenges.

I have chosen to investigate this subject matter because I am convinced that thorough preparation, a deep grasp of both recent and historical contexts and the development of a

diverse range of strategies are of paramount significance within the area of European security and defence. Additionally, I hold a strong belief that the continent must not become passive in response to the substantial and formidable threats posed by external actors; instead, it must possess the capability to respond decisively and efficiently to counter these threats. Nevertheless, the study of this subject finds itself in danger of being derailed due to the rapidly evolving events witnessed in contemporary geopolitics.

The opening chapter of this paper provides a detailed outline of the current geopolitical challenges facing Europe, with a particular emphasis on three primary geographical actors: Russia, China and the MENA region. Following on, Chapter two delves into the European security and defence landscape in 2023. This segues into Chapter three, where the first of two scenarios is introduced. In this first scenario, a significantly reduced NATO presence is contemplated alongside discussions on Europe following a path of self-sufficiency in security matters. Chapter four, by contrast, presents a scenario featuring a robust and reinforced NATO alliance system, actively operating throughout the European continent.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this paper is predominantly rooted in the examination of literary sources, academic papers and working documents that pertain to the European Union (EU), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) and the perceived adversaries of these two organisations.

These sources have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the historical context, policy frameworks and evolving dynamics within Europe and NATO. By drawing upon this extensive literary corpus, I have strived to construct a nuanced and well-supported narrative, that underscores the significance of these organisations in contemporary European security and defence planning. Furthermore, I aim to provide a well-rounded and informed analysis of strategy and policy creation to date, as well as offering possible direction for future discussion and debate.

In the course of my research, I have implemented a qualitative analytical approach as mentioned above, as well as a quantitative approach when focusing on key areas such as troop numbers and comparative defence expenditure among different countries.

I have decided to employ the SWOT analysis method; and, while SWOT analysis is typically associated with the world of business, I have found it to be a valuable and productive tool for the purposes of this research. By applying this framework, I have been able to gain a thorough understanding of the various facets of the scenarios, allowing me to present a more holistic evaluation and insightful exploration of the subject matter.

Chapter I | Europe's Geopolitical Threats: An Overview

In this first chapter, I will set out what I believe are the principal geopolitical threats to Europe in the first half of the 21st century. I will detail the background behind these threats and the actors who pose them. I will also show how they might affect the peace, stability and prosperity of the European continent.

Primarily, in terms of the geopolitical actors, I will discuss the Russian Federation (Russia), the People's Republic of China (China) and actors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as posing the most urgent and serious threats to the defence of Europe. In many cases there are common causes and links shared between them. Therefore, whilst each threat should be analysed and strategized for based on its own specificities, it is also important to view the threats to European defence as being interconnected and sharing elements; in this way we can gain a broader perspective of the situation.

Russo-European Relations

Europe's relations with Russia have experienced both amicable and turbulent times throughout history. In fact, one could view the relationship between Russia and its European neighbours like the ebb and flow of the tide. Whether during the early years of the 19th century and a close working relationship, bellicose distance during the mid-19th century, the two World Wars or more recently the Cold War. Depending on the threat the leadership in Moscow has felt is being posed at any particular time, rapprochements have been more forthcoming, or Europe has been seen as the enemy.

In the first decade following the decline and collapse of the Soviet Union between 1991 and 2001, there were signs that Moscow and the West might be able to work together. However, despite a softening of anti-West rhetoric by the Russian leadership, both Mikhail Gorbachev and his successor Boris Yeltsin were steadfast in their refusal to counter the idea of an eastward expansion of NATO. This was particularly true after German reunification and East Germany's immediate entry into the alliance network. This mistrust of the West regarding NATO and the spread of the alliance's reach would be a point of contention that would play a leading role in Russo-Western relations over the next 30 years, (Steil, 2018).

Moscow showed a desire during this time to strengthen Russia's economy and global standing following the downfall of the Soviet regime. However, Russia faced numerous challenges. This period marked a significant transition for the country as it embarked on a path of economic reform and sought to redefine its role internationally.

To achieve these goals, Russia implemented various reforms aimed at liberalising its economy. Privatisation of state-owned enterprises became a central focus, allowing for the transfer of assets from the state to private ownership. This process aimed to create a more competitive business environment and encourage entrepreneurship. Additionally, efforts were made to establish a legal framework to protect property rights and ensure the rule of law, which were crucial for attracting foreign investment and fostering confidence in its neighbours in the European Union.

Another key Russian focus lay in establishing stronger international relations. The country sought to be seen as a major player on the global stage, politically, as well as economically. This involved engaging in diplomatic efforts to build partnerships and enhance cooperation with other nations, as well as actively participating in international organisations and forums.

Russia's vast energy resources played a significant role in its economic and global ambitions. With abundant reserves of oil and natural gas, the country sought to leverage its energy sector as a means of strengthening its economy and increasing its influence. Russia became a major energy exporter, establishing partnerships with countries around the world and using its energy resources as a tool for geopolitical leverage.

However, despite Russia's efforts to strengthen its economy and global standing, the path has not been without challenges and controversies. As I will go on to discuss below, both at home and abroad, Russia began turning away from an ideology more in line with the European Union and its North American partners and instead departed down a road of autocratic and violent extremism, culminating in the unprovoked invasion of its neighbour, Ukraine, in 2022. Russia's changing and, it could be said, worsening behaviour, poses a major threat to the security and defence of the European continent.

For over two decades Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, as both Prime Minister of the Russian Federation and its President, has been a key player in global affairs and in contributing to the direction European security and defence has developed. Putin entered politics after having worked for the state as a member of the Soviet Intelligence Service (KGB) between 1975 and 1990, being stationed during that time in East Germany, (Rutland, 2000).

Putin became President in 2000 and from the outset it quickly became evident that whilst in the run-up to him taking office his rhetoric had been somewhat promising to Western observers, his ideology showed signs of veering away from Western expectations. During his time in office, he has significantly moulded Russian society, including making changes to fundamental laws, for example regarding the freedom of the press. He has repressed personal freedoms, including enacting repressive laws against the LGBTQ+ community in Russia, eliminating almost all opposition to him politically and also changing electoral law to allow him to stay in power until 2036 (Gaynullin, 2022).

Vladimir Putin's view of global geopolitics is based on a set of beliefs that are staunchly anti-American and anti-NATO. This was a clear change in direction to that taken by Putin's predecessor, Boris Yeltsin who, through the 1990s, had moved Russia closer to the West.

The 1990s saw some key actions taken to build bridges between NATO and the Russian Federation, including the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act which established bilateral relations and allowed for the Permanent Joint Council to be established, with the aim of being a space for consultation and cooperation. In fact, Russia shared peacekeeping responsibilities with members of NATO in Bosnia and in Kosovo.

However, from 2000 onwards, Putin's inclination towards viewing the American-led Western order, i.e. NATO, as Russia's principal enemy became ever clearer. Cooperation slowly dissolved. Over the past two decades there have been further red lines drawn by Russia which should not be crossed – primarily, further NATO expansion eastwards towards Russia's borders and closest neighbours.

During the last twenty years, a persistent apprehension has gripped the Russian leadership, suggesting that their European counterparts, supported by the United States through NATO, have harboured intentions of expanding eastward while keeping Russia in their crosshairs. Yet,

a closer examination of the evidence reveals a reality distinct from the one envisioned by the Kremlin.

Between the fall of the Soviet Union and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, defence spending among European states fell. If we take as a sample the 4 highest spenders on defence in Europe: Germany, France, Italy, as well as the UK, based on expenditure in 2022 (*see Table 1*) and look back at their defence and military spending over the past 20 years, we will see that levels of spending have decreased. This would suggest that the threat felt by European nations to their territorial integrity from states such as Russia had lessened during this time. Were this not the case, one would contemplate that spending would have increased to match the level of danger felt.

Country	Last	Previous	Reference	Unit
France	53639	56647	Dec-22	USD Million
Germany	55760	56513	Dec-22	USD Million
Italy	33490	36249	Dec-22	USD Million
United Kingdom	68463	67501	Dec-22	USD Million

Table 1: Military Expenditure by Country – 2022. (Tradingeconomics.com)

Looking at the figures for expenditure in the previous table, we can see that even with a war on the European continent, spending did not rise significantly in three out of four of the countries. If we also look at percentage of GDP spent on defence by these countries 1991-2021 (*see Table 2*), we see a decline in spending rather than an increase.

	1991	2001	2021
France	2.81%	2.03%	1.95%
Germany	2.00%	1.32%	1.34%
Italy	1.86%	1.68%	1.52%
United Kingdom	4.12%	2.41%	2.22%

Table 2: Military/Defence Budget as Percentage of GDP – 1991, 2001 and 2021. (Macro Trends.net)

Defence spending aside, we can also look the situation in which many EU Member States found themselves in February 2022, i.e. a precarious interdependence on Russian gas supplies. Large net receivers, such as Germany, had by that year allowed their energy strategies and supply solutions to become interlinked with Russia (including the construction of the Nord Stream network of pipelines running from Russia across Northern Europe). In the case of Germany, it was believed that by becoming economically enmeshed with Russia, this would cut down on future tensions and conflicts.

Furthermore, to disprove Russian paranoia about Western intentions, a brief assessment of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s would be useful. The United States withdrew very high numbers of troops from European bases and sent them to fight in the Middle East. They were joined by a coalition of European allies sending their own troops to the conflict zones. Therefore, it can be said that Russia for the most part of the early 2000s was not considered an immediate or urgent threat requiring the stationing of huge numbers of troops and military equipment in Eastern Europe by NATO.

However, if we now examine the military engagements undertaken by the Russian Federation between 1999 and 2022, we see that Russia has a track record of acting in a provocative, aggressive and dangerous manner. Russia's military interventions have had mixed results; however, they have always stood out for their high levels of bloodshed, violence and a great disdain for human rights and the civilian populations shown by Russian military personnel in these intervention areas

Furthermore, Russia has also employed several tactics in the run-up to commencing military activities, which in the future should be analysed and inputted in the formulation of policy responses and strategies for European security and defence.

Below, an overview is given of each of the main conflicts in which Russia has participated since 1999, to the most recent, the invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022. We can see how military action began within Russian borders, but how over the last twenty years, operations have been conducted in areas where Russia believes its sphere of influence or domination is under threat.

Between 1999 and 2009, Russia undertook a brutal campaign in Chechnya. Often split into the First and Second Chechen Wars, these interventions were against a combination of nationalists and Islamist Chechen forces seeking to forge an independent state, with Grozny as its capital. In October 1999, as Russia's then Prime Minister under Yeltsin, Putin ordered a massive direct assault on Grozny (Chakrabarti & McQuilkin, 2022). The level of damage and destruction wreaked against the city during the capture of Grozny was such that the United Nations declared the city to be "the most destroyed city on Earth".

The conflict which lasted long into the first decade of the new millennium saw massive loss of life among military and civilian groups, as well as oppressive measures taken against the local population by Moscow. This was an early sign of the cruel lengths Vladimir Putin was willing to go to in order to achieve his aims. This includes sending countless waves of young, untrained conscripts into battle, something that has been repeated over and over again by Putin.

In 2008, Russia invaded its neighbour Georgia. This was an aggressive act against a sovereign nation, one Russia believed was solidly within its sphere of influence. However, Georgia had begun to align itself more with the West. There had also been an internal struggle regarding the break-away and Russian-leaning regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia had massive influence, including having serving Russian officers in key positions within the authorities of these break-away entities.

Prior to its full-scale invasion of Georgia, in July 2008, Russia conducted the Kavkaz-2008 military exercises. These were on a massive scale and took place in 11 regions surrounding Georgia. After completing the exercises in August that year, the troops who had taken part did

not return to their bases, instead they remained stationed on the Russia-Georgia border (Cornell et al., 2008). This would be a tactic used again 12 years later in the build-up to the invasion of Ukraine.

The next major Russian military undertaking came in 2014. Russia's invasion of Crimea brought significant turmoil to the region and sparked international condemnation. While the invasion itself unfolded swiftly, there had indeed been signs and underlying tensions that foreshadowed these events.

Crimea, located on the northern coast of the Black Sea, had historically been an integral part of Ukraine since the late twentieth century. However, it had a predominantly ethnic Russian population and was home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol under a lease agreement with Ukraine. This arrangement created a complex web of political, cultural and military dynamics.

In the years preceding the invasion, there were several indications that relations between Russia and Ukraine were strained. Ukraine's political landscape was undergoing significant changes, with protests and demonstrations against then-President Viktor Yanukovich and his decision to reject closer ties with the European Union in favour of strengthening bonds with Russia. His pro-Russian stance ignited widespread unrest, culminating in the Euromaidan movement.

The Euromaidan protests, which started in late 2013, resulted in Yanukovich's ouster in February 2014. This sudden political change in Ukraine and the subsequent formation of a pro-Western government in Kyiv were viewed with suspicion by the Kremlin. Russia, concerned about losing its influence in Ukraine and the potential westward drift of the country, became increasingly alarmed.

Amid the political turmoil in Ukraine, there were clear indications that Russia was taking steps to consolidate its power and influence in Crimea. Russian military personnel and equipment were present in the region even before the formal invasion took place. Additionally, Russian nationalist sentiments among the population in Crimea were stoked up, leading to heightened pro-Russian feeling and calls for greater autonomy from Ukraine.

On 27 February 2014, unidentified armed individuals, later revealed to be Russian soldiers without insignia, began occupying strategic locations in Crimea. These actions were initially justified by Russia as necessary to protect Russian-speaking citizens and their interests in the region. It soon became evident, however, that Russia had orchestrated the invasion in coordination with some of the local pro-Russian Crimean populace, with the eventual annexation of Crimea as its ultimate goal.

The invasion of Crimea triggered widespread international condemnation. Western nations, including the United States and the European Union, imposed economic sanctions on Russia in response to its violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity. The crisis also heightened tensions between Russia and the West. This caused a deterioration in relations between Russia and the West that persists today, only made worse by the actions of the Russian state in 2022-2023.

A year after the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2015, Putin launched a military intervention in Syria, significantly altering the dynamics of the ongoing Syrian civil war. This intervention marked a new assertive phase for Russia's foreign policy and demonstrated its determination to support the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Prior to the intervention, Syria had been embroiled in a devastating civil war beginning in 2011, with various rebel groups fighting against the al-Assad government. The conflict had resulted in a humanitarian crisis and the rise of extremist organisations, such as the Islamic State (ISIS).

Russia's decision to intervene in Syria was motivated by multiple factors. Firstly, it sought to protect its longstanding ally, President al-Assad, whom it viewed as a key partner in the region. Secondly, Russia aimed to maintain its influence in the Middle East and safeguard its military facilities, such as the naval base in Tartus. Finally, the intervention allowed Russia to project its military power beyond its immediate borders, showcasing its capabilities and reasserting itself as a global player.

In September 2015, Russia began conducting airstrikes against rebel groups, including both ISIS and other anti-al-Assad factions. These airstrikes targeted strategic locations, infrastructure and opposition-held territories. Additionally, Russia provided extensive military support to the Syrian government, including weapons, ammunition and military advisors.

The Russian intervention had significant implications for the Syrian conflict (Pierini, 2021). It tilted the balance of power in favour of the al-Assad regime, enabling it to regain control of key areas and strengthen its position. The intervention also disrupted the advances of rebel groups and weakened their ability to challenge the government.

However, Russia's military intervention was not without controversy. It faced accusations of targeting civilian populations and non-ISIS opposition groups instead of focusing solely on combatting terrorism. These actions drew international criticism and raised concerns about Russia's true objectives in Syria.

The Russian intervention also impacted the dynamics among global powers involved in the Syrian conflict. It strained relations with the United States, which had supported certain rebel groups and heightened tensions between Russia and other regional powers, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, who opposed the al-Assad regime.

The most recent Russian actions against one of its neighbours has been the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. For many, this was clearly linked to the 2014-annexation of Crimea. The Russian state's conviction that Ukraine was in fact a historical and essential part of the wider Russian entity, which nationalist elements would argue included all former parts of the Tsarist empire and subsequent Soviet Union, meant that an independent, liberal democracy with a government with aspirations of joining both the European Union and NATO was unacceptable.

As seen prior to the invasion of Georgia in 2008, Russia staged massive military exercises and war games with its ally Belarus in the immediate border areas around Ukraine. This was an attempt to fool Ukraine, Europe and the rest of the world into believing that Russia did not have bellicose intentions.

However, on 24 February 2022, Russian forces crossed over into Ukrainian territory and began what Putin would repeatedly describe as a *military operation*, aimed at *de-nazifying* Ukraine and ridding it of Fascist elements, claims that were flimsy at best, if not completely laughable. "Russia planned to invade Ukraine over a 10-day period and thereafter occupy the country to enable annexation by August 2022", (Zabrotskyi et al., 2022). As we now know, the war has surpassed the one-year mark. The Ukrainians have surprised the world with their tenacity and

bravery in the face of a much larger opponent. Russia on the other hand has shown itself to be poorly organised at times and far from the military beast it saw itself as prior to February 2022.

The war to date has seen war crimes committed against civilian populations and terrified, unprepared Russian conscripts used as cannon fodder. Furthermore, the use of mercenaries, such as the Wagner mercenary group and Chechen warlords, not to mention the clearing of Russian prisons to send convicts to the front lines, has shown the world how weak the Russian military machine actually is.

As war fatigue sets in and those on the frontlines become tired and sick of fighting, anger and resentment may increase among Russian troops. This was demonstrated when the disorder and disarray of the Russian army, logistics and leadership came to a head in June 2023, when a massive, yet short-lived, mutiny took place led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner Group. Angered by decisions taken at the Kremlin, Prigozhin ordered his troops to occupy the city of Rostov-on-Don, which put up no resistance. The aim was march on Moscow. Prigozhin was talked down by Putin. However, commentators surmised that had the mutiny been successful, it could have led to civil war in Russia. This whole episode goes to show the precariousness and instability present at the highest levels of Russian leadership today.

Sino-European Relations

China is another key geopolitical threat to the strategic defence of Europe. Whilst not posing the same potential and immediate threat as Russia to Europe, China has shown increased assertiveness over the past ten years, on top of a rapidly developing economy and a desire to flex its muscle on the international stage.

Under the leadership of the current President, Xi Jinping, China has sought to influence, impact and steer a raft of countries down a path of its choosing. However in some cases this has backfired on Beijing (Yang, 2022). China's actions, especially in the Pacific region have scared its neighbours and created enmity between them and Beijing. China's actions have, in fact, pushed a number of countries in the Indo-Pacific region closer to the US sphere of influence, following the age-old belief of *strength in numbers*. Nevertheless the PRC still wields massive

potential and a desire to offer a different style of global leadership from that of the order led by the United States.

Since 2013, when Xi Jinping rose to power as leader of the People's Republic of China, the world has seen the country become more assertive and self-assured. China has been on a meteoric path of development, with an eye to rivalling US hegemony.

Xi has placed a great deal of importance of economic development, implementing initiatives, such as modernising China's manufacturing capabilities, boosting industrial output and extending Chinese influence and steering to all corners of the world through its Belt and Road Initiative. Through this initiative, civil engineering projects, ports, bridges, mines and transport infrastructure have been built in neighbouring countries and as far afield as Africa, Europe and Latin America. According to The Guardian: "Average income in China has doubled during Xi's two terms. According to World Bank figures, the gross national income (GNI) per capita was US\$5,910 (£5,214) in 2012 when Xi came to power and rose steadily to \$11,890 by 2021", (Davidson, 2022).

During Xi Jinping's time as President, he has implemented and encouraged a robust programme of military modernisation and development. This revolves around a core aim to be able to defend China, as well as a stated demand that, "The People's Liberation Army be able to fight and win wars", (Chatham House, 2022).

Below, we can see the increase in military spending by Beijing since Xi came to power in 2013. There has been an increase year on year, from 164.07 billion USD to 293.35 billion USD in 2021.

China Military Spending/Defense Budget - Historical Data		
Year	Billions of US \$	% of GDP
2021	\$293.35B	1.74%
2020	\$257.97B	1.80%
2019	\$240.33B	1.73%
2018	\$232.53B	1.74%
2017	\$210.44B	1.75%
2016	\$198.54B	1.77%
2015	\$196.54B	1.75%
2014	\$182.11B	1.73%
2013	\$164.07B	1.70%

Table 3: China Military Spending/Defence Budget – Historical Data. (Macrotrends.com)

During Xi’s tenure, there have been key reforms to the military. Of note among these has been the reduction in land forces and an augmented navy, increasing the fleet up to 400 vessels by 2025, including three aircraft carriers. This is in line with changing geopolitical priorities. Xi Jinping has stated in various policy papers and statements that China should be a “great maritime power”, (Chubb, 2019). He has also stated that whilst China seeks to maintain the peace, the country would not sacrifice its core national interests.

Whilst over the past decade China has been reforming and increasing its military capabilities, it has also acted in a more assertive way in terms of its foreign policy. I have already mentioned the Belt and Road Initiative; this is a core foreign policy strategy employed by the Chinese government since 2013. Under this initiative, countries are offered loans and delivery of key infrastructure projects.

However, recipient countries end up with so much debt that they are unable to repay the Chinese state, which then takes control of the new port, or road or military base. This was the case with the example of the Hambantota Port, Sri Lanka. This was originally a joint venture between Colombo and Beijing in 2017. However, when Sri Lanka was unable to repay its debt to China, the country was forced to hand over the port facility to the Chinese government (Samaranayake, 2021). This has been a robust approach undertaken by Beijing to project the country’s reach and influence on a global scale.

China's assertiveness in its approach to international institutions, particularly the United Nations and its specialised agencies, has become increasingly apparent since 2013. Beijing has actively sought to enhance its influence within these organisations, reflecting its growing ambition to shape global governance, promote its interests and portray itself as a major global power.

One significant aspect of this approach has been its financial contributions to international institutions. China has significantly increased its funding to the United Nations and its specialised agencies, demonstrating its willingness to invest in these organisations and contribute to their operations. In 2000, China contributed 12 million USD to the United Nations Regular Budget, whereas in 2021, this had risen to 318.3 million USD (Chinapower, 2021).

China has also sought leadership positions within international organisations. It has actively pursued roles in key agencies, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). By securing leadership positions, China has gained greater control over the direction of these organisations, enabling it to shape policies and decisions that align with its interests.

However, China's assertive approach to international institutions also raised concerns among other member states. Some countries have questioned China's adherence to the principles of transparency, accountability, and human rights, given its track record in these areas. These concerns have led to debates and disagreements within international organisations, highlighting the challenges associated with China's assertive posture and its impact on global governance.

China's relationship with Europe has changed too since Xi Jinping's rise to power. Between 1995 and 2005, Europe and China's relationship according to Wong (2013) can be characterised as being in a 'honeymoon period', during which time trade and cooperation progressed. However, from 2006, the two parties started to see differing approaches to their global outlooks.

Since 2013, Xi Jinping's diplomatic and foreign policy strategy has been concentrated on the "great renewal of the Chinese nation". This means, according to Xi, China at the heart of

international relations with the rules of the game being set out according to China's way of thinking as opposed to the established post-1945 global norms.

There have been several incidents and scenarios in the recent past which have altered Europe's outlook on Sino-European relations. However, it must be noted that there is a range of perspectives among European nations towards relations with China – something China may take advantage of in the future. Some nations, such as the United Kingdom or Germany are happier to have distance between Europe and China, whereas other nations are far more inclined to interact with Beijing.

Part of the geopolitical threat to Europe is the close relationship (an alliance in all but name) between the PRC and Russia. In whatever way their relationship is characterised, it is certainly not an equal relationship. Russia is now far more dependent on China than China is on Russia. However, what is clear is that Russia and China share a strategic and ideological outlook opposed to the conventional, democratic perspectives held by the US-led Western order.

It is widely believed that Xi Jinping was *kept in the loop* about the planned Russian invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, since the invasion, China, along with other nations including Iran and North Korea, has supplied Russia with military resources. It has also purchased Russian energy and mineral supplies, allowing Russia to avoid the potentially catastrophic effects of European and Western sanctions imposed since 2022. It is also clear that China is keen to see Russia succeed in its war against Ukraine, as a test of the West's resolve and reactions for any possible future military conflict against Taiwan.

What constitutes the Chinese threat to Europe? There are several noteworthy threats present. Firstly, Chinese participation in infrastructure projects is viewed as a threat to national security and defence by many European nations. Because of several key concerns and considerations, there has been reticence about China participating in national communications and infrastructure projects.

Security concerns form a significant part of this reticence. Chinese companies, particularly those in the telecommunications sector, have faced allegations of engaging in espionage and data theft. The involvement of Chinese firms in critical national infrastructure projects raises concerns about the security and integrity of sensitive information and data networks. European

countries are cautious about potential vulnerabilities and risks posed by Chinese companies in terms of data privacy, cyberattacks, as well as the potential for unauthorised access to sensitive systems.

Geopolitical considerations are also influential. European nations are wary of becoming overly dependent on China, both economically and strategically. They seek to maintain a balanced approach in their international relations, avoiding overreliance on any single country. There is a recognition that excessive dependence on Chinese technology and infrastructure could compromise national sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. European countries aim to safeguard their interests and ensure they have diversified partnerships that provide them with greater flexibility and options in their global engagements.

Furthermore, European nations are concerned about human rights violations and lack of transparency in China's governance and business practices. China's record on human rights, including its treatment of ethnic minorities, such as the Uighur Muslim ethnic group, freedom of expression, and political dissent, raises ethical and moral concerns among European nations. They may be hesitant to engage in partnerships with Chinese companies that are perceived to be complicit in or beneficiaries of human rights violations.

European countries have also taken note of the experiences of other nations that have faced challenges or negative repercussions from engaging extensively with China in their national projects. Concerns over debt traps, lack of local job creation, and limited technology transfer have been observed in certain countries that have embraced significant Chinese involvement in their infrastructure projects.

Another threat is Chinese actions against dissidents and those viewed as enemies of the Chinese state on European soil. *Police stations* have been discovered in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland and other countries. The existence of stations is not denied by Beijing, which states that they are there to provide bureaucratic and consular services to Chinese citizens in Europe; however, according to Politico.eu (2022), they operate to harass political dissidents living in exile abroad.

While the Chinese threat now and in the near future may not be a direct military threat to the European continent, the threat posed is more subtle. It is based on physical attacks on European

nations' cyber networks and infrastructure, as well as attempts to divide European unity by taking advantage of a plurality of European views and perspectives toward international actors. However, Europe is not blind to these Chinese strategies. In 2019, the European Union designated China as a *systemic rival* (Smalle, 2020).

Threats to Europe's Southern Flank

The final geopolitical threat I will discuss here is that posed by actors in the Middle East and North Africa. This is a vast area comprising the territory from Mauritania to Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. Whilst events in Eastern Europe have obviously taken the lion's share of attention and focus over the past few years, Southern European nations, such as Spain and Italy, have stressed a need to have robust policy responses to the threats posed along Europe's southern flank.

This shows one problem present in the debate on European defence strategy, i.e. the plurality of national priorities, concerns and areas of focus. What preoccupies Spain and Italy may be less of a worry to the political establishments in Helsinki and Tallinn.

Whereas the two previous geopolitical threats mentioned involve one state actor or another with the combined resources of a state and with a solid, state ideology, the third threat comes from a region rife with competing difficulties and challenges triggering multiple threats from militarised actions to humanitarian and resource conflicts.

In North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, transnational threats have been a part of the geopolitical scenery for decades. These include being sources of provenance for organised crime, such as human trafficking and at times open conflict between state and non-state actors (Nickels, 2023). A number of these conflicts have, as Nickels offers, become frozen and protracted in nature, with poor governance and very little economic activity. The security to Europe's south comes under pressure when the nations of North Africa experience instability and upheavals.

According to Boserup (2017), security threats may arise from two scenarios in the MENA region – oppressive governance leading to the rise of armed *terrorist* groups and the absence of governance, which also leads to armed groups operating in those spaces which become

highly militarised. One example of this is Libya, which since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, has experienced militarised civil unrest and a lack of any serious, organised governance. This has made the country dangerous and a threat to European security.

The current contexts seen in North Africa can in part be linked back to the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring uprisings, which started in Tunisia in 2010 and spread across the region, initially raised hopes for democratic reforms. However, in some cases, these uprisings resulted in the rise of oppressive regimes that curtailed civil liberties and human rights. These regimes have since contributed to social unrest, political instability, and increased migration flows, creating challenges for regional governance and by association have impacted European security.

Out of this context of civil unrest and the popular call for change arose the Syrian civil war. The war, which erupted in 2011, has had profound implications for the region and beyond. It has created a power vacuum and allowed extremist groups like ISIS to emerge, posing a threat to regional stability and security. The conflict has also resulted in a massive displacement of people, with millions seeking refuge in neighbouring countries and Europe leading to a migration crisis and straining relations between countries in the Mediterranean.

The unrest and turbulence in the MENA region of the 2010s, and which have lasted into the present day, can partly be attributed to a combination of high unemployment and young populations. Young adults often face difficulties in finding employment, which can lead to frustration, hopelessness and social unrest. This situation is particularly prevalent in countries where the youth population outweighs the available job opportunities and where little chance for personal success or growth can be seen. Eventually something has to give. As a result, the security in these countries is shaky at best and toxic at worst.

Another threat to European security from the MENA region is energy nationalism, characterised by the control and manipulation of energy resources by nation-states. With abundant oil and gas reserves, countries in the region have used their energy resources as tools for economic development and political leverage.

A recent example of this was in 2022 when Algeria threatened to cut off gas supplies to Spain over ongoing diplomatic unrest with the Kingdom of Morocco. Also, as a direct effect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Europe found itself to be particularly vulnerable to energy

nationalism and changing control over energy supplies by countries, depending on their national interests.

Aside from the core issues affecting the countries of the MENA region, countries in this area have to deal with interference from powers outside the region. At times, European powers participating in *anti-terror* missions in countries around the Sahel region, or the internecine conflict in Libya or Russia, or Turkey or Saudi Arabia acting in their own national interests in Syria and Lebanon.

As a demonstration of the common thread that links the threats mentioned in this chapter, I draw attention to the interconnection between the Russian threat in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe and Russian interests in the Eastern Mediterranean as a complex geopolitical dynamic. Russia's assertive actions, such as the annexation of Crimea and military interventions in Ukraine and Syria, have raised concerns among European countries about their security and territorial integrity. The security risk has been highlighted given the widespread nature of Russian interventions from Northern Europe to deepest Syria.

The Eastern Mediterranean and to an extent Sahelian Africa hold strategic importance due to their proximities to Europe, energy resources and maritime trade routes. For example, Russia's engagement in these regions, including military presence and cooperation with countries like Syria and Turkey, and the involvement of Russian mercenaries in African conflict zones give rise to implications for European security.

There is the potential for Europe's enemies to influence regional conflicts, shape power balances, and project influence beyond their immediate borders. The dynamic relationship between Russian interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader European security context remains a complex and evolving example of this.

Chapter II | Contemporary European Security and Defence

The following chapter offers an overview of contemporary European security and defence considerations. It is important to have an in-depth understanding of the recent past in this area so stakeholders can chart a strong and effective path forward.

Centuries of inter-state warfare and diplomacy have moulded Europe. However, more recent European security and defence strategies have emerged from the post-Cold War context, based upon a new unified *Europeanness* embodied in the European Union and commitments to collective defence provided through the NATO alliance.

This chapter will also focus on the current debates between deeper cooperation among the Member States of the NATO alliance and strategies based on this alliance as the *go-to* solution for any future aggression from an external actor. In addition, I will examine the other key debate of recent years regarding the feasibility, desirability, as well as the potential, of a European army. I will focus on the national security priorities of a selection of European countries with the aim of demonstrating the difficulties that may exist in reconciling their varying priorities. Finally, I will outline key contemporary uncertainties for European security and defence.

On the whole, there has been a sustained peace in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Such a destructive and deadly conflict left a sour taste in the mouths of European leaders and citizens alike. The Cold War saw an exerted attempt (though the ice was sometimes very thin) to stave off military engagements as much as was possible. It was in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union that conflict was once again seen in Europe. The Yugoslav Wars, which took place between 1990-2001, shook the Western Balkans, as well as Europe and the wider international community. Not since the heinous and barbarous acts carried out by Germany, its allies and collaborators in the 1940s had Europe experienced death and slaughter on such a scale.

As the bipolar world order that had dominated the Cold War period fell apart, Europe was presented with fresh difficulties and opportunities. European countries set out to modernise and reinforce their security structures and deal with new threats.

The violent events witnessed in the Balkans, which arose from the resurgence of several ethnic and nationalist tensions, were a case in point. These conflicts made clear the requirement for a stronger and more coordinated European security response. New security programmes and institutions were developed in Europe as a result. The establishment of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union in 1999 is the most notable of these. The CSDP was designed to strengthen the EU's ability to respond to security challenges, such as crisis management, conflict prevention and peacekeeping missions. It also resulted in NATO's creation of the European Security and Defence Identity, giving the EU the ability to conduct military operations on its own or in conjunction with the alliance.

Counterterrorism efforts and global threats have received renewed attention since *9/11*. Before this, security concerns were more prevalent in European nations, particularly those that were close to conflict areas in the Middle East and North Africa or that experienced internal sectarian conflicts. The US was the first NATO Member State to invoke Article 5 of the Founding Treaty. Enshrined in Article 5, NATO allies consider that “an armed attack against one or more countries in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all,” (Amersi, 2022).

In its military operations in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, the US received active support from NATO's European members. This saw NATO's area of focus drawn away from Europe and the North Atlantic for the first time, with a new focus instead being placed on an area outside its original remit.

Despite the fact that the United States remained the main security guarantee for Europe given its military presence there, European countries understood the necessity of developing autonomous defence capabilities. The European Security Strategy, which was adopted in 2003, emphasised the significance of a thorough blueprint combining military, diplomatic, economic and development tools. This plan served as the foundation for the creation of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2004, which had the dual objectives of promoting the growth of common security and defence capabilities and enhancing defence cooperation among EU Member States.

European security and defence have faced new challenges in recent years. Relations between Russia and European nations are extremely strained as a result of the ongoing conflict in

Ukraine and the aggression shown by Russia in the area. As a result, NATO has increased its presence in Eastern Europe and taken steps to heighten its readiness and responsiveness, placing a greater emphasis on collective defence and deterrence measures.

Additionally, Brexit, the departure of the UK from the European Union, has had an impact. The UK is a prominent military and diplomatic player; thus, this has inevitably altered the balance within the European security framework. The EU and its Member States are now compelled to redefine their defence strategies, considering factors such as resource allocation, technological advancements and evolving global security factors. However, through bilateral agreements, participation in multinational initiatives, or entirely new mechanisms, the level of British engagement in European defence should remain aligned with that of the EU. Moreover, this alignment based on the UK's stance on defence collaboration should contribute to shaping the narrative of security cooperation in the region.

European nations have sought to strengthen their collective defence capabilities, enhance cooperation through initiatives, such as the CSDP and the EDA, and respond to new challenges, such as terrorism and regional conflicts. The future of European security and defence remains a complex and evolving matter, requiring continued cooperation and adaptation to ensure the stability and prosperity of the continent.

There are two key debates that have been developing in recent decades concerning European security and defence, both of which intersect: firstly, to what extent should European security and defence rely on the NATO alliance system and how deeply should this dependency be based on an American-led alliance; secondly, should the European Union have what some have termed an EU army. Though not a new idea in and of itself, it was advanced in more recently by former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in 2015 (Sparrow, 2017). This debate focuses on what form the latter should take and how much involvement the EU's Member States should have. Furthermore, were there to be a military solution managed by Brussels, how would this affect NATO?

Since 1949, the idea of collective defence has been at the centre of European security and defence strategies. As more and more European countries have joined NATO, collective defence has taken on greater importance. While the idea of *one for all and all for one* has generally been accepted, fostered and advanced among the European contingent of the alliance,

there has nevertheless been push-back from certain countries. France is a key example here. Whilst the country was an initial alliance member, by the 1960s, diplomatic tensions between Paris and Washington had become so strained, that, in 1963, France withdrew from the NATO Military Command Structure. By 1966, the De Gaul government had ordered the official withdrawal of France from the alliance and the removal of all NATO forces from French territory.

France remained out of the alliance until 2009. While officially outside the alliance, it still remained a financial contributor, and there was a great deal of cooperation between NATO and France (Rieker, 2013). Even having rejoined the alliance, the idea of French exceptionalism and of its position as a major world power have predominated in Paris. This has led to a commitment to further and deeper European integration by successive governments and has embodied a sense of reluctance among the French when it comes to NATO.

An example of a European NATO member that, unlike France, has been a constant supporter of deeper cooperation as the main tool for European security and defence is Denmark. This northern European country was a founding member of the alliance and has been committed to the NATO system ever since.

As part of the Edinburgh Decision, Denmark received *opt-outs* from various parts of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. One of these opt-outs dealt with the Treaty's provision relating to European defence. The reason for Denmark's insistence on a raft of opt-outs in 1992, which included defence, was a desire from a fairly Euro-reluctant nation to keep the impact of *Europeanisation* within its national system to a minimum.

Despite the defence opt-out, Denmark adhered closely to the defence requirements and provisions of the EU's CSDP in case, in the future, the country would have to opt in to the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty. Denmark saw NATO as the bulwark of European defence over any autonomous European military solution. However, it must be noted that in 2022, the Danes held a referendum in which they voted to do away with the defence opt-out. This was a direct result of events unfolding east of Copenhagen in Ukraine and growing worries over Russian aggression against its European neighbours. Had a war provoked by Russia not started, it is worth pondering whether Denmark would have changed course regarding the defence opt-out.

The reticence over the *Europeanisation* of Europe's security and defence capabilities shown in the example of Denmark is shared by various groups across Europe. The arguments against include those that believe an EU army would take on more territorial defence capabilities, i.e. active militarily ready solutions, as opposed to the CDSP, which provides for more humanitarian, peacekeeping and disaster relief tasks.

However, an argument can be made that the EU has already started down the path towards an EU army with the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the multinational EU battle groups that have been created and partially operational since 2007.

The flip side of this argument, which has gained more support since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, is that of European security and defence sovereignty. This idea has been spearheaded by President Macron of France. Whilst his conviction that Europe be able to stand on its own two feet regarding its own defence is not necessarily shared by all Europeans, the idea that Europe be less dependent on the United States for its defence requirements is supported by many across the continent.

In a speech in September 2021, Emmanuel Macron made clear that the United States remained the great ally of Europe and an important friend; however, it could not be denied that over the past decade, the Americans had turned their gaze towards the Indo-Pacific and China. This meant that the Europeans had to be strong and ready to defend themselves against any future aggression - *this would come less than a year later!* (rtbf.be, 2021).

Also part of this debate is the question of how a European army would be funded and how this would affect NATO funding. With many European NATO members unable or unwilling to meet the 2% GDP threshold on defence spending asked of them by NATO, those who question a European army ask where the funding would come from. Would there also be overstretch, in terms of resources, equipment and manpower, not to mention competence-sharing and who would control which parts of the military capabilities?

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia, of an independent European state with a European-leaning elite, has placed an urgency on both debates. It has, as we will see, also changed forecasts and expectations. The gaze is once again back on Europe; not totally, but more intensely than it has

been over the past decade. The heads of European countries are now actively dealing with the question: how does Europe defend itself in the twenty-first century?

One of the key points to consider when discussing European security and defence is the fact that each nation has its own priorities and areas of focus. Generally, European strategies align; although, what is important for one nation may be less important for another.

By looking at the priorities of various European nations or regional blocks within Europe, we can see how each has a different focus regarding its security, defence and foreign policies. However, a positive point to state is that all are committed to the current security and defence mechanism in place in Europe, i.e. the NATO alliance system.

Until 2022, Germany had followed a line of limited involvement and discreet security and defence strategies in the period following the Second World War. There was a belief within Germany that quiet diplomacy and strong trade links with countries that pose a potential threat would be enough to deter any future aggression. Likewise, the emphasis on democracy in the country has often meant that instead of a centralised security structure, many voices from across the federal territory give their opinions.

This still remains the case in spite of Chancellor Olaf Scholtz's reforms, implemented following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Chancellor's new reforms have been grouped under the umbrella of the *Zeitenwende*, or 'turning point', describing the awakening of Germany's security and defence structure in the face of possible aggression from the east. In 2023, the Federal Government published the *Sicherheitsstrategie*, or 'Security Strategy', an in-depth, but also imperfect, strategy document, including a broad range of possible threats from war to climate change and natural disasters. "Germany takes a comprehensive societal view on its security environment, focusing not only on the immediate challenge that Russia poses, but also on hybrid threats arising from climate change, pandemics, world hunger, and poverty, as well as disinformation and cyberattacks." (Kefferpütz, 2023).

Germany's neighbour to the west, France, as we have already seen, has had a varied relationship with Europe's primary security solution, NATO. French exceptionalism has played a key role when it comes to the nation's security and defence ideology.

Having been a great player on the European continent, as well as globally, and a nuclear power, France has sought to take the lead on European defence by promoting the EU's CSDP. As Rieker (2018) states, France has taken a unilateral line towards European security and defence, as shown by its actions in a number of African conflict zones and Syria.

The Macron government believes that Europe's defence capabilities, as well as its ability to arm and resource itself, should be in the hands of the Europeans themselves and with a far-reduced dependency on non-European actors, primarily, the US.

As Europe's third largest economy in 2023, according to the World Economic Forum, with a contribution to the overall economy of the European Union of 12%, Italy plays an important role in Europe and in terms of the question of security and defence. Italy has traditionally played the role of intermediary and diplomat, trying to smooth tensions with those outside Europe and the NATO network. This has been especially true of relations between Rome and Moscow.

Italy's commitment to NATO was emphasised by the new Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, in 2022, giving a boost to European commitment to the alliance. That said, Italy finds itself in the same position as many NATO Member States regarding its commitment to defence expenditure, which in 2022 stood at 1.51%, below the agreed threshold of 2% of GDP (International Centre for Defence and Security, ICDS).

Until recent events on the EU's eastern borders, Italy's priorities laid in Europe's southern frontier, the Mediterranean. The conflict zones of Libya, the Sahel and the Middle East, as well as the developing migrant situation of displaced people and others attempting to reach European shores, led Italy to view the MENA as a priority for its security and defence strategy.

Similarly to Italy, Spain until recently viewed the Maghreb and Sahel regions as key priority zones regarding national security and defence policies. Spain has traditionally erred on the side of reduced military intervention, although during the NATO operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, until 2020, Madrid did have some troops stationed to help train local police and security forces.

Spain's defence expenditure has increased over recent years, but still only stands at 1.26% according to ICDS, far below the 2% minimum threshold. It will be interesting to see how security and defence will be dealt with should a new government move in to the Moncloa Palace in Madrid following the elections in July 2023.

The Baltic States have been at the sharp end of NATO-Russia relations since their independence in 1990-1991. However, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia only joined NATO in 2004, the same year as their entry into the European Union.

Given the region's proximity to Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave, and Russia's historical control of the Baltic region, the three states have been particularly weary of Russia and the threat posed from Russian aggression. This became much more acute following Russia's invasion in 2022. The fact that the current conflict, or a future European conflict, could spill over into the Baltic region explains why the three countries were among the only NATO Member States to actually meet and in fact surpass the 2% expenditure threshold in 2022 (Estonia - 2.73%, Latvia - 2.27% and Lithuania - 2.54%).

Similarly to the Baltic States, Poland looks eastward towards Russia regarding its main foreign policy, security and defence priorities. A member of NATO since 1999, the country has strong links to the Washington and follows the line that the US should be at the centre of European security and defence. Poland has also spearheaded European assistance to Ukraine in its defence of its territory. Between 2022 and 2023, Poland gave assistance to Ukraine in the amount of 2.55 billion euros, third only after the US and the UK (Armstrong, 2023).

Sweden and Finland are notable examples of two countries demonstrating how national approaches can change in a very short time. Sweden had followed a strong line of neutrality since 1834. However, since 2000, Sweden has been cooperating to some extent on NATO and EU defence operations and strategy. In 2023, with Russian aggression looming over the Baltic Sea region, Sweden officially asked to become a member of the NATO alliance. After various objections from Turkey over Sweden's entry, the country was finally accepted into the alliance in summer 2023.

Finland too was accepted into NATO in 2023, bringing the alliance right up to the border with the Russian Federation (something Russia had been afraid of since the Cold War). Finland had

maintained a non-aligned status in an attempt to appease Russia, although maintained military service and defence expenditure in line with its European neighbours. However, in 2023, this is expected to surpass the 2% threshold previously mentioned.

The United Kingdom was a founding member of NATO and has been a committed and leading Member State ever since. The country prides itself on the *special relationship* that exists between the United States and the United Kingdom. While this has suffered over the past two decades, depending on the incumbent in the White House, it is generally accepted that the relationship between the two Anglo-Saxon nations is one of strength and joint cooperation.

Despite the UK's strong commitment to NATO, and defence expenditure surpassing the 2% threshold since 2014, reduced investment and spending have been features of successive Conservative economic policies. The UK has also seen the size of its military forces reduced over the past 30 years. In 1990, troop numbers stood at 308,000, but by 2019, the number stood at 149,000. There is an ongoing debate in the UK, given fuel by the Russia-Ukraine war, over defence spending and the ideal size and format of the armed forces in the twenty-first century.

The UK has a global outlook in terms of its security and defence priorities, viewing the Indo-Pacific region as important for the future. In 2021, the UK, along with the US and Australia, signed the AUKUS agreement. This agreement rests on two pillars: providing nuclear submarine technology to the Royal Australian Navy and sharing technology and intelligence. This agreement came out of increasing unease at China's flexing its muscles across the region and beyond.

One of the claimed objectives of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia was to sow discord among NATO and the West. However, despite differing national priorities, varied levels of public support for Ukraine, as well as a lack of readiness to see Europe pulled into the conflict, the extent of European resolve to defend its way of life has in fact been strengthened.

NATO has been greatly galvanised after a period of stagnation in the years leading up to the conflict and has even seen two new European members join its ranks. In July 2023, Lithuania hosted a meeting of NATO leaders. This was seen as a major meeting during a period of heightened tensions with Russia. The communiqué released following the meeting stated that, "Peace in the Euro-Atlantic area has been shattered. The Russian Federation has violated the

norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order. The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area". The document also stated that blame for the Ukraine invasion lay squarely at the door of the Russian Federation.

The communiqué also made reference to NATO's relations with China and the point of view of the alliance regarding the PRC, "The People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values. We remain open to constructive engagement with the PRC, including to build reciprocal transparency, with a view to safeguarding the Alliance's security interests. We continue to be confronted by cyber, space, hybrid and other asymmetric threats, and by the malicious use of emerging and disruptive technologies" (NATO, 2023).

The conflict in Ukraine presents a significant danger to both European and global security and defence. It has ramifications for trade, the flow of energy resources and the international economy. Additionally, the prospect of a more confident China engaging in assertive manoeuvres within the Indo-Pacific region is causing significant unease among European policymakers. However, it is essential to recognise that there are further factors also at play here.

This, for instance, includes the 2024 elections in the United States. A Republican victory could herald a sea change in policy towards NATO, Europe and support for Ukraine against Russia. The re-election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2023 in Turkey means that relations between Turkey and the wider NATO family could become more strained than they already have been over the last decade. Resource shortages (particularly water), as well as climate change, pose a threat to Europe's southern flank in the Mediterranean, as tensions could rise in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, leading not only to conflict but also massive humanitarian catastrophes.

Furthermore, whether Vladimir Putin remains in power in Moscow following the conclusion of the war is a serious concern. For example, if he were to stay in power, what further acts of aggression might he undertake? Alternatively, were he to be toppled, what would the power vacuum and subsequent turmoil in Russia look like, and what uncertainties would this pose for security and defence strategies across Europe?

Chapter III | Scenario I: A Downsized NATO Alliance and An Autonomous European Security and Defence Capability

The next two chapters outline a potential vision for European security and defence in the initial decades of the twenty-first century. These chapters will explore potential causes, substantiated by evidence. There will then be a focus on the strategic and policy implications of these scenarios, paving the way for an examination of potential strategies to effectively address the ensuing challenges.

When embarking on a new project or facing unfamiliar challenges, businesses often conduct a SWOT analysis. This involves a thorough assessment of the project's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. I will apply this same methodology to assess the given scenario and strategy.

In this first scenario, for reasons explained below, we are presented with a NATO alliance that has been greatly reduced in its material capabilities and financial resources. The discussion revolves around the subsequent impact this would have on European security and defence. A reduced budget would lead to Member States experiencing increased economic burdens, with the once formidable military might of NATO seeing a profound transformation. Joint military exercises and operations would become less frequent, and some long-standing cooperative agreements would be reassessed or discontinued altogether. The reduced material capacity could translate into a diminished deterrent, potentially emboldening adversaries and creating uncertainties among NATO members about their collective security options.

Moreover, with limited financial means due to changing geopolitical circumstances, NATO would find it difficult to invest in cutting-edge technology and modernisation efforts, eroding its technological edge and weakening its response capabilities.

The effects of reduced funding could also impact intelligence-sharing and counterterrorism initiatives, leaving gaps in tracking and combatting emerging threats in the future. Additionally, NATO's influence in shaping regional security agendas would be diminished as it becomes harder to maintain consensus among Member States on critical international issues.

In this challenging context, NATO would face mounting pressure to prioritise and allocate resources strategically, seeking innovative ways to pool remaining assets and cooperate with partners outside the alliance. While this downsized NATO would still retain valuable expertise, it would have to navigate uncharted waters to prove its continued geopolitical relevance.

With an alliance in a much-reduced format safeguarding European security and defence, the European Union would have to step up and take the baton employing a Euro-centric, Brussels-led strategy. This would have to centre all EU Member States along the same lines. Although, of course, it can be imagined that there would be *push and pull* from different governments regarding the path taken.

A self-sufficient, autonomous Europe with greater or total sovereignty over its own security and defence would need to be able *to cover all bases* to the greatest extent possible within Europe itself. This would include, “a permanent standing force funded by a common budget; common defence planning to develop and acquire common capabilities; autonomous military capabilities, including fully-fledged command and control; an effective decision-making process with a unique chain of command and clear leadership with the authority and legitimacy to engage armed forces; civilian and democratic control over the military and the use of armed forces,” (European Court of Auditors, 2019).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the current direction of security and defence in Europe is dependent not only on NATO, but, more specifically, on the leadership (technologically, financially and materially) provided by the United States. Even when, over the last two decades, the US gaze has been focused elsewhere, whether the Middle East or the Indo-Pacific, it has been a generally accepted fact that the US would act to protect its European, NATO allies in the face of any attack. This is partly due to Article 5 of the NATO Founding Treaty but also because of the close cultural, political and trade links between North America and Europe. Nevertheless, what would happen were the United States to change its stance towards participating in NATO or guaranteeing the defence and protection of Europe?

Based on my analysis, I firmly believe that the primary factor leading to a reduction in NATO’s scope would be contingent on the stance adopted by the United States towards the organisation. There are several factors that could affect this outcome.

A key aspect under consideration involves a potential realignment in the allocation of US resources and focus concerning security and defence. In the years before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, US strategy, to a certain extent, had been redirected to the Indo-Pacific region where tensions had grown as a result of China's approach to its regional and broader global foreign policy. China's threatening rhetoric about Taiwanese sovereignty and the accelerated modernisation of its military are the most concerning. Additionally, China's global aspirations, like the Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at influencing and setting the global agenda, have also caused apprehension in the US and among many in the international community. As a result of these tensions, multiple administrations have shifted US attention to the Indo-Pacific. Their objectives have included ensuring free passage of trade, offering reassurance to Taiwan and other allies, and demonstrating the United States' continued role as a global superpower, deserving of respect.

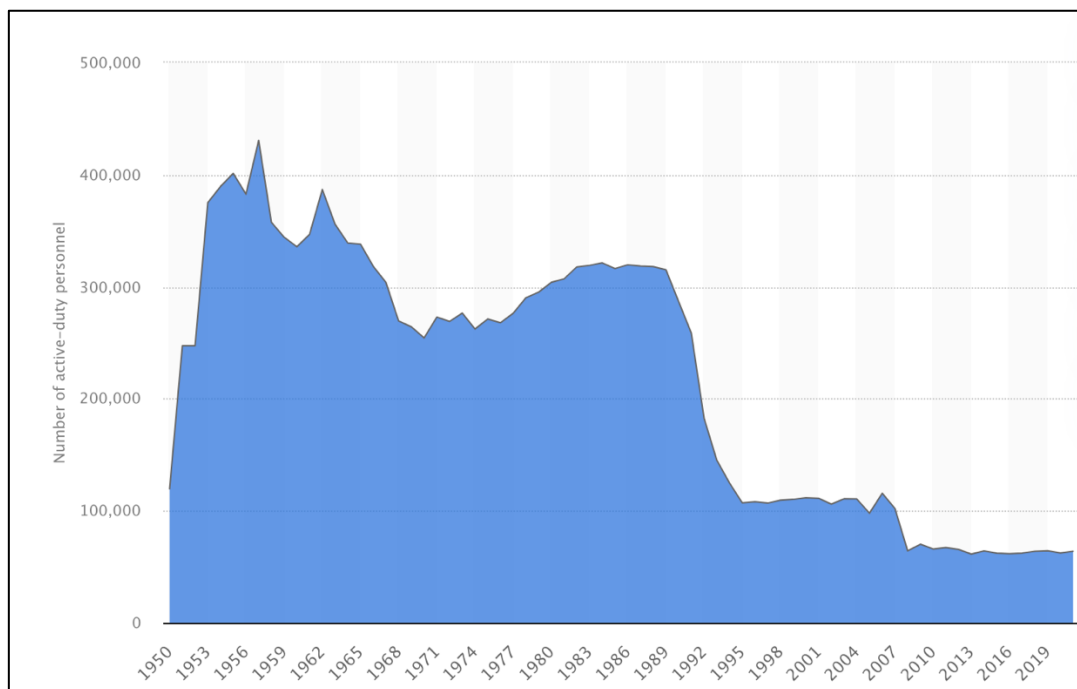


Table 4: Number of US military personnel in Europe from 1950 to 2021. (Statista.com)

If we compare the number of US military personal in Europe from 2001 to 2021, we see that there was a reduction in numbers. In 2001, 111,170 personnel were stationed in Europe, by 2008, this number had decreased to 64,258, and by 2021, there were 68,853 personnel. This decrease reflects the changing geopolitical context that occurred after 2001 with troops being reposted to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Any strategy pursued by the US administration would have significant implications for the NATO alliance, and consequently, European security and defence. Future presidents might adopt a comparable approach to that of Donald Trump, potentially advocating for certain conditions before providing US support to its allies. Such decisions could profoundly influence the dynamics within NATO and the ability of Europe to defend itself in the face of aggression.

In fact, from 2017 to 2021, under the leadership of Donald Trump, the US administration displayed a distinct lack of confidence in the alliance and voiced scepticism about shouldering most of the European defence funding. Trump in fact even threatened the very foundations of NATO, saying that Article 5 should be made conditional on whether the country in question had fulfilled its financial obligations in terms of the agreed defence spending threshold, (Pothier & Vershbow, 2017). It is worth noting here that the only time Article 5 has been invoked was at the behest of the United States following the 2001 attacks on its territory.

Another factor contributing to the potential decline of NATO would once again be contingent on the approach taken by the United States. Should a Washington administration adopt a staunchly neo-isolationist stance towards foreign policy, it could have significant repercussions for Europe. Neo-isolationism contends, “That strategic engagement beyond a core security perimeter around North America is unnecessary and counterproductive. The United States need not intervene in the political and military affairs of other nations because, surrounded by two large oceans and friendly countries, it occupies a position of strategic immunity,” (Sprouse, 2020).

The United States habitually allocates a considerable portion of its national budget to military expenditure, to the detriment of welfare and public spending. However, there exists the possibility that public sentiment could alter drastically against maintaining a substantial military capability. Instead, there could be increased demands to redirect these funds towards essential domestic priorities, such as education, healthcare and the improvement of the country's infrastructure. Rather than investing in the infrastructure of far-off nations that many Americans could not place on a map, let alone care about what happens to them, the emphasis could pivot towards enhancing the infrastructure within the nation itself (Halimi, 2023). This change in public opinion could further contribute to the potential decline of NATO in the future.

How would the downsizing of NATO impact Europe's security and defence? Furthermore, how could Europe address new challenges and obstacles stemming from the need to manage its security affairs independently?

In an unprecedented move, Europe would have to assume full responsibility for its security and defence, reaching levels unparalleled in contemporary times. With the absence of assured US support in the face of potential attacks or perceived threats from other actors, the EU would need to equip itself with sufficient resources to autonomously safeguard its interests.

As noted previously, the prevailing real threats to security in Europe have underscored the deficiencies in the approaches adopted by certain EU Member States, particularly those traditionally regarded as leaders, including Germany and Italy. A notable misjudgement came to the fore in 2022 when it became evident that Germany's policy of *discreet diplomacy* and its heavy reliance on Russian energy resources had proven to be a serious error.

In the face of continuously evolving global challenges and potential threats in the coming decades, the diverse but interconnected nations of Europe are at a crucial juncture. Key debates and discussions will need to take place in the capitals of Europe to reflect not only upon the remarkable strides made in the past half century, but also regarding how to enhance and guarantee Europe's security and defence capabilities. Europe will need to also seize the opportunity to proactively and diligently build upon previous achievements, fostering a collective spirit of cooperation, innovation and strategic planning across the region.

Such past achievements include the West European Union's (WEU) 'Petersberg Tasks', drawn up in 1992, which set the conditions under which Europe could undertake military action. These conditions stretched to peacekeeping, humanitarian missions and disaster management. However, they did not go as far as territorial defence, or indeed offence.

Soon after, the Maastricht Treaty was signed. This significantly important treaty contained within it the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The CFSP laid the ground for a more coherent defence policy for the European Union. A decade later, by 2003, the EU had agreed to work towards possessing, "The capability to deploy an independent military force of up to 50 or 60,000 personnel," (Retter et al., 2021).

In 2016, two years after Russia's annexation of Crimea, a prevailing sentiment was sweeping across Europe, underscoring the pressing necessity for a robust security and defence strategy. The primary objective was to fortify Europe's capability to counter an aggressive neighbouring country, especially given the EU's now extreme proximity to the Russian Federation, since the 2004 process of enlargement. This imperative strategy was formalised as the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) and rested on five pillars: the security of the Union, state and societal resilience to east and south, an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, cooperative regional orders, global governance in the twenty-first century.

To reinforce the EUGS, the European Defence Action Plan emerged, aiming to provide direction for increased spending and defence collaboration among Member States, ultimately resulting in the establishment of a European Defence Fund. Geopolitical events further heightened the significance of these initiatives, as evidenced by events such as Brexit and the United Kingdom's departure from the CFSP in 2020.

In addition to the EUGS and the European Defence Action Plan, in 2022, the European Commission released a document outlining the need for and commitment to the development of a rapid response force, known as the Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), which would consist of up to 5,000 troops. This force would be flexible and would have the mission of responding to *imminent crises*. According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, the RDC should be operational by the end of 2025.

Scenario I - SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

A more autonomous European security and defence capability would offer several strengths, foremost among them being the significant reduction in Europe's reliance on external actors. At a strategic level, the presence of a fully-functioning, well-equipped and resilient military force would serve as a powerful deterrent against potential aggressors. By lessening its dependency on outside sources, Europe could bolster its sovereignty and decision-making in matters of defence, ensuring that security decisions align closely with the continent's own

interests and values. Moreover, a self-sufficient defence system would enhance Europe's ability to respond in an agile manner to emerging threats and challenges, safeguarding its territorial integrity and contributing to regional and global peace and stability.

A multinational troop selection with the ability to swiftly respond to aggressive acts by other states or non-state actors would empower Europe to mount a coordinated and effective response. Such a force would draw on diverse strengths, know-how, experience and tactical advantages gained from various environments and conflict zones.

Weakness:

The potential for a more autonomous European capability might arise from a substantial drawdown of the NATO system and a withdrawal of US support and leadership, driven by a plurality of factors. In such a scenario, Europe would be compelled to rely more on its own resources and abilities which unless strengthened in advance could be found lacking. Consequently, intelligence-sharing between North America and Europe might be significantly curtailed. Moreover, Europe would lose the guaranteed backing of a global superpower, potentially leading to a decrease in its credibility in the eyes of potential adversaries. This situation raises the question of whether an autonomous European security and defence capability would effectively serve as a deterrent at all.

One potential weakness lies in the struggle for control among the larger and more militarily dominant nations in Europe. France, boasting nuclear capabilities and the largest armed forces within the Union, historically identifies itself as a global power. France's perception of itself and the stance it takes could possibly clash with Germany and Italy, both possessing significant military and economic strength within the EU. Furthermore, Poland, increasingly regarded as a prominent European military force, could also aspire to take a leadership role (Terlikowski, 2022). The positive or negative approach of the United Kingdom regarding a European solution would also have an impact on any possible successful deterrent. The divergent perspectives on the direction of European security and defence could potentially undermine the cohesion, determination and overall effectiveness of a unified European military deterrent.

Opportunities:

One potential advantage of having an autonomous security and defence capability in Europe would lie in keeping arms and equipment manufacturing processes within the continent. This approach would open up job creation through the revitalisation and growth of the arms manufacturing sector. The establishment of a self-sufficient defence industry would lead to the creation of employment opportunities for a diverse range of experts across various sectors, such as intelligence, engineering, technology and strategy. These well-trained and highly educated Europeans would contribute significantly to the development and maintenance of an updated and effective defence sector bolstering Europe's overall security and reinforcing its position on the global stage.

Furthermore, an enhanced security and defence sector in Europe would offer the potential to foster greater cohesion and deeper integration across the continent. If European nations were to collectively strive to develop and fortify deterrence measures and rapid response capabilities against potential threats, a shared mission might emerge, uniting the continent as one cohesive and coordinated organisation. This common purpose would serve as a driving force for cooperation, encouraging joint efforts and collaborative strategies towards the common goal of safeguarding the region's stability and safety.

Threats:

If Europe were to find itself in a scenario where it stands almost, or completely, alone in the exercise of its own defence, the threats to the security, liberal-democratic way of life and peaceful lives of its citizens would become even more critical compared to the current challenges posed by external forces. In such a situation, the continent would face greater vulnerabilities and the need to safeguard its territorial integrity and core values would become paramount. The absence of a robust network of allies and partners could lead to increased pressures, necessitating a more vigilant and self-reliant approach to counter potential threats effectively.

Furthermore, should the guaranteed protection of the United States or the combined, organised force of NATO dissipate, an autonomous Europe might find itself exposed to additional threats, including cyberattacks, espionage and potential traditional acts of aggression from other actors.

In this chapter, a scenario unfolds wherein Europe is faced with the task of asserting its autonomy regarding security and defence. Within this complex context, there looms another potential threat that demands careful consideration. Another direction that European security and defence could take is if individual European nations were to opt to pursue autonomous security and defence strategies. Such a scenario could result in fragmentation within the European continent, undermining the unity and collective strength that has been a cornerstone of European security for decades.

Even in the best-case scenario, where these nations collaborate to form small regional defence blocs, there is a risk of reduced cohesion and coordination on the broader European level. The potential consequences of this situation extend beyond mere weakening; it would pose a multifaceted threat to Europe's capacity to effectively tackle matters of collective defence. In addition to eroding Europe's collective strength, such an outcome could sow the seeds of uncertainty and instability in the geopolitical sphere. This unpredictability could become a pivotal factor in reshaping the intricate balance of global security dynamics.

Chapter IV | Scenario II: A Reinforced NATO for Changing Geopolitical Conditions

This chapter will focus on the idea of a reinforced and more substantial NATO alliance acting in defence of Europe; however, it is very much grounded in the reality of the day, in contrast to the more hypothetical nature of the previous chapter.

A reinforced NATO would come out of a seismic event or events taking place directly affecting the interests of the region, and which would shake the alliance to its core. This would give it the boost it has needed for the past decade or so. This scenario offers the idea of NATO taking on an even more significant role in the task of European security and defence and can easily be demonstrated by focusing on some of the recent events that have taken place in and around Europe.

The first type of event that could push NATO into taking a more robust stance in Europe, and one which over the past two years has already prompted the alliance to do so, is one such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russia's actions against Ukraine since 2014 and threats directed at NATO were a major source of geopolitical tension and instability in the region in the run-up to February 2022. The most significant event of the past decade had been Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 following a controversial referendum in the region. This was widely condemned by the international community and led to a deterioration of relations between Russia and Western nations, including those in NATO.

Additionally, Russia actively supported separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine, leading to a protracted conflict in the Donbas region. This support included the supply of weapons and military personnel, exacerbating the ongoing crisis and causing thousands of casualties.

Furthermore, Russia engaged in provocative military manoeuvres near NATO borders, raising concerns among alliance members about their territorial integrity and security. Large-scale military exercises, airspace violations and aggressive rhetoric became recurrent themes, fuelling tensions between Russia and NATO countries. This tactic was already well tried and tested by Russia, which had employed it prior to the invasion of Georgia in 2008.

The position of Russia and its behaviour towards its neighbours led to a re-evaluation of security policies in the region, prompting NATO to strengthen its collective defence and reinforce its commitment to its members' protection from potential aggression. The 2022 invasion acted as a stark wake-up call for the nations of Europe, compelling them to acknowledge the escalating threats to their sovereign, territorial integrity and security.

Europeans acknowledged the need to bolster their defence capabilities and invest in modernising their armed forces. Consequently, defence spending saw a notable surge as countries sought to strengthen their military in a bid to deter potential aggressors and respond effectively to emerging threats, as shown in the table below.

Million US dollars										
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022e	2023e
Current prices and exchange rates										
Albania	178	132	131	145	176	197	197	224	231	371
Belgium	5,200	4,204	4,258	4,441	4,845	4,761	5,324	6,245	6,880	7,076
Bulgaria	747	633	671	724	962	2,159	1,121	1,276	1,440	1,855
Canada	18,172	18,689	17,708	23,700	22,399	22,572	23,330	25,502	26,046	28,950
Croatia	1,064	883	837	926	966	1,001	983	1,361	1,285	1,394
Czechia	1,975	1,921	1,866	2,259	2,750	2,982	3,199	3,915	3,896	5,033
Denmark	4,057	3,364	3,593	3,780	4,559	4,487	4,886	5,274	5,420	6,775
Estonia	514	463	497	541	615	637	719	749	821	1,170
Finland	3,991	3,401	3,418	3,536	3,825	3,900	4,156	4,145	4,726	7,325
France	52,022	43,496	44,209	46,133	50,507	49,493	52,519	56,561	52,289	56,649
Germany	46,176	39,833	41,606	45,470	49,772	52,549	58,652	62,054	60,788	68,080
Greece	5,234	4,520	4,637	4,752	5,388	5,019	5,492	8,006	8,488	7,125
Hungary	1,210	1,132	1,289	1,708	1,615	2,190	2,767	3,061	3,278	5,036
Italy	24,487	19,576	22,382	23,902	25,641	23,559	30,084	33,157	30,307	31,585
Latvia*	294	282	403	485	710	692	743	824	857	1,028
Lithuania*	428	471	636	817	1,057	1,094	1,176	1,308	1,738	1,990
Luxembourg	253	250	236	326	356	381	426	403	511	609
Montenegro	69	57	62	65	75	74	83	91	86	131
Netherlands	10,349	8,673	9,112	9,643	11,172	12,067	12,838	13,953	15,606	16,741
North Macedonia	124	105	104	101	120	146	154	204	221	294
Norway	7,722	6,142	6,431	6,850	7,544	7,536	7,228	8,438	8,723	8,814
Poland*	10,107	10,588	9,397	9,940	11,857	11,824	13,363	15,099	16,580	29,105
Portugal	3,007	2,645	2,616	2,738	3,249	3,299	3,273	3,886	3,574	4,167
Romania*	2,691	2,581	2,645	3,643	4,359	4,608	5,056	5,298	5,195	8,481
Slovak Republic	999	987	1,004	1,056	1,298	1,802	2,049	2,066	2,090	2,620
Slovenia	487	401	449	477	547	572	568	763	777	928
Spain	12,634	11,096	9,975	11,889	13,200	12,630	12,828	14,849	14,897	19,179
Türkiye	13,577	11,953	12,644	12,971	14,168	14,089	13,396	13,137	12,286	15,842
United Kingdom	65,692	59,505	56,362	55,719	60,380	59,399	63,500	71,938	66,651	65,763
United States	653,942	641,253	656,059	642,933	672,255	750,886	770,650	793,990	821,830	860,000
NATO Europe and Canada	289,276	254,422	255,595	275,102	300,167	301,674	325,953	359,641	350,961	404,115
NATO Total	943,218	895,675	911,654	918,035	972,422	1,052,560	1,096,603	1,153,631	1,172,791	1,264,115

Table 5: Defence Expenditure in Millions of US Dollars (among NATO Member States) 2014-2023. (NATO)

Moreover, the Russian invasion sparked a debate about the NATO enlargement process. Several countries that had traditionally remained neutral or intentionally stayed outside the alliance felt a newfound urgency to seek membership as a means of fortifying their security against external pressures. The prospect of NATO membership provided reassurance and stability for these aspiring members leading to a broader expansion of the alliance. Even countries that remained outside the alliance after the invasion reassessed their centuries-old neutral status.

Furthermore, areas outside of Europe itself have emerged as posing complex threats to European security. The Sahel region, in particular, has emerged as a critical hotspot, witnessing escalating conflicts involving the region's governments and their efforts to confront the growing influence of Islamist groups in zones in Mali and the unsettling fall of the democratic government in Niger, among other coups and flare-ups. These developments exert considerable pressure on already fragile humanitarian conditions in the region, exacerbating human suffering and generating significant concerns for European nations.

One of the most concerning implications of the troubles in the Sahel is the potential for massive population displacements. The instability and violence in the region could force a substantial number of people to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighbouring countries, particularly in the Maghreb region. This influx of displaced persons would give rise to numerous challenges and risks for the countries in this region, including strained resources and social tensions. The possible spillover effects would most probably trigger migration flows onward to Southern Europe adding to the ongoing migration challenges faced by European countries. Pressure would be felt by Southern European NATO nations, such as Italy, Spain and Greece to manage and address this migration influx.

In addition to the direct humanitarian consequences, instability in North and Sub-Saharan Africa lays the ground for the proliferation of illicit activities, including human trafficking, arms smuggling and the rise of terrorist movements. Such threats not only put at risk the safety and well-being of local populations but also have further implications for European security. These security threats could draw attention and resources away from higher-level geopolitical considerations, such as threats from nation states on the borders of Europe and further afield.

Within the broader context of the Russian threat to Europe, Belarus emerges as a notable concern, adding a layer of complexity to regional security dynamics. The close historical, cultural and political ties between Russia and Belarus have positioned the latter as a potential pathway for Russian influence and military activities in the region. Belarus' strategic positioning on NATO's and the EU's eastern flank has given rise to unease for decades. Its geographical proximity to the Baltic states and Eastern European nations within the alliance amplifies worries that any destabilising actions by Russia could have consequences for Belarus, thereby affecting regional stability.

Frequently referred to as *Europe's last dictatorship*, Belarus has earned this label due to the challenging living conditions its citizens must endure as a result of President Aleksandr Lukashenko's firm control over the country. Despite the prevailing trajectory of former Soviet nations in Europe aligning with the EU and NATO following independence in 1991, Belarus has chosen a different path. It has opted to foster close ties with Moscow, in contrast to pursuing EU and NATO membership. By 2022, the Belarus-Russia relationship had evolved into a substantial alliance, characterised by profound economic integration and extensive cooperation in the areas of defence and intelligence.

As a demonstration of the close military ties shared by the two states, in 2021 the pair conducted the Zapad-2021 military exercises. This entailed almost 13,000 troops from both countries conducting preparative military exercises based on a scenario where Belarus is attacked by *Nyaris, Pomoria and the Polar Republic*, which, according to Coes (2021), were supposed to be Poland, Lithuania and a Scandinavian country, i.e. an attack on all weak flanks.

Once the war had begun and any pretence had gone regarding Belarus' interconnectedness with Russia, Moscow employed the country as a conduit to move its troops into Ukraine. Furthermore, Belarus itself has been making preparations for a potential future incursion into Ukraine.

Considering the gravity of the threat emerging from Europe's eastern borders, it is important to address two possible outcomes stemming from this situation. The first consists of Russia losing the war with Ukraine and facing the blowback brought about by that national disaster. For Russia itself, the loss of the war would be a catastrophe. The country would inevitably become more isolated from its neighbours, even seeing the few friends that remain – China, for example, take a step away and weaken their links with Moscow. Vladimir Putin would have to fight battles on multiple home fronts against the elites who would lose faith in him and possibly look to replace him. Likewise, with a populace who have seen their sons, brothers, husbands and fathers killed in a war with Ukraine that many had not desired, Putin would have to deal with mass discontent and anger which could turn into a violent rejection of his rule.

Whilst the end of Vladimir Putin is something that essentially seems desirable, the in-fighting and civil unrest that could ensue from the loss of the war and the end of Putin's reign would lead to a situation of massive instability and precariousness on the borders of the EU and

NATO. To be ready for what might come in such a scenario, both organisations should be fully prepared and, importantly, committed to providing a robust and credible deterrent.

Such a loss would not only affect Russia, but also Belarus, the one European country that has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Moscow. Their deeply intertwined relationship has already resulted in significant repercussions for Belarus since the start of Russia's war. This has led to substantial damage to Belarus' reputation and standing internationally, including its further isolation from Western nations and a substantial decline in its exports to the EU. By June 2022, a 99% decline in exports to the EU bloc meant that almost the entirety of its oil product exports to EU markets had been effectively severed.

Concerns persist against the backdrop of ongoing discontent among the younger generation of Belarusians, as shown through extensive nationwide protests from 2020 to 2021, which ultimately resulted in little to no change. These concerns could increase significantly due to the potential rise in instability from Russia's growing influence over the nation.

There is a common belief that specific factions within Russia are actively engaged in destabilising Belarus. They do so by trying to involve the country in conflicts and have the aim of using its military forces as expendable pawns. This strategic approach aims to lay the groundwork for a potential total annexation of Belarus by Russia, should Russia's efforts prove successful.

A Russian defeat and the end of Putin's grip on power could trigger a parallel upheaval in Belarus. This scenario could potentially lead to internal turmoil and the escalation of conflicts, thereby further destabilising Eastern Europe (Samorukov, 2022).

The second outcome consists of Russia winning the war and taking over vast swathes or indeed all of Ukraine, bringing the borders of an aggressive pariah state to the heart of Europe. Russia would inevitably be greatly buoyed by this and could seek to swing its sabre further in NATO's direction.

Were Russia to occupy Ukraine on a permanent basis, or even install some kind of puppet government, it is unlikely that the Ukrainians would merely melt away into the background settling for becoming powerless actors in their own country's fate. The possibility of a guerrilla

war developing is quite high. Whilst Moscow would seek to use Ukraine and Belarus as buffer states against NATO, it would have to deal with the threat of hardline, Ukrainian patriots, experienced in war, extremely well-trained in the use of weapons and weapons production on a domestic scale, doing everything in their power to disrupt Russia's plans for their country.

Moreover, a triumphant Russia would find its confidence bolstered in its dealings with the West. Consequently, NATO would be confronted with the challenge of managing a substantial and less than amicable neighbour along its eastern frontiers. This situation would necessitate an increased deployment of troops within the region, a greater availability of equipment and weaponry and the unwavering determination of all Member States to adhere to the principles of Article 5 as outlined in the Founding Treaty. Achieving these objectives would, in turn, demand a deeper financial commitment from these nations to bolster collective resources.

The European Union would also need to unite and wholeheartedly adopt a unified approach to security, defence and diplomatic engagement with the triumphant Russian Federation. I am of the opinion that a more consolidated, centralised command system in Brussels would become essential, setting aside individual national interests and fostering increased cooperation, collaboration and reinforcement of NATO's role as the guardian of European stability.

Beyond the European region, a Russian victory would also have a galvanising effect on all those states that had stood behind Russia in its war against Ukraine. China would see that such endeavours can be successful, and this could put Taiwan and other neighbouring states at risk from a Chinese attack in the near future. Although this scenario would not have a direct impact on the security and defence of Europe, the continent would need to envision a future where its interests could be jeopardised by conflicts in the Far East. It would be essential to devise strategies for responding to and managing the consequences of an emboldened China driven by expansionist ideologies.

Given these two potential outcomes, it would be imperative that the defence of Europe, built on the bedrock of the NATO alliance, be firmly positioned in advance. NATO would be required to undertake judicious and astute measures to ensure its preparedness for the consequences coming from the end of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Likewise, the same is so for any future conflicts that might flare up along its borders and beyond throughout the twenty-first century.

In this chapter, I have given two different potential outcomes that could emerge in the near future under the umbrella scenario of a heightened NATO presence in Europe. These outcomes, rooted in varying geopolitical scenarios, underscore the indispensable role that a substantial NATO network would assume in ensuring the security and stability of the European continent.

What might a more tightly knit and fortified NATO entail? In order to gain an idea about this question, we should examine NATO's strategy for military readiness over the past decade.

Since 2014, the alliance has deployed 8 battlegroups along the eastern flank of the alliance's territory, based in one of eight host countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. These battlegroups each consist of around 1000 troops, placed in forward positions. Importantly, according to NATO, these battlegroups are *battle ready*. This initiative not only functions as a pragmatic response, given Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, but it also serves to dispel the idea that NATO and Europe, collectively, would display weakness and disunity in the face of such aggression.

In total, from 2023 onwards, NATO plans to have up to 300,000 troops on higher alert, ready to act should the need arise. These troops will be stationed along the eastern frontier. Additionally, another consideration for NATO is the new expanded territorial reach due to Sweden and Finland joining the alliance.

The situation changed dramatically in 2022 for Sweden and Finland. The two countries were forced to contemplate new approaches to their security in light of Russian aggression. After overcoming several hurdles, such as Turkey's initial hesitance due to Sweden's approach to Kurdish activists (considered enemies of the state by Ankara), both were formally invited to join the alliance. This expansion resulted in an approximate 1300-kilometer extension of NATO's borders. Additionally, the collective military strength of the alliance received a notable boost as the combined forces of Sweden and Finland will contribute up to 33,850 troops and 248,000 reservists.

The Vilnius Summit held in Lithuania in summer 2023 produced several key outcomes and this particular expansion marked a significant stride in the path of progress towards a stronger and more coherent alliance. The summit, a pivotal gathering of key decision makers and

leaders, laid out the path envisaged for future NATO development across several key areas. Crucial developments emerged in the form of resolute commitments made by the Member States. One of the most prominent of these commitments was the unanimous agreement to meet the 2% defence expenditure, which, as stipulated by Herrmann (2023), should be seen as a minimum rather than a maximum limit, underscoring the collective determination of the states to bolster their defence capabilities. This commitment, far from being a mere symbolic gesture, reflects a shared understanding that defence preparedness is not merely an option but a fundamental necessity in the current global atmosphere.

To bolster the commitments made at the summit, Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, went on to make the following comment that, “This year, [2023] the defence spending of European allies and Canada will grow by 8.3 percent in real terms. This is the biggest increase in decades and the ninth consecutive year of increased defence spending across NATO. The United States is also increasing its spending”, (Stoltenberg, 2023).

The summit’s significance extended beyond the explicit commitments; it also underscored the sense of unity and shared purpose among the participating states. A resolution such as the declaration on defence expenditure, in the context of the complex geopolitical challenges facing the world, represents a cohesive step forward transcending individual interest for the collective good, towards the end goal of solid, collective defence.

It sent a clear message of unity and solidarity, signalling to both allies and potential adversaries, that NATO Member States are committed to fortifying their defences. This outcome adds to the broader narrative of the Vilnius Summit as a pivotal event. Not only for its tangible agreements but also for the intangible and invaluable strengthening of the bonds among those present, fostering a sense of shared responsibility that it was hoped would have long-lasting implications.

In July 2023, during a visit to Helsinki, President Joe Biden of the United States delivered a concise yet resolute affirmation of the nation's dedication to European defence and the NATO alliance. He restated the significance of the Trans-Atlantic Partnership and emphasised that the well-being of Europe, in terms of peace and security, directly impacts the peace and security of the United States. He conveyed a strong message that the idea of the United States being a

passive observer in any European conflict would be inconceivable in the contemporary world (Associated Press, 2023).

The declarations from the US leader signify a strong dedication not just to NATO but to the overall security and defence of Europe. This highlights NATO's objective to collectively deter any potential threats that could jeopardise peace in the Northern Hemisphere. I agree with Joe Biden's assertion that the critical strategy moving forward lies in collective defence, as demonstrated by NATO and its member nations. In a world rife with dangers and threats, no nation should or would wish to stand alone without allies or find itself in a state of unreadiness.

Scenario II - SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

In terms of European security and defence, an enhanced NATO would serve as a robust deterrent to potential aggressors and both state and non-state actors aiming to undermine Europe for their own interests. A Europe safeguarded by a strengthened and modernised NATO framework would discourage current and potential adversaries.

By means of the commitments demonstrated by Member States within the NATO alliance, both in terms of financial contributions and expertise, the entire continent would gain from increased intelligence exchange concerning potential threats, vulnerabilities and risks. Moreover, a more unified NATO network would bolster the existing connections for the purpose of sharing knowledge in domains such as land, maritime, aerial, cyber and space defence as we progress into the twenty-first century.

As a cohesive organisation, demonstrating unity and collaborating closely with both the European Union and non-EU European nations, like the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Ukraine, NATO could significantly enhance its collective bargaining strength on the global stage when confronted with future threats.

Weaknesses:

I have mentioned in this chapter the benefits that I believe would come from having a stronger NATO network. However, something of this nature would also be prone to certain weaknesses. With NATO making additional pledges, the extensive logistical challenge of upholding and strengthening such a far reaching and considerable military alliance in the twenty-first century would become evident. The Member States would be required to guarantee seamless functioning of every role undertaken by their personnel and specialists within the supply chain, maintaining consistent, peak performance. Any vulnerability within this chain could potentially lead to grave complications for the alliance, especially in scenarios requiring military actions in the event of hostilities, humanitarian disasters or natural calamities.

Despite the commitments emerging from the Vilnius Summit and the statements issued by almost all Member States after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the challenge of harmonising the varied interests, priorities and viewpoints of 31 Member States (or 32 with Sweden's full membership) has the potential to give rise to significant complications in the future.

While divergent perspectives can offer the advantage of a range of outlooks rooted in national contexts, the absence of strong leadership and guidance at the top of the alliance could lead to a scenario in which numerous actors pull in different directions. This could severely undermine NATO's capacity to project a resolute and credible deterrent and even impede its ability to act when needed.

An enlarged and expanded NATO could potentially have significant implications for relationships with actors beyond the alliance, especially those perceived as adversaries. For instance, the Russian Federation has consistently expressed concerns that NATO might extend its boundaries and strive for supremacy. Paradoxically, despite Vladimir Putin's purported intent to sow discord within NATO, his government's actions in Ukraine have inadvertently contributed to bringing together and instilling new life into the alliance and pushing it closer to Russia's northern borders.

Opportunities:

The potential benefits stemming from a strengthened NATO include the potential for a stability dividend for the region. Through an expanded membership and increased troop levels, the alliance would build on already existing foundations and create an atmosphere of robust determination. The organisation would serve as a deterrent against potential adversaries, consequently generating greater stability.

This aligns with a deeper dedication to collective defence demonstrated by NATO's Member States. This commitment has the potential to be strengthened and result in increased cohesion across the alliance, thereby enhancing the protection of one another's interests.

From a practical perspective, a more expansive NATO creates the potential for improved interoperability among the military forces of individual states. This could result in joint missions, a better and even more well-oiled supply chain and the capacity to respond swiftly to both crises and threats.

Threats:

NATO faces potential threats both internally and externally. A prominent concern is the escalation of tensions with Russia. Unless a context came about whereby Russia underwent a substantial transformation into a functional liberal democracy, it would likely persist in perceiving NATO as a threatening presence. Consequently, any effort to enhance, expand or reinforce the alliance could be interpreted by Russia as an aggressive move made by the West. Although not insurmountable, these strained relations set the scene for misunderstandings and potential conflicts further down the line.

Spanning more than 30 nations and encompassing a population exceeding 1 billion, the alliance faces the prospect of resource exhaustion and increased discontent from more sizeable nations regarding the varying levels of commitment and input, both in terms of practical engagement and financial support, from other Member States. This simmering dissatisfaction holds the potential to escalate gradually and manifest in the future. A leader of a NATO country in the

future might choose to withdraw funding or personnel contributions, thereby undermining the operational effectiveness of the alliance in confronting potential threats.

An additional concern might arise in the form of direct confrontations between Member States, exemplified by the ongoing tensions between Greece and Turkey. Clashes tend to recur periodically. However, considering both nations hold significant positions within NATO and have made important contributions to the alliance, the potential for substantial complications is evident.

Moreover, given Turkey's geographical location partially outside Europe and its non-membership of the European Union, a persistent risk looms over the alliance. This risk entails the possibility that Turkey might pursue its own interests as its focus gravitates towards the Middle East and Asia. This geographical reorientation could create vulnerabilities that adversaries of the alliance could readily exploit, thereby undermining NATO and its operational capacities.

Conclusion

In this paper, a detailed analysis has been provided of two distinct scenarios envisioning European security and defence in the initial decades of the twenty-first century. The first scenario is rooted in a hypothetical context where NATO's influence has waned for various plausible reasons. In this scenario, the European nations find themselves in a position where they must assume responsibility for overseeing their collective security with no outside assistance, relying on their own resources and capabilities.

In contrast, the second scenario presented paints a picture of a Europe in which NATO has experienced a resurgence, fortified by a heightened level of commitment and involvement from its European Member States. In this alternate vision, NATO emerges as a more robust and assertive alliance, shaping the course of European security and defence in an era characterised by evolving geopolitical dynamics.

These two scenarios serve as critical explorations of the potential trajectories that European security and defence could follow in the complex geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century.

The research approach taken for this paper involved a meaningful analysis of the extensive body of literature pertaining to two pivotal subjects: NATO and its evolving role, and the concept of European defence autonomy. This methodological choice was made with the overarching goal of facilitating a thorough examination of contemporary theoretical perspectives within the realm of European security and defence. By adopting this approach, I sought to highlight the critical challenges facing European security, drawing out the paramount threats, while also identifying prevailing schools of thought concerning strategic responses to a potential deterioration in the continent's security environment.

I delved deep into the annals of academic literature and policy papers, meticulously dissecting a multitude of ideas, theories and viewpoints. This in-depth exploration enabled me to discern recurring themes and emerging trends, as well as nuanced arguments. Thus I was able to garner a richer understanding of the complex interplay between NATO, European defence autonomy, and the broader security environment in Europe.

As I embarked on this journey, drawing upon the foundation of personal pre-existing knowledge and guided to some extent by my own convictions, there was an expectation that I would encounter a diverse array of viewpoints, each with its own unique perspective. These viewpoints, I believed, would ultimately converge around a central theme: the suitability and necessity of NATO as an organisation in safeguarding Europe against potential aggressors in the forthcoming years. Alternatively, I pondered whether NATO had served its purpose, prompting discussions about whether the European Union and its regional allies should assume the mantle of Europe's defenders. This inquiry set the stage for a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted debates surrounding the future of European security strategy and policy.

The outcomes of my analysis broadly aligned with the expectations I held prior to undertaking this research. It is noteworthy that, regarding the question at hand, there exists a dynamic interplay between the two discernible camps of thought. These contrasting perspectives appear to ebb and flow in significance, their prominence contingent upon the prevailing threat level facing Europe and who is at the helm of its Member States.

Upon diving deeper into my research, a particularly striking observation emerged, notably in the context of the United States' role in European security affairs. It became evident that the US, influenced by the prevailing ideology of the incumbent of the Oval Office, wields a profound capacity through a single pronouncement to either diminish Europe to a grouping of anxious and uneasy nations or elevate the continent to a state of heightened self-assurance by presenting the idea that the United States remains steadfast in its commitment to bolster European defence capabilities.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the underlying geopolitical framework upon which my research rests is inherently dynamic, exhibiting a fast-paced and ever-evolving nature. Recent years have witnessed a marked acceleration in geopolitical change, causing considerable apprehension among observers who are increasingly concerned about the potential ramifications, particularly those pertaining to the security and stability of Europe. This heightened concern stems from a confluence of factors which include the destabilising repercussions, both material and economic, from Russia's ruinous foray into Ukraine. Additionally, it is exacerbated by China's growing assertiveness not only in the Indo-Pacific region but also in its expanding global influence, sparking a discourse that extends far beyond

regional boundaries. The pressure of these geopolitical forces underscores the imperative need for further analysis to better understand the multifaceted challenges that Europe faces in this era of rapid change and intense uncertainty.

The challenge of devising steadfast strategies and crafting enduring policies is magnified in this current setting, as the flow of circumstances can render even the most meticulously developed plans obsolete in the blink of an eye, driven by unforeseen global events. As we look towards the future, it becomes increasingly important to embark on a comprehensive exploration of the recent past, to understand the mistakes that have been made and the gains that have been achieved in terms of security and defence. European policymakers and academics find themselves at a juncture where a thorough and meticulous inventory of resources and capabilities is of utmost necessity, a detailed process aimed at enhancing and amplifying these invaluable assets. Whether as an integral pillar within the multifaceted structure of a NATO alliance or standing alone and acting autonomously, the capacity to rise to continually changing geopolitical challenges rests upon Europe's shoulders.

It has been my aim for this paper to clearly outline the array of challenges that lie ahead for Europe. These challenges stem not only from the external threats encircling its borders but also from the intricate web of internal logistical and financial hurdles that it must overcome. Furthermore, this paper has left room for the emergence of additional study, inviting an even deeper exploration of the subject matter. This serves the overarching purpose of sustaining the momentum required for Europe to rise resolutely to the occasion, safeguarding not only its territorial integrity but also the very essence of its way of life and the people who call it home.

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