

PEACE AND SECURITY

# BRITISH-GERMAN DIALOGUE ON DEFENCE AND SECURITY POLICIES

Conference Report

**Ed Arnold**  
June 2022



The 27.2.2022 ›Zeitenwende‹ speech by Chancellor Olaf Scholz will have a profound impact on Germany as a European security actor. The UK's strong response to Russian aggression similarly indicates how it intends to develop as a European security actor.



NATO primacy will remain a longstanding policy of the UK and it will likely choose to engage with Europe either bi-laterally, or mini-laterally to further practical defence cooperation, while an institutional agreement with the EU remains politically elusive. In contrast, Germany will continue to prefer to operate within multilateral organisations in particular NATO and the EU.



The UK could play an important role in supporting Germany through the cultural change that the Zeitenwende demands.

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From 23.–25.3.2022, RUSI and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) hosted a three-day British-German defence and security policies dialogue. This brought together leading parliamentarians, and security and defence experts from both countries to discuss the war in Ukraine and other threats and challenges to European security. The dialogue was divided into five sessions, including a reception discussion:

1. The War in Ukraine and the Immediate Challenges and Responses;
2. Russia As a Strategic Challenge for Europe;
3. Europe and the Geo-Politics of the Indo Pacific;
4. Iran, the Nuclear Question, and the Regional Security Context – What Next?;
5. Conclusions and Recommendations;
6. Reception – How Best Can European Defence and Security Cooperation Be Enhanced Following Brexit?

## FORMAT

Each session heard remarks from two subject specialists, one from the UK and the other from Germany, followed by political remarks from a member of the UK House of Commons and a member of the German Bundestag. The remainder of each session was a facilitated unattributable group discussion and Q&A session. This report is a summary of those discussions.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The strength of multilateral institutions in the post-war period has benefitted Europe greatly, underpinning the security and prosperity of Germany and the UK. The war in Ukraine and renewed Russian aggression is the most dangerous moment in European security since the 1950s. There are multiple points of potential escalation and while this is not a nuclear crisis, it could yet have a nuclear dimension which could become more significant than the Cuban crisis of 1962. Moreover, a weakened, or humiliated Russia, could be a far more dangerous challenge. This is a long-term challenge and there was consensus that the absence of war is not peace and that an era of constant competition beckons. In the face of these dangers, both countries, alongside other allies, and partners, need to enhance cooperation to keep the Rules Based International Order (RBIO) alive. The unity that we are currently experiencing within the Euro-Atlantic community is a reminder of the strength of the post-war order and a welcome return of the ›West‹ as a coherent concept. However, there was also consensus that the West also has weaknesses as a concept and that more effort would be needed to include dialogue and outreach to the global south, to counter Russian influence with these powers.
- Despite the welcome and positive current levels of unity among the Euro-Atlantic community, there are multiple warnings that this unity is fragile. There is a risk that as

political challenges and the cost of the war bite, old dividing lines will resurface, and perennial European security problems will not actually be solved. Euro-Atlantic nations and institutions need to invest in unity for it to be maintained. Increased defence expenditure within Europe is unlikely to alleviate security burden sharing at the national and multinational levels. The requirement to avoid duplication of capabilities and capacity remains a priority. European nations need to discuss and agree who is best placed to do what and when. Participants agreed that there is now an opportunity to get more creative with the European security architecture.

- The 27.2.2022 ›Zeitenwende‹ (watershed) speech by Chancellor Olaf Scholz will have a profound impact on how Germany develops as a European security actor. At the heart of the Zeitenwende was the dual spending commitment of, first, a €100 Billion ›special defence fund‹ for immediate investments in military capabilities, which sits outside of the normal budget process and capacity and, second, by that, to ›invest more than 2 per cent‹ of GDP on defence ›year by year‹, beginning from fiscal year 2022–2023.
- The UK response to Russian aggression similarly indicates how it intends to develop as a European security actor. The UK has had a more forceful stance against Russia following the Skripal chemical poisoning attack (2018) and the HMS Defender incident (2021), among other historical differences. NATO primacy will remain a longstanding policy of the UK and it will likely choose to engage with Europe either bi-laterally, or mini-laterally via the E3 (UK/France/Germany) or the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) to further practical defence cooperation, while an institutional agreement with the EU remains politically elusive. In contrast, Germany will continue to prefer to operate within multilateral organisations in particular NATO and the EU.
- The UK has an important role in supporting Germany through the cultural change that the Zeitenwende demands. For the UK, the new Germany position is welcome, and is something the UK has advocated for a long time. However, this decision will directly challenge key UK aspirations in the 2021 Integrated Review: ›The UK will be the greatest single European contributor to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area to 2030‹<sup>1</sup> and ›We (the UK) will continue to be the leading European Ally within NATO‹.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, p 60, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy> (Accessed 30.3.2022).

<sup>2</sup> Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, p 6, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy> (Accessed 30.3.2022).

## SESSION ONE

# THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Within Europe, defence policy is back on the agenda in a way that it has not been since the end of the Cold War. There is a view, both internally and externally, that Germany is finally living up to its defence and security commitments, which is in direct contrast to 2014, when, following the Russian annexation of Crimea, Germany, alongside the EU, pursued mainly solidarity statements.

### THE POLITICAL BASIS FOR THE ›ZEITENWENDE‹

Up until 24.2.2022 and the Russian reinvasion of Ukraine, the German Government tried to follow its traditional foreign policy approach to pursue the following objectives: act in consultation with EU members and the USA, avoid war; be a good ally; maintain unity; limit military power; protect economic interests; and maintain dialogue with Russia. However, Germany was not prepared for when this long-standing approach failed to match the situation and neither Berlin's nor Brussel's diplomacy could prevent a full-scale war. Germany was viewed as an ›unreliable partner‹ by some allies on a range of issues, including Nord Stream 2 and oil and gas reliance on Russia, not reaching the two per cent of GDP NATO defence spending commitment, and the country's participation as an observer in the first meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

On 24.2.2022, German core defence and security assumptions were shattered regarding the military, Russia, and the US. Germany found itself unable to influence Russian behaviour. This inability was also exposed in 2014 but this was largely ignored by the German government. In contrast, the Zeitenwende was formed following what the German political leadership considered an attack on immutable values and a direct threat to Germany and Europe. This political change led to five key decisions being made quickly through consultations within the Chancellor's office

1. To halt the completion of Nord Stream 2 and end the unconditional supply of oil and gas
2. To approve the delivery of lethal aid to Ukraine
3. To establish a €100 Billion special defence fund for long-term military projects, outside of the regular budgetary process with a special mechanism

4. To increase defence spending to meet the NATO 2 per cent target by fiscal year 2022-2023, which represents an increase from €50 to 75 Billion which will make it the largest defence budget in Europe
5. Announcements of purchasing decisions on large scale projects, such as the F35 and equipping Eurofighter with Electronic Warfare (EW) capabilities.<sup>3</sup>

Thus far, the political decision has been made and some of the required capability commitments have been announced. However, the Zeitenwende will only be successful if there is a meaningful change in mentality and culture, which will be far more difficult to achieve. Critical to this change in mindset is an acceptance that ›the end of war is not necessarily peace‹ and Germany must now acknowledge that a permanent state of competition and a new conflict environment exists. The wider significance of the announced increase in defence spending is that it will be much more difficult for other European countries to keep hiding behind Germany in regard to their own spending commitments. It was suggested that the UK can play a supportive role to mentor Germany through the required change if required/requested.

### THE UK AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The UK is proud of its military response to the war in Ukraine. The UK military has been training Ukrainian military forces under Operation Orbital since 2016.<sup>4</sup> It was the first European country to send weapons in 2022 and has been advancing an economic investment pact with Ukraine. In addition, the UK has formed a new trilateral defence pact with Poland and Ukraine and has sent additional troops to Estonia and Poland to enhance its commitment there.

The UK was attuned to the Russia threat which was described in the 2021 Integrated Review as the ›most acute threat to Euro-Atlantic security‹. This view helped to secure an additional £16.4 Billion defence funding for 2021-2025.

<sup>3</sup> The Federal Government, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378> (Accessed 30.3.2022).

<sup>4</sup> UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn07135/> (Accessed 30.3.2022).

However, the UK National Audit Office currently assesses the UK Ministry of Defence equipment black hole as £17 Billion and therefore it remains unclear exactly how the new funding will be spent. There was a view that this money had to be spent by Number 10 to prevent defence falling over.

Many of the assumptions in the Integrated Review remain but the prioritisation must now be accelerated, especially regarding resourcing Euro-Atlantic security and the Indo-Pacific tilt. More detail will now have to be given to the UK's commitment to and role within Euro-Atlantic security. Moreover, there was an assumption that the type and scale of warfare we are witnessing in Ukraine was on the way out, which has surprised many defence planners, in terms of the readiness requirements of military forces and the required ammunition stocks to prosecute such operations.

There are signals of a UK-EU rapprochement behind the scenes with the arrival of the new Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, who has taken a different approach and used a more constructive tone to her predecessor. The Foreign Secretary has outlined the desire to create a 'network of liberty' as an anti-authoritarian grand plan, using British experience in regulations, governance, and standard setting to support viable economic structures as a priority. Ukraine could become a test case for some of this activity.

Cooperation between members of the Euro-Atlantic community is vital and the current unity against Russia is an important starting point. However, this unity needs to be invested in if it is to be maintained over the long-term. The war – and the European security crisis it has produced – is greater than 9/11, the financial crash of 2008 and even Covid-19, with political, military, economic and energy dimensions.

Participants expressed concern about the long-term relations with Russia and questioned whether there was any opportunity to find peace with President Putin still in power. The West is now in a new environment characterised by constant conflict which is a position that the UK is more comfortable with than Germany.

## SESSION TWO

# RUSSIA AS A STRATEGIC CHALLENGE FOR EUROPE

The decision to reinvade Ukraine was a personal choice by President Putin. Therefore, the consequences of the war reflect on him primarily, whether that is victory, defeat, or partial success spun as a victory. President Putin seems a man on a historical mission. It is unclear whether Russia without Putin would become a different security actor or whether what might come after Putin would necessarily be better from a Euro-Atlantic position. Moreover, Russia presents a far greater challenge to Europe outside its boundaries, with Russian influence in Mali and the Sahel remaining active and there is a clear strategy to reduce Western influence in these areas, which is an obvious pattern of behaviour. In Germany, individuals within the political parties »Alternative für Deutschland« (AfD) and »Die Linke« can be seen as elements of the Russian way of war, who deliberately engage with the part of the German population that are pro-Putin. With 4,9 per cent of the votes in the last federal elections »Die Linke« has distanced itself from Putin whereas the right-wing AfD (10 per cent) has not done so far.

Europe has struggled to develop a coherent and consistent policy towards Russia for 30 years which can no longer be the case. The priorities for determining future policy should include:

- Deterrence at the core of the European response. This must be designed with military and economic levers working in synergy;
- Developing a Eurasian strategy to include engagement with the post-Soviet space where Russian influence remains unchallenged;
- Situating Russia in a global context and bringing in India, Japan, South Korea, and Australia into the process to help counter its behaviour;
- Understanding how best to manage Russia in the future within a hostile relationship, including practicalities such as military to military engagement, escalation management, and engaging the Russian population;
- Understanding how best to create dialogue with the Russian government and to be very clear in what we want, not just what we do not want.

### ENHANCING EUROPEAN COOPERATION TO COUNTER RUSSIA

President Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and how that war has been prosecuted has thus far generated unprecedented levels of Western unity and enabled greater levels of NATO – EU cooperation. However, this unity is fragile, and it will need to be invested in at the national and multinational level if it is to be maintained. As a priority, the Euro-Atlantic community should agree on how to deal with Ukraine diplomatically and ensure that it is not isolated.

Moreover, broad agreement needs to be gained on how to deal with Russia diplomatically and the conditions for that, as there are other global issues that Russia needs to be engaged on, for example the climate change agenda. Participants were unsure about the future of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) given the low degree of trust that currently exists between the West and Russia. However, it was noted that the OSCE was an important part of the European security architecture and provides a means to engage with the Russian government, and post-Soviet states, on a broad set of issues within a European format.

### DEFENCE INDUSTRY AND SPENDING

The increases in European defence spending following the war in Ukraine have created opportunities for European security. The announced significant increases in German defence spending create new opportunities for security policy dialogue and a chance to anchor new relationships, especially regarding defence industrial cooperation, cyber and space.

Participants agreed that while all these spending commitments and numbers were positive and welcome, it is more important that the funds are spent wisely on a broader range of activities, such as domestic resilience, combatting election interference and countering Russian relationships and investment with right-wing parties throughout Europe. It was stressed that an increase in defence funding needs to be embedded in European formats, based on strategic thinking and prioritisation. Europe cannot afford to waste resources and effort any longer and there must be a greater focus on removing duplication.

## SESSION THREE

# EUROPE AND THE GEO-POLITICS OF THE INDO PACIFIC

The war in Ukraine has led many European nations and organisations to either reassess extant Indo-Pacific strategies or reprioritise the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres. The overlap in the current European strategies create a significant duplication of effort and countries within the region do not have the capacity to absorb the potential levels of engagement. Beijing will be watching the levels and sustainment of Western support and engagement with Ukraine closely and are probably surprised by the current level of solidarity. Taiwan, through Covid and now Ukraine, with supply chain disruption and semiconductors is now firmly on the European radar.

Germany has spent a long time sitting on fence between the US (values) and China (economic interest), with this position becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. The German government published its Indo-Pacific ›guidelines‹ in September 2020 (not a strategy but a political declaration). The region remains incredibly important to Germany's trade and the country depends on open and secure sea routes but has largely outsourced this task to others. This could be an area of greater military cooperation but there was a realisation that German strengths lie elsewhere. German participants declared that they were impressed by the global significance and messaging of the UK Carrier Strike Group (CSG21) which toured the Indo-Pacific last year. Moreover, it was suggested that Germany F35-Bs, which have been ordered, could operate on UK carriers in the future.

Germany's position towards China is deliberately less confrontational than the UK position, which is closer to the US approach. However, both countries have the same needs in terms of economic diversification and the UK needs to access to new markets due to Brexit. There has been a convergence in the China debate between the UK and Germany and both countries were the first major European powers to start a real debate, with Germany focussed on business interests and the UK on security concerns, particularly regarding Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and domestic security challenges posed by China. In Germany, the main driver of the debate was business concerns about dependency on China. This was followed by concerns about Huawei and Germany's critical infrastructure, leading to a law to protect CNI passed just before the election. The new German approach towards China has been sanctified by the coalition agreement: China as systemic rival, competitor, and possible

partner, with Germany willing to co-operate as much as possible but the government recognises that there are limits to this approach.

The UK cannot unpick these international challenges from domestic politics, which is a clear message that individual UK MPs hear from constituents, as the current government tries to make international trade policy link to the domestic ›levelling up agenda‹. It was noted that the Indo-pacific tilt was not a Global Britain vision, but rather an attempt to avoid talking about Brexit and future EU security cooperation. Moreover, there is a question over how achievable the tilt will be due to the additional resources that the war in Ukraine will demand. The UK Labour Party would prefer to focus on positive global relationships, including close trade and cooperation with European neighbours. A significant advantage for the EU within the Indo-Pacific is as a regulatory superpower, playing a role in strengthening European sovereignty by legislation on public procurement and avoiding unfair competition.

## SESSION FOUR

# IRAN, THE NUCLEAR QUESTION, AND THE REGIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT – WHAT NEXT?

Until 27.2.2022, Russia played a largely constructive role in the negotiations to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); Russia's head negotiator Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov repeatedly smoothed over ruffled feathers on both the Iranian and the US/European sides throughout the process. Moscow's approach changed with FM Lavrov's request for guarantees that sanctions on Russia due to its war in Ukraine would not impede its ability to trade with Iran, but this appears to have been resolved. In general, Russia could actively sabotage the talks, but also could make life difficult by not doing anything. With regard to the JCPOA, nearly all substantive issues have been resolved, but a deal is yet to be finalised. Meanwhile, Iran has been upping ante through proxies (e.g., against US interests in Iraq); this is likely to intensify should negotiations collapse. The deal on the table is largely transactional and tactical in nature; even if agreed it is unlikely to dramatically change Iran-West relations.

The Gulf states have struggled to establish a position on the war in Ukraine. They value their relations with Moscow and had hoped that Russia would act as a counterweight to Iran in the region. Thus far, the UAE has been the most prominent by holding a »difficult« position at the UN Security Council. Countries within the region have been reluctant to choose a side, as they seek to avoid setting a precedent should they ever have to face a choice between the West and China.

The negotiations on JCPOA (P5+1) do not include regional powers and are only focused on the nuclear file, rather than wider regional security questions. From the perspective of the Gulf monarchies and Israel this division is artificial. Some of the resources that Iran gained from sanctions relief in 2015 went towards funding armed non-state actors in the region, and a new nuclear deal could again provide Iran with additional resources and international legitimacy for its regional activities, especially in regard to Yemen. Participants stressed that any deal was not a »mission accomplished« moment but rather a »mission start« moment, signalling the need to engage more actively with Iran in the region. Europeans cannot afford to take their eyes off this, not least because of energy concerns brought about by the war in Ukraine, as demonstrated by German vice-chancellor Robert Habeck's visit to Qatar and the UAE and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to Saudi Arabia and UAE to help Europe become less reliant on Russian energy.

This is an interesting moment with new forms of dialogue being explored by countries in the region (especially the Iran-Saudi dialogue). However, while these initiatives look good on the surface, there is a risk that they are all too short-term. There was a view that members cannot take the E3 for granted. Its origins, from 2003 during the Iran nuclear crisis, initiated a process that 12 years later became the JCPOA. Participants expressed a strong desire to protect the E3 as a diplomatic mechanism and valued its usefulness and its international role in helping solve some global challenges, in conjunction with the US.

Europe should not over or underestimate what has happened in the context of the Iran deal. President Trump destroyed all that was achieved, which included the wider destruction of multilateral approaches. In doing so he did more damage to US credibility than any dictator could achieve. There is a risk that a new Republican administration in the US in 2025 could withdraw from JCPOA again.

The war in Ukraine and its potential escalation has focused conversations on nuclear issues more broadly and as nuclear weapons become more effective, nuclear agreements and limitations become even more important. In addition, a more radical right-wing government in Iran similarly makes achieving an agreement much more important.

### AREAS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOWING THE DIALOGUE

The following points were highlighted by participants in the conclusions and recommendations section. It was agreed that they required further discussion and consideration of their implementation:

- What might future UK–German defence and security cooperation look like taking the UK-Germany Joint Declaration of June 2021 as a baseline?<sup>5</sup> Is there an ambition and ability to recreate a relationship more like the UK–France Lancaster House Treaties of 2010?

<sup>5</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-germany-joint-declaration-june-2021/uk-germany-joint-declaration-june-2021> (Accessed 30.3.2022).

- How can the UK and Germany cooperate to become more creative on European security architecture and test ideas to increase the formality of UK-EU relations, such as via a European Security Council or an 'EU plus one' arrangement?
- The dialogue reinforced the importance of parliamentary exchanges between the UK and Germany and the possibility to move such contacts on to a broader footing and to establish a joint backbench group on defence and foreign policy issues will be explored to identify practical ways that the leaderships of Labour and the SDP can work together more closely, as they have in the past.
- What is the future of UK-German defence industry cooperation? Should the UK and Germany look to develop shared projects to help to anchor the relationship in post-Brexit environment? How might joint German-French projects be impacted?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ed Arnold** is a Research Fellow for European Security within the International Security Studies department at RUSI. His experience covers defence, intelligence, counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, within the public and private sector. His primary research focus is on British defence, security, and foreign policy, specifically relating to the European security architecture and transatlantic cooperation. Ed has a particular interest in UK National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Reviews. Ed joined RUSI from the private sector where he was a strategy consultant within the defence and security sector. His clients included multiple government departments and multi-national and SME private companies. Prior to consultancy, Ed was an infantry Officer within the British Army. His military career was primarily spent overseas, including deployments to Afghanistan and East Africa and a posting at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe during the Ukraine crisis. Ed holds a MA War Studies from King's College London and a BA (Hons) in International Politics from the University of Stirling, Scotland.

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- economic and social policy
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## Conference Report



The strength of multilateral institutions in the post-war period has benefitted Europe greatly, underpinning the security and prosperity of Germany and the UK. The war in Ukraine and renewed Russian aggression is the most dangerous moment in European security since the 1950s. There are multiple points of potential escalation and while this is not a nuclear crisis, it could yet have a nuclear dimension which could become more significant than the Cuban crisis of 1962.



Moreover, a weakened, or humiliated Russia, could be a far more dangerous challenge. This is a long-term challenge. The absence of war is not peace. An era of constant competition beckons. In the face of these dangers, Germany and the UK, alongside other allies, and partners, need to enhance cooperation to keep the Rules Based International Order alive. The current unity within the Euro-Atlantic community is a reminder of the strength of the post-war order and a welcome return of the ›West‹ as a coherent concept. However, the ›West‹ also has weaknesses as a concept. More effort is needed to include dialogue and outreach to the global south, to counter Russian influence with these powers.



Despite the welcome and positive current levels of unity among the Euro-Atlantic community, there are multiple warnings that this unity is fragile. There is a risk that as political challenges and the cost of the war bite, old dividing lines will resurface, and perennial European security problems will not actually be solved. Euro-Atlantic nations and institutions need to invest in unity for it to be maintained. Increased defence expenditure within Europe is unlikely to alleviate security burden sharing at the national and multinational levels. The requirement to avoid duplication of capabilities and capacity remains a priority. European nations need to discuss and agree who is best placed to do what and when. Now there is an opportunity to get more creative with the European security architecture.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

<https://uk.fes.de/>