

UKRAINE, EUROPE AND SECURITY

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The task of projecting the power distribution in Europe and Northeast Asia by 2020 was quite challenging in 2001 when the book called “Tragedy of great power politics” was published by Mearsheimer. The author claimed that the process involved two interconnected tasks: 1) calculating the power levels of the major players in each region, with particular attention to the presence of a potential hegemon; and 2) estimating the likelihood that the United States would continue to be militarily involved in those areas, which was primarily dependent on the existence of a potential hegemon among the local great powers that can only be contained with American assistance. For instance, it was difficult to predict how strong the economies of China and Russia would be in 2020, or if China would continue to exist as a single nation or disintegrate like the Soviet Union did. (Mearsheimer 2001)

Nowadays, the picture is relatively fixed and the above-mentioned puzzles are answered to a major extent. China is potentially the most potent rising power ever, while Russia since 2022 claims to be under its existential threat and tries to justify its invasion of Ukraine mainly with that argument. However, what about the post-Soviet countries and their degree of freedom, sovereignty and independence? Throughout the history all these countries struggled a lot in order to achieve the latter. Having said that, it can be argued that the condition has the most challenging period since the August war in 2008 as far it was the first European war in the 21st century. Many scholars and political leaders at that time claimed that it was just the beginning of a larger scale invasion and unfortunately the probability turned out to be true.

Therefore, since February 2022 Ukraine fights for its sovereignty, democracy and independence. Having said that, the military conflict is much more than meets the eye. In other words, it is a value competition among the states and organizations worldwide. Accordingly, its consequences are expected to have a huge impact on the new world order that is already shaping but still stays in flux. Obviously, not all states are the same in terms of their characteristics or interests while the latter plays the key role in the process of defining how friendly they potentially are towards each other. Moreover, the history plays the key role in it and the pattern that clearly shows how a state was behaving itself throughout the years can be decisive. The latter is strongly related to the ideology phenomenon that itself cannot be created in a day and cannot be vanished at once.

On the 28th of February 2024 Ursula von der Leyen who is the president of the European Commission highlighted the existing growing destabilization from the security perspective in Europe that is mostly caused by Russia. The leader also talked about the interdependence between NATO and the European Union as they can weaken or strengthen each other. In the same token, the president of Finland before the above-mentioned statement declared as follows: “Europe needs to wake up. It was also mentioned that investments in military production solely to provide necessary assistance could not be considered as sufficient. Being

strong not for waging wars but to ensure peace,” he noted. As the matter-of-fact Sweden is about to join the EU and this fact itself proves the stability or strength of the Union. It was also stated that the ability together with the willingness to protect European interests and value system stays existential at the very moment.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU has been constant in implementing and consolidating security or defense measures. Long-term consideration of Europe's financial and military needs should also be emphasized. In 2024, the EU and NATO will continue to carry out security and defense programs as they address Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which is in its third year, as well as the growing complexity of the geopolitical landscape near Europe (the Middle East and the Caucasus, for example).

Priorities for the next European Commission, the European Council's Strategic Agenda 2024–2029, and the June European elections are probably going to place a strong emphasis on security and defense. The main items on the agenda should include the state of the European Peace Facility (EPF), the status of the Rapid Deployment Capacity, and the execution of several EU strategies related to military mobility, space exploration, and maritime affairs.

National defense budget increases across the EU and NATO are expected to continue, but given competing priorities and the social and economic hardships many Europeans have seen since COVID-19, this could turn into a more divisive political issue in the context of the next elections. It is likely that priority will be given to restocking and purchasing necessary weapons, including fighter jets, tanks, army vehicles, and air defense systems. It is unclear, meanwhile, if these higher budgets will result in a sustained commitment to raise defense spending.

In 2024, the evolution of defense cooperation between the EU and the US should be closely monitored, as should any potential ramifications from the US presidential election outcome, which could be problematic for the transatlantic alliance. Europeans must assess their current security and defense capabilities and fortify NATO's European pillar, regardless of the results of the election, but especially if Donald Trump is reelected. In order to maintain stability in its neighborhood and, above all, to be able to defend itself, maybe without US assistance in the future, the EU needs to have far greater credibility as a security actor.

NATO's best defense plan is still to prevent Putin from winning in Ukraine. The goal therefore is to support Kyiv's ability to withstand Russian attacks going forward by approving the long-term military and budgetary assistance that is presently stalled in the US Congress. In some way, NATO's job is to more effectively communicate the message that aiding Kyiv is an essential part of Western defense in general and not just a voluntary humanitarian endeavor. The last thing the Summit needs to portray is a struggling President Zelenskyy asking for help to survive in front of a group of doubtful allies.

In the beginning there were 12 countries that signed the treaty and in so doing shared the alliance's core values. Since then, the number has risen, which makes the alliance stronger and safer every time. Even though the threats change its characteristics, still the organization

effectively deals with the crucial issues throughout its history. The idea that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO went downhill and lost its importance might not be accurate. Moreover, the latter played a crucial role in the process of ending the war in Balkans and strived for sustaining peace there. Furthermore, the fact that NATO efficiently protected civilians from the Kadaphi dictatorship can serve as another example. The fact is that the alliance has a growing tendency and now it is more influential than before. Still the Russian invasion of Ukraine has challenged the organization in a complex way by making peace expensive to be achieved or sustained.

By the same token let's recall the recent statement of the Finnish prime minister Sanna Marin: 'We want to become a member of NATO because we don't ever again want war in Finland'. She said on the 17th of January, 2023. (Politico) So, the fact that Finland and Sweden showed readiness and felt necessity of joining the NATO alliance, once again proved the latter's importance in terms of global peace and security. On the other hand, the fact also proved that NATO's open-door policy stays viable and credible in times of great uncertainty. As many might know Sweden is the country that stayed neutral since 1834 even in times of the Second World War, however, the recent global security events made it clear that the unity becomes a top priority. Obviously, this sudden shift means the NATO expansion towards Nordic countries that for Russia represents an additional threat in the European security paradigm. As the matter of fact, it is obvious that being close to the organization is not enough as far as being its member is what matters in the end; "NATO supports its partners, but it defends its allies" Jonson. (NATO, 2022)

With its brutal war in Ukraine, Russia distracted the existing peace balance and created the reality in which Finland and Sweden decide to change their isolationism keeping in mind that whatever happens in Europe it directly affects the neighboring countries. In the same token, Denmark joined the European cooperation on security and defense on the 1st of July, 2022. In doing so, the country chooses to contribute to the EU's military missions and joins the European Defense Agency (EDA). (EURACTIV)

The strong desire of reuniting Russia and his failed tactics about the war of conquest in Ukraine creates a high degree of uncertainty or insecurity nowadays. The strategy also threatened peace among the free world that includes western, democratic or non-communist parties.

As the Estonian foreign minister stated: "Russia's steps will not deter us from providing continued support to Ukraine, which has been fighting for its sovereignty and the security of us all... We will continue to support Ukraine as Russia is planning large-scale attacks, and we call on other like-minded countries to increase their assistance to Ukraine." said Urmas Reinsalu. (Politico, 2023) The response was quick, as Moscow accused Tallinn of 'Rusophobia' after removing the Russian ambassador from Estonia and Latvia. So, 'tensions between Russia and Baltic EU member countries Estonia and Latvia escalated when Moscow told Estonia's ambassador to leave'. (Politico)

Undoubtedly, the role of solidarity and the relevant supranational organizations or the units that make collective decisions stay as important as never before. Meanwhile, by its brutal actions in Europe's biggest territory, Russia creates a dangerous precedent in the 21st century as it tries to push the world backwards when the war of conquest was normalized. Undoubtedly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is the worst large-scale war in Europe since WWII.

Before February 2022, invading a democratic state was not considered to be an option, however, the ongoing war undermined the international order and made other states vulnerable. Therefore, the ongoing severe war in Ukraine continues to have a huge impact on the renewed global order. So, there should be a clear opportunity cost for the aggressor.

Obviously, Putin's Russia can never go back to what it was before February 2022. Nowadays, Putin's political decisions completely unveil his totalitarianism, however, earlier in December 2022 during the Russian security council meeting, Putin made it clear that he considers himself to be an absolute power in Russia.

Therefore, it is not a secret that Putin fears the idea of rising democracy, freedom and sovereignty. Despite the prolonged military conflict one can argue that poor tactics and the current Russian ideology of being great again is destined to fail once and for all.

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