

On the Threshold of Global Changes

In-Depth Insight into the 22nd Berlin Security Conference

The traditional 22nd Berlin Security Conference was held on November 29 and 30, 2023. The conference was held at the Vienna House Andel's Hotel in Berlin. The organizer of the event was the German *Behörden Spiegel*. I attended the conference as a student at the University of Ljubljana and a member of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Slovenia.

The Berlin Security Conference, alongside the regular February Munich Security Conference, is a central event addressing global security challenges. It brought together politicians, high-ranking military officers, academics, representatives of the military industry, and other experts to discuss global security issues in depth. The event was excellent for discussion and exchange of ideas, forming common approaches to conflict deterrence and maintaining peace and security. The conference also served as a useful basis for collaboration and knowledge exchange among various actors.

In a contemporary world, where global security threats are continuously evolving and changing, it is important for leading thinkers, decision-makers, and experts in the fields of defense, security, and industry to join their efforts in formulating strategies to face these challenges. Through a series of keynotes, panel discussions and other presentations, speakers discussed a wide range of topics. The conference featured thirty-six presentations in the form of speeches, panels, and discussions, and with over 100 different speakers, it represented a wide range of security content. I combined all the presentations into a condensed and comprehensive report, in which I shed light on the key points and conclusions of the conference and offered an insight into future trends and challenges in the field of security and how we can adequately prepare for them.

European Security Structure and Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a *zeitenwende*. It has triggered a tectonic shift in the European and broader security environment. The conference highlighted that Europe also shares the values that Ukraine is fighting for, so its fight is just as much our fight. Speakers pointed to the critical need to increase defense industrial capabilities in Europe, as the consumption of weapons and ammunition in Ukraine is ten times greater than the current European production capacities. This disproportion has clearly highlighted the deficiencies in

the European defense infrastructure and the need for rapid strengthening of production capacities. We must become war capable, necessitating multi-layered changes in thinking at the political, industrial, and individual levels within the European Union and nationally. The defense industry has once again become a part of the critical national and European infrastructure, as in the times of the Cold War.

The unity of Western countries is crucial for effective defense and support of Ukraine, which is central to the security of wider Europe. Speakers emphasized the need to eliminate grey zones – areas of uncertainty and instability that can serve as starting points for conflicts and tensions in Europe. This would strengthen the political and economic stability of the entire region. Ukraine was also identified as a key part of the future security structure of Europe and NATO. Speakers agreed that Ukraine's future lies both in NATO and in the EU. This path will require great efforts on international level. Without Ukraine's radical reform efforts, of course, this will not be possible.

With the war in Ukraine, the European Union is providing support to a country in war for the first time in history. The European Union Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUMAM) was established on October 17, 2022, as a response to Ukraine's request for military support. In this mission, Germany plays a central role.

The need to include Ukraine in broader European security plans was also emphasized, ensuring its security and stability, which is essential for maintaining peace on the European continent. Ukraine will remain safe only if it becomes part of the Western security structure and NATO, which would provide security guarantees and deter Russian aggression. Had the Baltic states not been members of NATO and the EU, they could easily have been victims of Russian aggression. Therefore, it is important to realize how important NATO's role is. In this context, the importance of supporting Ukraine, not only with military means but also with political and economic assistance, was highlighted. Its sovereignty and resistance to external threats need to be strengthened. We must show the US that we share the burden.

The European Union and NATO allies will continue to stand by Ukraine because of its sovereignty, to deter future aggression, and to prevent destabilization. Ukraine has chosen the path of the West, the path of democratic values. A Russian victory would be a victory of an autocratic regime over a sovereign state that has chosen democratic values. Europe simply cannot and should not afford this.

The European Union must move from "emergency responding" to building "long-term defense capabilities." Joint procurement will be key in this regard. The EU must strive for greater strategic independence in the defense industry. Europe must unite and develop a long-term

strategy to ensure that a similar conflict like the ongoing one in Ukraine can be prevented or at least effectively managed in the future. This includes strengthening the military capacities of the industry as well as developing strong political and diplomatic tools to deal with modern security challenges.

NATO and the New Era of Collective Defense – Admiral Rob Bauer

The centerpiece of the 22nd Berlin Security Conference was the speech of Admiral Rob Bauer, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. In his speech, he highlighted the critical phase in which the alliance finds itself and the need to transform the approach to collective defense. Admiral Bauer described the current global situation as the most critical in recent decades, with the shifting "tectonic plates of power" and an increase in the number of countries involved in external conflicts. The Institute for Economics and Peace, a global think tank based in Sydney, Australia, stated in its annual Global Peace Index that the number of countries involved in external conflicts increased from 58 in 2008 to 91 in 2022.

Bauer emphasized that NATO is facing a new era of collective defense, a consequence of Russia's pattern of aggressive and ruthlessly destructive behavior. This means that it is not we who determine the timeline, but our opponents. The war in Ukraine will shape the 21st century. In his speech, he detailed the adaptations and strategies NATO has developed to defend against the two main threats: Russia and terrorist groups. He mentioned plans adopted at the summit in Vilnius, which represent the most comprehensive defense plans of the NATO alliance since the end of the Cold War. These plans closely link national and NATO defense strategies and will shape defense capabilities for the coming decades. To achieve the desired level of collective defense and security, we need several steps: putting more troops on higher readiness, capacity building for high-intensity warfare, adaptation of command-and-control structures, greater and sustainable logistical support including ammunition stocks, and more joint exercises and training.

Special emphasis was placed on the "whole-of-society approach" to strengthen deterrence and collective defense, involving both the public and private sectors. The public and private sectors must change their mindset and move from an era when everything was predictable, controlled, and where everything could be easily planned – an era focused on efficiency – to an era where anything can happen at any time, where nothing is predictable, and where we must expect the unexpected – an era in which we must focus on effectiveness. For the past 30 years, most countries and industries have focused on efficiency, reducing stocks, profitability, and not on effectiveness, which in practice meant "just enough" at "just the right

time." If we are attacked, we must be resilient and ready to fight – be *kriegstüchtig*. "Someone may attack us," this is what NATO focuses on for collective defense. Therefore, we must be more prepared than in the past. This new era of collective defense is also an opportunity for us to redefine the MIC, to move into a reality where we once again have large stocks and spare capacities in the broadest sense. We witnessed this during the pandemic when stocks saved lives. Both the private and public sectors must fundamentally change their approach.

People must realize that war is not something from our past. War is not an "eradicated disease" that can only be found far away. For 80 years, we have built our prosperity on the premise of the security of our country. We never had to worry or think about whether we are actually safe or threatened. War has returned to the European continent. Too few people realize that what is happening elsewhere in the world could also happen to us. People think that reaching the 2 percent GDP target for defense is a magical threshold after which everything will be fine. Collective defense and real deterrence require much, much more than that – they require nationwide resilience that must be built by the public and private sectors hand in hand, said Admiral Bauer.

Furthermore, Bauer spoke about the importance of national leadership within the alliance, praising Germany for its new defense policy and historical shift with the term *kriegstüchtig* – readiness for war, which was once unimaginable for German policy and society. This change in German policy reflects a decisive shift in mindset and approach to defense in Europe.

Bauer concluded with a strong message. Great power competition should not take place on the battlefield but should be resolved through diplomacy, or in the courtroom if that fails. However, it is time to look at the world and see it as it is, not as we would like it to be. This means that we must prepare for war and get our deterrence, resilience, and defense capabilities in order – we must become *kriegstüchtig*. Preparing for war in a new era of violence and conflict is not an act of aggression but a necessity for maintaining peace. Deterrence is like oxygen – you don't notice it until it's gone. Together we can and must do what NATO does best: unite, adapt, and protect. He called for swift and decisive action. If we want to maintain peace, we must prepare for war!

Admiral Bauer's speech clearly indicated that NATO has entered a new era of violence and conflict. This necessarily requires decisive, adaptable, and united action from all allies. His speech was a key part of the conference and reflects the current dynamics and challenges faced by NATO and its members.

Changes in Military Operations and Adaptation to New Realities

War has once again become a significant part of political and security debates in Europe. European countries and allied forces must adapt to new realities that demand greater readiness and resilience. This need stems from the increasing security threats and instability on European soil, which require decisive actions. The need for more effective and resilient defense was emphasized. This does not only include increasing military capabilities but also developing and implementing advanced strategies that can respond to a broad spectrum of threats. Discussions revolved around the importance of developing and using new technologies, including unmanned aerial vehicles, cyber defense, artificial intelligence, as well as advanced surveillance and intelligence systems.

Standardization and coordination of equipment within allied states are crucial. This approach not only enhances interoperability among different armies but also allows for more efficient and rapid response to crisis situations. The need for joint procurement and development of military equipment was discussed. The need for better coordination and cooperation at the international level, including sharing intelligence data and joint planning of defense operations, was also mentioned. This would also involve closer collaboration with non-NATO members, who are equally important for ensuring regional security.

European countries and NATO as a whole must adopt a proactive approach to military operations that goes beyond traditional defense mechanisms. This means investing in advanced technologies, improving interoperability, strengthening international cooperation, and adjusting military strategies to effectively confront contemporary security challenges. Such an approach not only enhances defense readiness but also ensures that European countries and their allied partners are better equipped to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Germany and Defense Policy

Germany has experienced a radical change in its defense mentality, representing a key turningpoint for the first time since World War II. This change is reflected in a new approach called "*kriegstüchtigkeit*," meaning that it must be militarily prepared for high-intensity, large-scale warfare. This historical shift reflects a deep awareness of the need for stronger military readiness and capability in response to modern security challenges. The change acknowledges that the current geopolitical circumstances and security challenges demand a stronger and more decisive response from Germany. Increasing defense spending and

focusing on boosting the capabilities of the defense industry are part of this approach. These efforts include not only quantitative increases but also qualitative modernization of the German armed forces and an upgrade of the overall armament systems. With these steps, Germany not only improves its defense capabilities but also strengthens its role as a key player in European and global security.

The discussion also highlighted the need for a more coordinated and integrated approach to defense at the European level, with Germany playing a key role. It was emphasized that Germany, with its geopolitical position and economic strength, must assume a leading role in joint European defense efforts, including strengthening cooperation within NATO and with transatlantic partners. Challenges such as the need for standardization of equipment and weapons to ensure better interoperability among allied forces and the need for joint investments in new technologies and defense systems were also mentioned. Germany should lead in the development and implementation of new defense strategies and technologies that would strengthen the entire European defense architecture.

For Germany, it is crucial to realize the goals of the new defense policy and invest in modern, effective, and resilient defense infrastructure. This means not only responding to contemporary security challenges but also strengthening Germany's role and contribution in joint European and transatlantic defense initiatives, which will ensure greater stability and security throughout Europe.

Hybrid Threats

Hybrid threats are challenges posed by modern forms of aggression that extend beyond traditional military methods. Hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, blockades, the spread of fake news, and sabotage are becoming increasingly widespread and require innovative approaches to security and defense. The need for a better understanding of these threats and the development of effective strategies and tools for their management were emphasized. The discussion specifically highlighted the security situation in Israel and the Middle East, where hybrid threats are particularly pronounced. It was noted that Israel, as a country often targeted by cyberattacks and terrorist acts, has developed advanced techniques and methods for defense against such threats.

The need for cooperation between countries in the region and the international community to address these challenges was stressed. Additionally, the importance of exchanging information and experiences between countries to better prepare for hybrid threats was

highlighted. It is crucial to develop joint strategies and establish close cooperation among competent authorities. The emphasis was also placed on the importance of involving civil society and the private sector in the fight against hybrid threats. Efforts to defend against such threats must be comprehensive, involving both state and non-state actors, as hybrid threats often occur in forms that transcend traditional state borders. Effective defense against hybrid threats requires a combination of technological innovations, international cooperation, and a proactive approach that includes all segments of society.

People's Republic of China and Taiwan

Taiwan is a regular target of cyberattacks. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan, Dr. Roy Chun Lee, highlighted that Taiwan was the target of approximately 13 million cyberattacks per month in 2022, which is a hundredfold of the European average. Taiwan is recognized as a key in the global supply chain, particularly as the main exporter of critical components for European infrastructure and technology. This role of Taiwan emphasizes the need for stronger economic and technological ties between Europe and Taiwan, which would strengthen not only economic security but also political and strategic stability in the region. These facts emphasize the importance for Europe to strengthen its partnership with Taiwan.

Furthermore, he emphasized China's indirect interference in the upcoming elections in Taiwan. For example, the opposition says that the elections are actually a vote between war and peace, war in terms of China's military exercises in the waters near Taiwan and peace in terms of the absence of such activities. If the opposition wins, there would supposedly be no more military exercises, which in this sense means peace.

Dr. Chun Lee also highlighted the potential consequences of China's policy towards Taiwan for European security. Concerns were expressed regarding China as an autocratic power and its influence on regional stability, freedom of navigation, and international trade. In this context, the need for a clear European strategy towards China and Taiwan was highlighted, which would balance economic interests with the promotion of democratic values and human rights common to Taiwan and Europe. It is important to support Taiwan not only because we are democratic partners but also because the consequences of deteriorating relations between China and Taiwan would be strongly felt in Europe, even though Taiwan is on the other side of the world for us. Thus, we could experience the collapse of the railway system and email servers, as Taiwan is the largest exporter of key parts for the operation of these systems. In short, cooperation with Taiwan is strategically beneficial for both Europe and Taiwan.

Looking Forward: The Future of Security Challenges (Conclusion)

The Berlin Security Conference was a key gathering place for thinkers, decision-makers, experts, and representatives of the defense industry who face constantly changing global security threats. The conference provided insight into current challenges and shaped guidelines for the future. The critical need to strengthen the European security structure, especially considering the war in Ukraine, was emphasized. European countries must become *kriegstüchtig*, which requires a radical change in mentality at the political, defense, and industrial levels. The unity of Western countries and the inclusion of Ukraine in the broader security structure were highlighted as key to long-term stability.

Admiral Rob Bauer indicated a new era of collective defense. This new era requires greater readiness, greater resilience, and strong capability development. Bauer's call for a holistic societal approach and the need to transform the defense industry reflects the need for a new mindset in a period of dramatically deteriorated security situation in Europe and beyond.

Confronting hybrid threats, such as cyberattacks and fake news, requires innovative approaches. The need for international cooperation and the involvement of civil society and the private sector in defense strategies was highlighted. An important topic was also the role of Germany in defense policy, which has undergone a historic turnaround with an emphasis on *kriegstüchtigkeit*. This change emphasizes Germany's key role in joint European defense efforts, increasing German defense capabilities within NATO, and the importance of standardizing equipment and procedures in terms of greater interoperability among allied forces.

The conference clearly showed that security challenges are complex and require joint, adaptable, and decisive action. To maintain peace and stability in the region, it is crucial that European countries and NATO as a whole adopt a proactive approach that includes necessary investments in defense capabilities, technological and intellectual innovations, improved interoperability, and vibrant international cooperation. In this spirit, we must unite our forces, adapt to new realities, and together protect our common future.

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