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Rethinking European Security: Warsaw Workshop

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Introduction

In September 2024, BASIC hosted a track 1.5 workshop in Warsaw, Poland to discuss the present and future of European security. The workshop was the third of five regional workshops organised in fulfilment of the aims of the "Turning Point: Realising a Sustainable Security Architecture for Europe" project, referred to as "Rethinking European Security".

This project is driven by the need to address increasing geopolitical tensions that have led to a rise in military conflicts and a breakdown of the global rules-based order. This trend rapidly accelerated with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which highlighted the collapse of post-Cold War diplomacy and the need for a new security architecture. New agendas and initiatives are needed to lessen current and future security risks, most importantly climate change and its impacts on security. This project seeks to generate a new security architecture in Europe and beyond.[1]

The workshop in Warsaw was held under the Chatham House Rule and was attended by official representatives and non-governmental experts from the Czech Republic, Croatia, France, Poland, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. BASIC gives thanks to participants for their active engagement in workshop discussions, with the main findings detailed in this report.

Main Findings

It is necessary to de-silo security threats to strengthen Europe's security and stability.

Workshop participants began discussions by acknowledging the need to increase the scope of security threats, de-siloing concepts such as energy, climate, and human security, as well as military violence and emerging technologies. They agreed that today's threats are interconnected and necessitate ongoing attention as different security domains multiply and spiral upon others. Workshop participants differed on the level of emphasis that governments should place on non-traditional security threats, however.

[1] A working paper produced by BASIC was distributed to participants to provide background information on these subjects, thereby allowing for informed discussion.

Some participants argued that traditional threats must still be at the forefront of analysis because these threats outweigh all the rest. As one participant reflected, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its hybrid attacks exemplify that traditional threats have made 'a spectacular comeback'. Another participant placed traditional security at the top of a security hierarchy but also added emerging and disruptive technologies, such as autonomous systems and AI - particularly in the context of hybrid attacks - at the same level. Other participants labelled climate change as the most pressing human threat, lamenting that it has not been prioritised as high as fighting wars, economic issues, and technological competition. The need for trade-offs was outlined as being due to the huge costs associated with addressing each category of security while there is a finite amount of money that can be allocated to these issues despite their interdependencies and complexities.

Other participants pointed to the impossibility of maintaining a hierarchy of securities when all contribute to traditional security threats. As one participant raised, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has presented traditional security threats, such as the destruction of critical infrastructure, seizure of territories, and threats of nuclear weapons use. Simultaneously, Russia's invasion has impacted human security as both Russia and Ukraine were some of the world's largest exporters of grains and fertilisers before fighting increased. Similarly, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine exposed the risks associated with dependence upon Russian energy and the need to find alternative sources.

Some workshop attendees pointed to the need for a whole-of-society approach, recognising that synergies are needed between hard, energy, and climate security because civilian-military dimensions are important to today's geopolitical context. One participant suggested that for Europe to have adequate preparedness, possessing resources and wealth are not enough; social infrastructure must be strengthened to respond to any attacks. Some participants asserted that the total defence practiced in Nordic states should be emulated across all of Europe which would necessitate a minimum level of consistency in economic investment across states.

Participants agreed that the general public in the West is more aware of the concept of threat multipliers than they once were. Participants noted that climate change compounds with other crises including war, inequality, and poverty which increase risks such as loss to lives and livelihoods, a depletion of resources, and displacement. The workshop asserted that recognition of multiplied threats could spur European governments to act on reducing carbon emissions and work further towards a green energy transition. Even with this broad understanding, however, participants raised the issue of some individuals still not seeing causality between threats. For example, some still do not link extreme weather back to climate change. It was also pointed out that, to date, there is no shared European vision at the state level on what energy security means.

There is common support for Ukraine and support, more broadly, for deterrence. However, there are nuanced divisions around approaches to arms control, disarmament, and risk reduction.

The workshop displayed unanimous support for Ukraine and its sovereign integrity against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion. One participant made the argument that Ukraine must be supported militarily 'for as long as [is] necessary'. The workshop was sceptical of if peace could be reached between these two countries in the near-term through diplomatic means, even with the possibility of a second Trump administration looming. This was because participants believe that Putin is unlikely to find satisfaction in any territorial concessions offered to Russia in a peace settlement.

Deterrence is necessary for the strength of European security.

The workshop unanimously identified deterrence as necessary for the robustness and stability of European security. Participants recognised that Europe will continue to have a deterrence relationship with Russia, although they agreed that a more stable relationship with Russia would be desirable if Russia could accept security guarantees for Ukraine. It was agreed that Europe must improve its deterrence posture and come to a common understanding and joint policy on deterrence.

The workshop discussed the feasibility of a shared European nuclear deterrent that could be had by states that want it. Participants largely agreed with the necessity of a shared European deterrent as a means to prevent future aggression, particularly if the US cuts its commitment to Europe, thereby leading Europe to deliver commitments for its own security. However, participants were adamant that there is a strong need for US involvement and for strategic unity to continue amongst the EU, NATO, and the US. While proposals from France to share its nuclear umbrella across Europe were reflected upon, some participants raised concerns that France does not have an extended deterrence policy and suggested that perhaps a NATO-based nuclear deterrent capability would be preferable. Further, it was noted that even if the UK joined forces with France in offering a European nuclear deterrent, it would still be smaller than the US's arsenal.

Regardless of if a European nuclear deterrent is feasible, workshop attendees agreed that the strengthening of NATO - with or without the US - is imperative to ensuring European strategic autonomy and strengthening European deterrence. Some participants welcomed NATO's continued directive to increase GDP spending on defence, thereby encouraging Europeans to invest in their own security; these participants, however, mentioned the need for a more consistent sense of urgency amongst Allies beyond those situated on the Eastern flank. They acknowledged that strengthening NATO's European deterrence posture is a long process with economic and industrial challenges, although a worthwhile endeavour. Other participants supported a strong EU component in relation to a strengthened NATO, recognising that there is increased discussion within the EU to adopt varying security measures.

Participants were cautious to note that deterrence should not be to the exclusion of disarmament and arms control. As one participant specified, arms control was created due to deterrence and without arms control deterrence becomes more fragile. Another participant noted that arms control alone is 'not a panacea'; rather, it must be a component of a wider strategy where arms control, diplomatic action, determination of societies, and deterrence are mutually reinforcing. The workshop concluded that this approach plays into European strategic autonomy where, when Europe is competitive militarily, arms control proposals can be offered to adversaries beyond dependence upon American-led arms control. From the workshop's perspective, deterrence, arms control, and risk reduction measures are here to stay regardless of any changes to Europe's relationship with Russia.

There is a desire for arms control, disarmament, and risk reduction but there is disagreement on how these measures should be carried out and when.

As alluded to above, the workshop expressed a strong desire for improved arms control, risk reduction, and disarmament measures. Many argued, however, that it would be difficult to employ these measures in the near-term while Russia invades a European state. It was noted that the disarmament architecture has lost its credibility, not least due to the erosion of disarmament and arms control agreements over many years. The suspension of the INF Treaty was cited as heightening the risk of an arms race concerning intermediate missile development. Further, the workshop pointed to the precarious position of New START, with some participants arguing that Russia's decision to suspend it was to send a signal to the Biden administration.

The workshop conceded that the current dearth of arms control, disarmament, and risk reduction agreements are not unique to this moment in time. They reflected that arms control takes place in a cyclical way with a crisis scenario of escalation taking place before there is an agreement for discussions. Given that Russia's war against Ukraine has likely not yet reached its peak of escalation, things may become worse before they improve. Yet, the workshop was already thinking about the importance of strengthening European security – independent of the US – to reach a more favourable deal with the Russians on future arms control, disarmament, and risk reduction agreements.

Participants argued that future arms control mechanisms and architecture that are post-INF Treaty and post-New START will need to account for Russia's rhetoric of escalation, China's rapid build-up of nuclear weapons, and the role of new, emerging technologies. The workshop argued that, in the long-term, arms control should facilitate more transparency for our societies, particularly around deterrence. More broadly, participants called for risk reduction mechanisms that counter drivers of instability including strategic relationships, misperception, misunderstanding, miscalculation, and escalation.

Workshop participants agreed that the future of arms control and disarmament would depend on how Russia's war on Ukraine ends. One participant suggested that the EU could establish a common position and include neighbouring countries to try to expand an application of common rules in the near-future; perhaps this would be the foundation of a future arms control agreement with Russia. Some workshop attendees speculated if arms control and/or disarmament regarding conventional weapons could be looked at *before* the war ends. Others argued that an agreement on conventional arms control with Russia would be difficult because NATO presently has conventional superiority over Russia, even though Europe on its own could not sustain a conventional war at present.

Many workshop participants countered that it would be unwise to try to engage Russia in conventional arms control talks before the end of the war. This is because it could lead to the appeasement of Russian behaviour or allow Russia space to readapt and continue industrial planning. Participants argued that Russia has violated liberal norms and principles, as well as international rules. These participants therefore cautioned against engaging in arms control negotiations with Russia, as this could signal to Russia that the West is willing to compromise on liberal norms and international rules-based order. Instead, the workshop agreed that it would involve less risk to engage Russia in arms control and risk reduction measures through legally binding confidence-building measures as part of a peace settlement.

There are tensions of differing views around monitoring and verification, humanitarian approaches, and no first use.

The workshop discussed certain aspects of arms control measures and approaches towards them, sharing their differing views on monitoring and verification, a humanitarian approach, and no first use doctrine.

The workshop agreed that having an arms control structure with proper monitoring and verification measures would be ideal for ensuring European security. These measures should be adaptable to technological developments with space for amendments to be made to agreements as necessary. It was agreed that future arms control treaties require political will for monitoring and verification and transparent flows of information. Some participants argued that there would not be political will for these confidence-building measures in Russia given its decision to invade Ukraine. Others asserted that geopolitical changes – such as Sweden and Finland joining NATO – have made Russia interested in having more transparency and confidence-building measures.

Participants' opinions differed on if an arms control agreement could be had *without* a verification system in place. One participant thought the imperative of a new arms control agreement outweighed the necessity of a verification system, arguing that a strategic agreement between the US and Russia could be had without monitoring and evaluation to preserve a strategic relationship. The participant stated that there have been agreements that have been respected even when verification and monitoring activities have been suspended. In place of sophisticated verification would be measures like satellite use as an intermediary solution. Other workshop attendees argued that the final agreement between Russia and Ukraine would require confidence-building measures and verification monitoring.

The workshop discussed the importance of applying a humanitarian approach to arms control and risk reduction. Participants were somewhat critical of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), yet conceded that it has been an important humanitarian tool to be used for formal agreements on limiting weapons usage. They argued that humanitarian recognition should be had in arms control and disarmament to reduce human suffering. To the participants, a humanitarian approach should be recognised as residing under a larger umbrella of human security, as concepts such as protections for civilians during war, mitigation of climate change, and ending poverty are all large issues and challenges that must be tackled simultaneously.

Participants also held differing views on no first use doctrine. One participant asserted that NATO and its nuclear member states should commit to no first use of nuclear weapons, as this would show the world that the Alliance holds a different approach than Russia towards security. This participant argued that deterrence through conventional weapons use – particularly in Ukraine – would still be possible. Other participants strongly disagreed with this sentiment, arguing that this pivot would be counterproductive to effectively supporting Ukraine, sending the wrong message to Russia and other potential adversaries. Instead, the workshop advocated for renewed strategic communication with countries in the Global South to counter perceived inconsistencies and false information regarding Western approaches to nuclear weapons, as well as energy and climate change.

Public support is necessary for institutional responses to climate change and energy transition as a matter of security.

The workshop recognised that support from the European public is also needed for these approaches to be effective. The workshop reflected that global emissions are rising and the world is not on track to reach its commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement. Europe has increasingly had to respond to forest fires, floods, and droughts. These natural disasters have had the knock-on effect of 'heatflation' – rising prices on food and other products – increased migration, and pressure on ecosystems. Public support is needed for governments to address these crises.

Participants agreed that the 2022 energy crisis in Europe raised public awareness of the need to engage in energy diversification and the green energy transition. As a result, the EU has doubled down on its implementation of Green Deal policies, reinforced through the REPowerEU initiative. Europe's past dependency on Russian oil – and its current consumption of oil from Russia but refined in India – reinforces the need for independent energy supplies. The workshop discussed that while the interconnectedness of fossil fuel pipelines and electricity grids in the EU are positive for energy security, a multitude of cascading effects can occur when there is disruption.[2]

[2] Participants highlighted that the risks to consider include operational, when an interruption on the local scale could impact energy market mechanisms; geopolitical, which include cyberattacks, sabotage, and physical assault on infrastructure; economic, which is related to how market discrimination on the energy market is dealt with; climatic, or impacts upon electricity and cables impacted by extreme heat or extreme cold.

The workshop concluded that new, clean technologies are needed for an energy transition. As such, critical materials are needed, an industry in which China dominates. Participants raised the risk of falling into a new dependency where China is able to control the prices of, and access to, rare minerals. The workshop agreed that such a dependency would be undesirable, as the US attempts to decouple its markets from China and encourages the EU to do the same through pulling Europe's markets and productive capacities together instead. One participant described the need for decoupling as an issue of economic security, particularly if tensions between the US and China rise and Europe is forced to reassert its alliance with the US.[3]

Participants shared that the EU has attempted to decouple from China and become more energy independent through its industrial pillar of the Green Deal. This pillar aims to conserve manufacturing in Europe for net zero strategic technologies; non-price criteria would help the EU's industry value and competitiveness with China. Similarly, the Critical Raw Materials Act will focus on conserving some domestic mining in Europe. Participants shared concerns that such mining projects would require increased public financing and public acceptance, with many individuals not wanting the erosion of nature through mining in their communities.

The workshop concluded that the European public is sceptical of these energy transition initiatives due to Europe's hypocrisy of exporting dirty energy production to third states.[4] The additional hypocrisy of Europe's production of 'gas-guzzling' cars and other high energy using products was also a point of concern from workshop attendees. As such, some workshop participants conceded that for the energy transition to take place, an overall reduction in energy consumption is needed which is reliant upon a change in public behaviours. It was argued that regaining public trust would enable Europe to be global leaders in the energy transition. However, participants agreed that there needs to be a broader understanding of whose energy security is being accounted for, as energy poverty is still faced by many populations in Europe.[5]

Framework through which to deal with Russia: normative or shared values?

Having discussed pillars of a new European security architecture, the workshop assessed the framework through which these pillars could be implemented, particularly in coordination with Russia. As detailed earlier in this report, workshop participants were unanimous in their belief that Russia poses a long-term threat to Europe. Participants pointed to what they perceived as a cyclical relationship between the rise in Russia cyberattacks and misinformation and a lack of public support for government policies in Europe, such as those relating to the Covid pandemic and climate crisis; they foresaw this to become a greater problem as Europe builds a security architecture that addresses issues such as climate change, migration, and disruptions to food and energy.

Due to these concerns, workshop participants considered whether a normative framework could be had to deal with Russia rather than one of shared values and trust. The workshop recognised that relations with Russia could not be restored as normal before the full-scale invasion. Workshop attendees argued that Russia has continuously denounced the liberal international order such as through its capture of sovereign territory and escalation in hybrid attacks on European infrastructure and societies. As such, some participants argued that a framework built around norms - rather than rules, treaties, or regulations - would be preferable to engage Russia on issues where there is no agreement.

Some participants urged caution against building a security architecture *without* normative frameworks, as informal frameworks will then be built around power dynamics in the absence of something more concrete. This is because the current international system is built around international norms, rules, and principles against the backdrop of a rise of authoritarian and populist regimes amidst a crisis in liberal democracies. Participants did not differentiate between the meanings of norms and shared values, as these concepts tend to go hand-in-hand, particularly through the lens of global trends towards upending the current world order.

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[3] On this subject, it was pointed out that, at the time of the workshop, there was no common European position on the relationship to be maintained with China: Hungary and Germany, for example, were not opposed to Chinese investment in their economies, while the United States was strongly urging Europeans to adopt a strategy to combat Chinese entryism in Europe at the industrial, commercial, and strategic levels.

[4] Other examples given of European countries 'exporting their problems' to third countries were the mining agreements that European nations are making with countries like Serbia, and countries like Italy sending migrants to Albania and Denmark sending migrants to Kosovo. As one participant pointed out, these actions are exporting what are seen as 'issues' whilst delaying accession to the EU, especially for the Western Balkan 6 countries. Participants raised concerns that these practices have the consequence of Europe losing its credibility to the rest of the world.

[5] While the workshop took into account risks and concerns of energy and climate security, participants also recognised that, for maximum efficacy, the structural issues around energy efficiency must be the primary focus. Participants argued that energy dependence and efficiency must be presented as a strategic imperative. One participant deemed issues such as effects on petrol states and geoengineering as being less important. Another participant viewed issues such as the state providing provisions for those who are energy insecure as imperative.

Other participants asserted that while Europe shares common goals, there will be regional and local interpretations of what liberal values mean and how they can be achieved. The example of the Western Balkans was given, in that the region is part of Europe, yet are not members of NATO nor the EU; countries in the region are influenced by a range of actors, including China, Russia, the US, and the EU. According to some participants, discrepancies in interpretations of values and/or norms risk two different, or tiered, Europes; they argued that a dialogue must be had across Europe to find a common vision for concepts of security. With a rebuilt consensus, the fundamental principles of normative frameworks – such as through a humanitarian approach – can be reached.

Other participants differed in that they believed that already-existing principles and norms are already agreed upon and sound. They argued that principles have been to not change borders by force, that nations have freedom to choose their own alliances; these norms are still agreed upon by Europeans but have been violated and rejected by Russia. These participants asserted that it was Russia's choice to abdicate on their agreements and walk away from a mutually beneficial security architecture bound by common norms.

Existing institutions can be adapted to respond to current challenges so long as they have willingness to act.

Workshop participants concluded that the security architecture in Europe has eroded over the past couple of decades and that a new architecture is needed for the present day. However, few would commit to defining what a new security architecture would entail until the outcome of Russia's war on Ukraine is decided. Participants recognised that collective security in Europe is developing in an unprecedented way and it will take time to understand fully what a new architecture will consist of and who will be included.

As detailed throughout this report, participants were reluctant to include Russia in a European security architecture based on values or norms, and certainly not from a place of mutual trust. Some participants were adamant that Russia could not be part of a future European security architecture, as Russia is not a part of Europe, nor do they want to be. They argued that in the 1990s structures based on Western institutions and norms attempted to incorporate Russia and Russia could not accept the rules set. Instead, these participants argued that Russia should be treated as an external threat.

Other participants asserted that, geographically, Russia is not outside of Europe and therefore a European security architecture could not exclude them. However, Europe's strategic relationship with Russia and agreements made around arms control and confidence-building measures would not constitute incorporating Russia into a cooperative security community. This rhetoric signalled that some participants viewed a security architecture as comprised of allies, rather than a structure that could enable dialogue and/or agreements amongst allies as well as adversaries.

Indeed, workshop attendees raised the issue of different countries having different definitions of a European security architecture as well as different threat perceptions. They contended that once a common understanding is had on these views and definitions, misunderstandings could be easier to resolve. The workshop recognised that European security actors have committed to diversity and hearing differing views. A difference of views relating to what is a risk or security concern is to be expected with so many different security threats to take into account, from traditional to energy-related.

It was argued by some that the very concept of a security architecture is ambiguous.[6] Participants also conceded that a security architecture is not typically a well-designed single structure. They reasoned that it is usually a co-creation of mechanisms rather than a whole or the result of an accumulation of possibilities over several generations, with the aim of consolidating what already existed in the previous generation. The sudden replacement of one architecture by another has always been the result of a major historical crisis. This becomes all the more difficult when one considers the multi-dimensional, geostrategic, and geopolitical questions that must be addressed when one is addressing who is 'in' or 'out' of a future security architecture.

The workshop discussed the present institutions that a new European security architecture could be situated within. The EU was cited regularly as an institution that works to address a wide array of security concerns. Participants discussed how the EU has utilised mechanisms – such as strategic storage capabilities for oil and gas – to ensure climate and energy security and independence for Europe. They stated that the EU has taken initiatives to protect civilian infrastructure. Participants cited NATO as having expanded its outlook on security matters to include civilian resilience and the protection of critical infrastructures, including those pertaining to energy security. Participants reflected that the OSCE has an environmental dimension which could easily be applied to its political-military dimension and engage OSCE member states that are not also members of NATO and/or the EU.

[6] A security architecture is 'a system of norms, practices, relationships, alliances and institutions constructed or developed by nations to address, enhance or ensure international and/or regional security.' William T. Tow and Brendan Taylor, 'What Is Asian Security Architecture?', *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 95–116, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990520.

Even so, many participants argued that a future security architecture would likely be NATO-EU centric or a form of NATO-plus to incorporate states that sit outside these institutions. In other words, a future security architecture would be open to Europeans who accept common principles. However, participants questioned how such an architecture could be made effective internally and at different levels, or dimensions. Further, participants recognised that a European security architecture, while regional in nature, would have to tackle global issues. This is due to the cross-border nature of modern security challenges such as environmental and energy security.

Ultimately, the workshop concluded that it would *not* be necessary to develop a new institution to uphold a new security architecture. They concluded that there are a multitude of institutions that could be utilised, as outlined above, particularly if these institutions can adapt to new situations and conditions. Instead, participants agreed that Europe must look at its already-existing institutions and determine how to use them more strategically and find synergies amongst their outputs. Workshop participants emphasised the need for institutions to be willing to act and not be incapacitated by disruptive actors. Further, participants noted that a new European security architecture would need to include private businesses, as these actors make decisions in the context of energy and climate change.

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