

THE DILEMMA THAT FOLLOWS THE WAR

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One year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a strategic divergence is growing in the European Union. On one side, there are the champions of an outright Ukrainian victory in favour to provide more powerful weapons to retake the territory lost. On the other side of the debate are those who believe that the Russia factor must always be considered in Europe's security architecture and it is thus necessary to look beyond the war in order to define EU's strategic vision and interests.

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One year on, a debate is beginning to crystallise among Ukraine's allies that may prove decisive to the war's development. On the battlefield, the balance of forces – or better said the lack of differential factors able to tip the balance one way or the other – increases the likelihood of a prolonged war. Having failed to achieve the initial goals of its invasion, this is the scenario on which the Kremlin is now working.

In Europe, meanwhile, the debate veers between two diverging strategic visions. The champions of an outright Ukrainian victory demand that enough war materiel be sent to retake the territory lost over the past year – and even to return the whole of Donbas and Crimea to Ukrainian control, as Zelensky desires. To achieve these goals, Ukraine's armed forces need allies to provide more powerful weapons and, probably, fighter planes to drive Russian forces back. Humiliating Russia would involve leaving a chastened Kremlin that ceases to be a recurring problem for EU and NATO members.

But this strategic vision, widely held in central and eastern European and Baltic states, is not without risks. These risks include the war escalating, even to the point of a cornered Putin resorting to nuclear weapons, and blind support for the Atlanticist position of European security. The 2024 US presidential elections, the Republican Party's growing isolationism and the effects of the Inflation Reduction Act all raise fears of diminished European influence in the transatlantic alliance and the world.

On the other side of the debate are those who believe that the Russia factor must always be considered in Europe's security architecture. While the United States can turn its back on Russia, Moscow's influence in Europe will not disappear. It is thus necessary to look beyond the war in order to

define Europe's strategic vision and interests. Also, to be realistic with the support to Ukraine, whether in terms of the extent of military aid or the possibilities of an early EU accession.

As the social and economic repercussions mount – in the form of higher energy and food prices – so too do the voices calling for an increased focus on stopping the war. 47% of Germans feel comfortable about supplying weapons to Ukraine, but 53% believe that not enough effort has been made to bring an end to the fighting.

Europe's security must, necessarily, extend beyond the military, but after decades of outsourcing such concerns to the United States, since February 24th 2022, defence has become paramount once again.

But the risks of the strategic vision that prioritises European stability via dialogue with Russia are also considerable. Breaking the unity with Washington would mean Europe distancing itself from the country that remains the main guarantor of its security, while buttressing Russia and China's revisionist discourse at a time when the gap is widening between the West and the rest of the world. According to a [survey](#) by the European Council on Foreign Relations, while 71% of Americans and 66% of Europeans see Russia as an adversary or rival, 80% of Indians, 79% of Chinese and 69% of Turks consider Russia a necessary partner or ally.

The [gap](#) between those in Europe who prioritise Russia's total defeat and those who insist on stopping the war in Ukraine is already evident in public opinion. While total defeat for Russia is the most popular option in Poland (41%), stopping the war leads in Italy (52%) and Germany (49%). Notwithstanding these divisions, the shock of war has meant that Europe's political discourse has tended towards the necessary containment of Russia and stances like Poland's dominate.

The situation on the ground in Ukraine and the growing strategic divergence in Europe has led anti-militarist voices to argue that weapons deliveries to Ukraine should be stopped, ignoring the fact that this would mean victory for Putin. In a war of aggression it is impossible for the attacked to give up their rights to self-defence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The re-emerged "stop the war" movement fails to recognise that the Kremlin's expansionist militarism is the main threat to the security of many Europeans today.

Europe's security must, necessarily, extend beyond the military, but after decades of outsourcing such concerns to the United States, since February 24th 2022, defence has become paramount once again. The EU not only needs to spend more on defence, but to spend better and more jointly. The discussion in Europe must, therefore, return to the goals of strategic autonomy and the EU's interests after the war. Until it does, the focus of the discussion must move beyond the subject of dialogue, or otherwise, with Putin; it should seek to lay the foundations of an international coalition that works for tomorrow's global and European security frameworks.