

Rethinking European Military Engagements Abroad

The Strategic Trajectories of the United Kingdom, France and Germany

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Summary

In a rapidly changing European security context, European states are re-evaluating their security and defence policies. This study examines the strategic shift that is taking place among the three major European powers – the UK, France and Germany (the E3) – and how they view different types of international military engagements in the changing strategic environment. All three countries are undergoing a strategic transition away from crisis management towards deterrence and defence as the main tasks of their armed forces. The new strategic trajectories entail a shift in priority towards deterrence and defence in Europe, alongside a strengthened military presence in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, growing attention to increasing instability in Europe's eastern and southern neighbourhoods as well as geopolitical positioning means that crisis management and security cooperation will continue to be important for the E3. Smaller European countries can therefore continue to expect requests for participation in crisis management operations and security cooperation activities, alongside deterrence and defence efforts.

Keywords: United Kingdom, UK, France, Germany, deterrence and defence, crisis management, security cooperation, EU, NATO, Indo-Pacific, international military engagements.

Sammanfattning

Ett säkerhetsläge i snabb förändring i Europa innebär att flera europeiska stater omprövar sin säkerhets- och försvarspolitik. Denna rapport undersöker det strategiska skiftet bland de europeiska stormakterna Storbritannien, Frankrike och Tyskland (E3) samt hur de ser på olika typer av internationella militära engagemang i en förändrad strategisk kontext. De tre länderna övergår från krishantering till avskräckning och försvar som den främsta uppgiften för deras försvar. Deras nya strategiska inriktningar innebär en prioritering av avskräckning och försvar i Europa och en ökad militär närvaro i den indopacifiska regionen. Samtidigt kommer krishantering och säkerhetssamarbete att fortsätta vara viktigt för E3 till följd av ett ökat fokus på instabilitet i Europas östra och södra närområden samt geopolitisk positionering. Mindre europeiska stater kan därmed förvänta sig fortsatt efterfrågan på deltagande i krishanteringsinsatser och initiativ för säkerhetssamarbete, parallellt med åtgärder för att stärka förmågan till avskräckning och försvar.

Nyckelord: Storbritannien, Frankrike, Tyskland, avskräckning och försvar, krishantering, säkerhetssamarbete, EU, Nato, indopacifiska regionen, internationella militära engagemang, internationella insatser.

Preface

This study is funded by the Swedish Ministry of Defence and carried out within FOI's longstanding research programme on international military missions.

The authors are grateful to all the officials and experts who have shared their perspectives and contributed to the study. Special thanks are due to the Swedish embassies in Paris, Berlin and London for providing valuable assistance.

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Abbreviations

CJEF Combined Joint Expeditionary Force
CSDP Common Security and Defence Policy
E3 United Kingdom, France, Germany

eFP Enhanced Forward Presence EI2 European Intervention Initiative

EMASoH European-led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz

EPF European Peace Facility

EU European Union

EUFOR European Union Force

EUNAVFOR European Union Naval Forces

EUMPM European Union Military Partnership Mission

eVA Enhanced Vigilance Activities
FNC Framework Nations Concept
JEF Joint Expeditionary Force

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

RDC Rapid Deployment Capacity

UK United Kingdom
UN United Nations

VJTF Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

1 Introduction

The strategic environment in Europe is transforming rapidly. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 signalled the definitive re-emergence of state confrontation on the continent. Already in 2014, Russia's aggression against Ukraine and annexation of Crimea prompted a number of European countries to re-evaluate their security and defence policies in favour of a stronger defence posture at home. This marked a departure from a focus on crisis management and peacekeeping abroad that had characterised the international military engagements of European states since the end of the Cold War. In the past year, the policy shift has only accelerated. 2

At the same time as European countries transition towards deterrence and defence in the Euro-Atlantic area, they are affected by growing global and regional instability outside the territories of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Not only might instability in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans or Africa affect their strategic interests, it could also be exploited by other international actors seeking to increase their influence. The US' gradual shift towards Asia also increases pressure on European states to assume a greater share of responsibility for European security. Thus, in a new strategic context of conflict in Europe, European states still have an interest in engaging in Europe's eastern and southern neighbourhoods to promote stability and strengthen weak states. Additionally, European states have interests in the Indo-Pacific, a region of increasing geopolitical tension.

It is currently unclear how Europe as a whole will address the changing strategic environment and balance competing demands for limited defence resources. The strategic assessments and priorities of the three major European powers – the United Kingdom (UK), France and Germany (also known as the E3) – provide important indications of the future of European military engagements abroad. Moreover, how the E3 prioritise their resources will directly affect the types of requests for international military engagements that smaller European states can expect to receive. As highlighted by recent literature, smaller European states, including the Nordic countries, have been shown to join international military

¹ This study takes 2014 as the starting point for the shift in European defence policies from crisis management abroad to deterrence and defence at home, and is in part based on the Swedish case. In 2014, the Swedish armed forces began to transition from international to national military tasks. For more on this topic, see Hellquist, Elin and Tidblad-Lundholm, Kajsa. *National Defence and International Military Missions – The Swedish armed forces at home and abroad 1958–2020*. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2021.

² See, for example, Lundén, Jenny et al. (eds.) Another Rude Awakening - Making Sense of Russia's War Against Ukraine. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2022; Granholm, Niklas et al. (eds.) A Rude Awakening. Ramifications of Russian Aggression Towards Ukraine. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2014.

engagements for the political purpose of gaining support from a more powerful coalition partner.³

As this report shows, European military engagements abroad will consist, on the one hand, of deterrence and defence measures *on* NATO territory and, on the other, participation in various forms of crisis management and security cooperation activities *outside* of NATO territory. The changing strategic environment brings with it significant uncertainty, and European countries are still in the process of formulating their policy responses. This study is an early exploration of shifting European defence policies and their implications for how military resources will be deployed abroad.

1.1 Research design

The point of departure for this study is an observation that there is a strategic shift underway in the deployment of military resources abroad. The overarching aim is to understand how the three major European powers – the UK, France and Germany – view different types of international military engagements in the changing strategic context. In so doing, the study offers a preliminary analysis of the future European landscape of international military deployments.

The following question has guided the research:

What do the strategic shifts in the policies of the UK, France and Germany imply for their international military engagements?

This report answers the main research question with the help of the following sub questions, which also form the chapter outline of the report:

- How do the UK, France and Germany assess the consequences of the changing global and European strategic contexts for their international military engagements?
- How do they prioritise between different types of international military engagements?
- What are their geographic priorities for international military engagements?

In order to capture the policy trajectories within these sub questions, the study relies on a qualitative analysis of data gathered from written sources and semistructured interviews. In terms of the written sources, the primary sources consist

³ See, for example, Mariager, Rasmus M

ølgaard and Wivell, Anders. Uvildig udredning af baggrunden for Danmarks militære engagement i Kosovo, Afghanistan og Irak. K

øbenhavns Universitet, 2019; NOU. En god alliert – Norge i Afghanistan 2001–2014. Norges offentlige utredninger, 2016. A discussion on this topic can be found in Hellquist and Tidblad-Lundholm. National Defence and International Military Missions – The Swedish armed forces at home and abroad 1958–2020, 2021.

of strategic and other foreign and defence policy documents published in the UK, France and Germany between 2014 and March 2023. The secondary written sources consist of academic and policy literature as well as media reporting concerning the E3's security and defence policies, as well as their international military engagements.

In addition, the authors have conducted semi-structured interviews in London, Paris and Berlin in November and December 2022 with senior officials who work on security policy and international operations of the UK, France and Germany. During the same trips, the authors also interviewed researchers who have published research in this field. In total, the authors conducted 19 semi-structured interviews. Since the study aims to gauge ongoing debates and policies that are under construction, the interviews have been important for updating and complementing written sources. The analysis of interview data was particularly helpful by providing indications of the countries' changing priorities in those instances where policy documents have not kept abreast with domestic policy debates.

To comprehensively account for the policy evolution of the E3 lies outside the scope of this study. Nor does it intend to assess in detail the countries' military deployments and capabilities. The aim, rather, is to provide an overview of their policy trajectories, of where they are, or might be, *heading*, in the new strategic context. Moreover, the study does not predict how the E3 would respond in the event of a crisis, but suggests that unpacking long-term policy trends and recent strategic documents may provide helpful indications.

1.2 Definitions

This report uses the term *engagements* to cover all of the E3's operations and missions abroad. Military exercises are intentionally excluded from the study. To navigate between various military engagements abroad, the study borrows from NATO's 2022 *Strategic Concept* to distinguish between three different types of engagements: (1) deterrence and defence; (2) crisis management; and (3) security cooperation.⁶

Deterrence and defence refers to military engagements that are abroad in the sense that they are *outside* of the E3's territories, but *on* NATO territory. Deterrence and

⁴ See the bibliography for a list of interviews. 17 of the interviews were conducted in person, one interview took place online, and one interview took place via phone. The report does not include quotes from the interviews. Nor does it provide the names of interviewees, in order to enable discussions regarding ongoing political changes that may not yet be reflected in policy.

⁵ See Ottosson, Björn and Pallin, Krister (eds). *Western Military Capability 2023* ... Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) (forthcoming).

⁶ According to the 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO's collective defence activities are comprised of three core tasks: deterrence and defence; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security. NATO. NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. 2022.

defence could include engagements within the framework of NATO, the EU, or other coalitions. The aim of deterrence and defence, in this context, is to protect the territory of the E3 and their NATO allies. Such activities include NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and air policing activities. Since this study focusses on military engagements, it intentionally does not include other aspects of deterrence and defence that are increasingly important but involve civilian authorities, such as the protection of critical infrastructure.

The second and third types of military engagements, crisis management and security cooperation, refer to the E3's military engagements *outside* of their own territory and *outside* of NATO territory. Crisis management refers to stabilisation and counterterrorism operations, including at a "strategic distance," but also capacity building of partner's military forces. For Security cooperation refers to political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners on defence issues. For the purpose of this study, crisis management and security cooperation activities can take place within the framework of NATO or the EU, as well as within other multilateral or bilateral formats.

1.3 Outline

Following this introduction, the rest of this report is organised into three analytical chapters and a concluding chapter.

Chapter 2 outlines how the UK, France and Germany have officially assessed the changing strategic context since 2014 and onwards, and the resulting consequences for their international military engagements. It describes the countries' strategic trajectories since 2014 and their current strategic debates. The chapter ends with an analysis of the common and diverging factors that may help to explain the strategic transitions among the countries.

Chapter 3 explores how the strategic transitions in the UK, France and Germany translate into operational priorities. Specifically, it looks at how the E3 countries prioritise between different types of military engagements abroad, in terms of tasks, institutional formats and capabilities. It ends with an analysis of their differing priorities and preferences.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the UK's, France's and Germany's geographic priorities for military engagements abroad according to the strategic and operational priorities discussed in the preceding chapters. It ends with an analysis of the potential implications of the shifting defence postures of the E3 countries.

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⁷ NATO. NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. 2022, p. 9.

This report concludes, in Chapter 5, with an analysis of what these trends may mean for the future landscape of European military engagements and for smaller European states.

2 Strategic (re)considerations

2.1 The UK: Redefining its role amid systemic competition

The UK continues to be a globally oriented power, due to its permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council, its nuclear deterrent and NATO membership, as well as its imperial history. The UK maintains interests worldwide, including overseas territories and partner countries within the Commonwealth. At the same time, the UK's departure from the EU and involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to shape its strategic debates. The formal decision to deploy the UK armed forces is held by the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Crown, with no official role for the Parliament.⁸

British strategic documents have since 2014 depicted the European security environment as steadily deteriorating. In 2015, the UK published a primary strategic document, the *Strategic Defence and Security Review* (hereafter 2015 *Strategic Review*), which pointed to a changing national security context driven by the resurgence of state-based threats and intensifying state competition. Russia is described as challenging the rules-based international order, with reference to the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and support to separatists in eastern Ukraine.⁹

According to an analysis by Chatham House, the relationship between the UK and Russia had been "difficult and volatile" since the 2000s, but even so, it deteriorated significantly after 2014. ¹⁰ The UK responded to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 by pushing for EU sanctions and Russia's suspension from the G8, in addition to contributing to NATO's strengthened presence on the eastern flank. Since 2017, the UK leads a multinational battlegroup as part of NATO's eFP, in Estonia.

Although strategic documents identified significant challenges resulting from state-based competition in 2015, at the time, terrorism and extremism were perceived as the UK's primary security challenge, both domestically and globally. As part of efforts to address terrorism and extremism, the 2015 *Strategic Review* placed significant focus on defence engagement, defined as "non-combat activities with international partners, which contribute to stability, security and prosperity." Defence engagement was to be a funded, core, Ministry of Defence

⁸ Mills, Claire. *Parliamentary approval for military action*. London: House of Commons Library, 8 May 2018.

⁹ HM Government. *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*. November 2015, p. 18.

Allan, Duncan and Ian Bond. A new Russia policy for post-Brexit Britain: The UK must abandon its delusions to deal effectively with Russia. London: Chatham House. January 2022.

¹¹ HM Government. National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, p. 90.

task, for the first time. It included military support and capacity building of the security forces of partner states and was seen as central to efforts to make British defence "International by Design." ¹² Moreover, the Joint Force 2025 was envisioned to be able to deploy a 50,000-strong highly capable expeditionary force, up from the 30,000 planned in the previous defence review. ¹³

Six years later, the 2015 Strategic Review was replaced by the document, Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (hereafter 2021 Integrated Review). By then, the world had changed considerably. The 2021 Integrated Review describes an international order that is fragmented and characterised by intensifying competition between states over interests, norms and values. State competition was accordingly upgraded to being the most prominent threat facing the UK. Russia was identified as the most "acute threat" to British security, based on Russian nuclear, conventional and hybrid threats, as well as the Salisbury attack. China also features as a "systemic competitor," with reference to its increasing power and international assertiveness. 14

In keeping with the UK's stated international outlook, the 2021 *Integrated Review* emphasised the slogan of "Global Britain" to signify continued global ambitions following its departure from the EU. Indeed, Brexit has made military and defence contributions and partnerships more important than before. Despite an emphasis on increasing state competition, however, the prospect of warfighting does not feature heavily in the 2021 *Integrated Review*. An analyst at FOI noted that it appears to place greater emphasis on what is termed "operating" tasks, defined as activities below the threshold of open warfare. ¹⁵ The 2021 *Integrated Review* and related documents propose a reduced force size in favour of a focus on technology, as well as research and development. The British army is to be reduced to 72,500 personnel by 2025. ¹⁶ According to a defence researcher in London, this has been accompanied by a reduction in stockpiles, artillery, and air defence. ¹⁷

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the rapid pace at which the trends identified in the 2021 *Integrated Review* accelerated after its publication led the UK to publish an update, the *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World* (hereafter 2023 *Refresh*), in early 2023. The 2023 *Refresh* identifies systemic competition as the main geopolitical trend and driver of a deteriorating security environment. In terms of threats, Russia is

¹² Sjökvist, Emma. "The United Kingdom – Training Troops and Maintaining Influence in Africa." Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), August 2019.

¹³ HM Government. National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, p. 29.

¹⁴ HM Government. Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, March 2021, p. 18.

Aronson, Albin. "Global Britain – Navigating between Europe and the Indo-Pacific?" Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), December 2021.

¹⁶ House of Commons Library. "UK Army to be reduced to 72,500," 23 March 2021.

¹⁷ Interview, London, November 2022.

presented as the most acute threat to European security in the short to medium term, China as an "epoch-defining and systemic challenge," and the deepening relationship between these two countries in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is noted with concern.¹⁸

A notable omission in the 2023 *Refresh* is the "Global Britain" slogan that had characterised the UK's foreign and defence policy under the post-Brexit Conservative governments. The 2023 *Refresh* pronounces a transition to a multipolar, fragmented world without sufficient strategic stability mechanisms to mitigate the heightened risk of escalation and miscalculation. In response, the UK will pursue collaboration with like-minded allies and partners, utilising its convening power.¹⁹

The 2023 *Refresh* was further motivated by the chaotic withdrawal of Western forces from Kabul, which caused a public debate about failures in UK leadership. ²⁰ Judging by interviews with policy officials and researchers in London, the outcome in Afghanistan has further entrenched an ongoing de-prioritisation of expeditionary operations. ²¹ This trend is partly a legacy of British experiences from the Iraq war, the failures and consequences of which have contributed to a gradual reorientation away from military interventionism during the last few years. Against this backdrop, the aftermath of British military involvement in Afghanistan will likely further limit public and political willingness to engage in expeditionary operations. The trend is fuelled by the failures of the international community to improve security and stability in Mali, which contributed to the UK's withdrawal from the country.

The UK's strategic shift from a focus on terrorism and extremism towards state competition has thus been accompanied by a shift from crisis management towards deterrence and defence. Both shifts have occurred in steps, as a result of internal political developments, such as intervention "fatigue" and Brexit, as well as external developments, such as increased state competition and the deterioration of the European security environment. That said, the UK's strategic trajectory may be subject to re-evaluation and renegotiation as a result of internal political developments and changes in leadership. The opposition Labour Party has been critical of the current government's global defence ambitions and cuts to the British Army. If there is a change in government following the upcoming elections in 2025 (at the latest), this could mean a further revision of the UK's strategic priorities. ²²

¹⁸ HM Government. Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World, March 2023, p. 7–8.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. Refreshing our approach? Updating the Integrated Review: Fifth Report of Session 2022–23. 13 December 2022; House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. Missing in action: UK leadership and the withdrawal from Afghanistan: First Report of Session 2022–23. 17 May 2022.

²¹ Interviews, London, November 2022.

²² Healey, John. "Britain needs a national strategy which is relentlessly pragmatic," *LabourList*, 7 February 2023.

2.2 France: Transitioning to high-intensity conflict

As a member state of both the EU and NATO, with a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and a nuclear deterrent, along with a global presence through its overseas territories, France is often described as an outward-looking and militarily willing European state. For much of the Cold War, strategic thinking in France was based the perception that it was an autonomous power, with a balancing role between the United States and the Soviet Union. French strategy included, and still does, having a military capable of projecting force globally, underpinned by the national deterrence force. The French political system combines a strong executive with weak parliamentary control over foreign, security, and defence policies.²³ Accordingly, French presidents have a strong influence on the country's strategic trajectory.

Since 2014, French strategic documents have noted a significant deterioration of the strategic environment, particularly following Russia's aggressions against Ukraine. The *Defence and National Security Strategic Review* conducted in 2017 (hereafter the 2017 *Strategic Review*) pointed to challenges to the multilateral order, the European security architecture, and cohesion within the EU, in part due to Russia's reassertion of power and the resurgence of war in Europe. The increase in great power competition identified in the 2017 *Strategic Review* required French forces to be able to conduct high-intensity operations in all domains (land, sea, air, outer space, and cyberspace).²⁴

France condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and was a driving force behind EU sanctions against Russia. ²⁵ Militarily, France contributed towards NATO's collective defence measures, specifically the eFP in the Baltic States as well as air policing missions. At the same time, France has pushed for a diplomatic solution to the crisis, especially via the Normandy Format, which brought together France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine, and led to the Minsk agreements intended to end the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In part due to this, France has been criticised by Central and Eastern European states for not taking seriously Russia's threat to European security. It was only after pressure from its allies and partners that France cancelled a contract for the production of helicopter carriers for Russia in 2015. ²⁶

²³ Pannier, Alice and Schmitt, Olivier. "To fight another day: France between the fight against terrorism and future warfare." *International Affairs*. Vol. 95, no. 4, 2019: 897–916.

²⁴ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *Defence and National Security Strategic Review*, 2017.

²⁵ Sundberg, Anna. "Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik och militära förmåga." Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), December 2018.

²⁶ Roblin, Sebastien. "How France Almost Sold Russia Two Powerful Aircraft Carriers." *National Interest*. 1 September 2019.

In the 2017 Strategic Review, military missions outside of the French mainland and overseas territories were motivated in great part by the fight against terrorism. which was seen as the greatest threat to both France and Europe, Indeed, French forces were at the time deployed in counterterrorism operations in the Middle East (Operation Chammal), and in the Sahel (Operation Barkhane).

The Strategic Update, published in 2021, reinforced the trends identified in 2017 and once more highlighted the jihadist phenomenon as the foremost global security challenge. ²⁷ At the same time, the update signalled a shift towards a greater emphasis on preparation for high-intensity operations resulting from direct confrontation between major powers. According to a separate vision document published by the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Thierry Burkhard, the conventional peacecrisis-war continuum was being replaced by the notions of competition, dispute, and confrontation, all of which can be active to varying degrees in different domains and geographies. The document further reinforced the need for the French armed forces to prepare for the possibility of high-intensity conflict.²⁸

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, France published a new National Strategic Review (hereafter the 2022 Strategic Review) to outline its strategic trajectory during the second presidency of Emmanuel Macron.²⁹ The 2022 Strategic Review recognises the strategic shift resulting from the war in Ukraine. Although it concludes that trends identified in 2017 persist, the threat of strategic confrontation on the part of Russia has replaced Islamic terrorism as the foremost threat to French security. The 2022 Strategic Review notes that the war in Ukraine calls into question the model of France's armed forces as designed according to an expeditionary logic. The review calls for a model that also takes into account the possible return to high-intensity conflict.³⁰

For France, the threat from Russia is not only visible in Europe, but also in the Sahel. According to the 2022 Strategic Review, confrontation with Russia is already taking place on the African continent, through the use of mercenaries, anti-Western diplomatic manoeuvres and information-based attacks. 31 In Mali, the Russian Wagner Group's activities, along with Russian information campaigns, are largely seen as contributing to France's withdrawal from the country.³² The dramatic deterioration of relations between France and Mali, and the strategic failure of French military operations there have in turn led to a re-evaluation of France's military presence on the continent, with a new Africa policy to be published during 2023. It appears that Africa will continue to be important to

²⁷ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. Strategic Update, 2021.

²⁸ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. Strategic Vision of the Chief of Defence Staff, 2021.

²⁹ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, 2022.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

³¹ Ibid., p. 10.

³² Gunnarson, Carina and Körling, Gabriella. Relationerna mellan Frankrike och Mali 2017–2022: Historien om en skilsmässa. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, January 2023.

France and, judging by remarks by President Macron, the new approach will feature a greater focus on building partnerships.³³

With the publication of its latest strategic review, France appears to be shifting its military focus geographically towards Europe and from expeditionary operations towards high-intensity conflict. Whereas the latter shift had already begun in 2017, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 accelerated the transition.

Even with a shift in priority, crisis management and security cooperation continue to be important both as parts of French defence policy and as tasks for the armed forces. According to the 2022 *Strategic Review*, the armed forces play a large role in conflict prevention, for example by pre-positioning military in third countries, with their agreement, to support stabilisation of states in crisis.³⁴ Intervention is formally motivated by three purposes: to ensure protection of nations, to defend priority interests and those of partners and allies, and to live up to international responsibilities.³⁵ Moreover, missions abroad are an important part of French ambitions to project strength globally. Given that, as put by one interviewee in Paris, military missions can be triggered by political authorities with little warning, we can likely expect this to continue.³⁶

2.3 Germany: Gradually returning to collective defence

Germany has a complicated relationship to military power, owing to its history. Following the end of the Cold War, Germany significantly reduced the size of its armed forces (the Bundeswehr), as part of a reorientation away from collective defence on its own territory towards international conflict prevention and crisis management. This has profound effects on the Bundeswehr's structures and processes, leading to reductions and "hollow" force structures.³⁷ The deployment of German soldiers abroad requires parliamentary approval, with the exception of deployments to NATO and EU headquarters, and of unarmed forces, or forces only armed for self-defence, e.g., in observer or training missions.³⁸

Russia's use of force in Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014 prompted a shift in German security policy. After 2014, German Chancellor Angela Merkel was key

³³ Macron, Emmanuel. Address by the President of the Republic before his visit to Central Africa. 27 February 2023.

³⁴ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, p. 22.

³⁵ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, p. 22.

³⁶ Interview, Paris, November 2022.

³⁷ Hagström Frisell, Eva. "Germany." In Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2020, Part II: National Capabilities, Hagström Frisell, Eva and Pallin, Krister (eds.). Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), FOI-R--501--SE, February 2021, p. 98.

³⁸ Rainer L. Glatz, and Hansen, Wikbe, et al. Missions in a Changing World, The Bundeswehr and Its Operations Abroad, Berlin: SWP, 2018. p. 5, 11, 15.

to keeping Europe united and worked to impose and maintain economic sanctions against Russia. Germany also took an active part in NATO's assurance and deterrence efforts on the eastern flank, including by assuming a leading role in NATO's eFP in Lithuania, from 2017. At the same time, German leaders wanted to show restraint in NATO's force posture and military exercises on the eastern flank. Germany maintained and deepened its energy relationship and wanted to uphold dialogue with Russia, for example in the Normandy Format.³⁹

Guided by developments in NATO, 2014 marked the starting point of a gradual return to deterrence and defence as the main task of the German armed forces. The 2016 White Paper on German Security Policy and the Bundeswehr (hereafter the 2016 White Paper) represented the first step in this direction. It depicts a complex and unpredictable strategic context. On the one hand, the re-emergence of power politics in Europe's neighbourhood and beyond raises the risk of interstate conflict. On the other, fragile and failing states in the Middle East and Africa provide a breeding ground for international terrorism, which is regarded as an immediate challenge to German security. The document also highlights that regional insecurity may threaten communication and transportation routes, which constitute the basis for Germany's prosperity and the wellbeing of its citizens.⁴⁰

One of the main messages of the 2016 *White Paper* was Germany's willingness to assume greater responsibility for international security. This was in line with the speeches of the German president and foreign and defence ministers at the Munich security conference in February 2014, in which they argued that Germany's economic and political weight must translate into a larger share of responsibility in the field of security. ⁴¹ Germany aimed to exercise this leadership in close cooperation with its partners and primarily within multilateral frameworks, such as the EU and NATO. ⁴²

According to the 2016 *White Paper*, all tasks of the Bundeswehr were of equal importance, including crisis management and security cooperation beyond the EU and NATO. However, national and collective defence in the framework of NATO and the EU were listed first among the tasks, indicating their importance. Solidarity within NATO and the EU formed "a fundamental principle of German governance." The paper also stressed the increasing significance of deterrence and defence measures on NATO's periphery. The evolving character of national

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³⁹ Engström, Alina. "Tyskland och Zeitenwende: Mellan nya idéer och gamla reflexer," Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), November 2022, p. 3.

⁴⁰ German Federal Government, White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, 2016, p. 38–41.

⁴¹ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, "Manuskript der Rede der Bundesministerin der Verteidigung, Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, anläßlich der 51. Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz München, 6. Februar 2015."

⁴² German Federal Government, White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, p. 8–9.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 91–93, 49.

and collective defence to include hybrid strategies below and above the threshold of open warfare also placed new demands on the Bundeswehr. 44

There were further indications that Germany was transitioning towards deterrence and defence as the main priorities. In 2018, Germany published the conceptual guidelines for the future development of the Bundeswehr, which stated that national and collective defence should determine its basic line-up (*Grundaufstellung*). In order to carry out international crisis management, the Bundeswehr would set up specific mission packages. ⁴⁵ At the same time, German enthusiasm for engaging in international crisis management operations was decreasing, and rapidly so, following the dramatic fall of Kabul, in August 2021. Germany had a substantial military presence in Afghanistan for over 20 years. The sentiment in Berlin, judging by interviews for this study, is that the international community's failure to stabilise Afghanistan will likely affect German decision-making for years to come. ⁴⁶

Until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the ongoing transformation of the Bundeswehr towards the tasks of national and collective defence did not receive much support at the highest political level in Germany nor was it matched by sufficient financial resources. However, on 27 February, just days after the invasion commenced, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced that Russia's actions represented a historic turning point – a *Zeitenwende*. The invasion proved to be a shock to the German leadership, prompting a fundamental reassessment of Germany's relationship with Russia, including efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian energy.

In response, Germany announced historic decisions to reinvest in the German armed forces by establishing a special fund of 100 billion euro, reaching the goal of spending 2 percent of GDP on defence and supplying Ukraine with weapons.⁴⁷ There were strong indications that the *Zeitenwende* would further transition the Bundeswehr towards deterrence and defence "at home." In an evaluation of urgent measures to increase operational readiness that was published by the Ministry of Defence in July 2022, the focus was on deterrence and defence.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the future strategic direction of Germany remains to a certain extent unclear. The changes announced by the *Zeitenwende* have not yet translated into new priorities. Germany has proven hesitant to make radical changes and has been criticised by its partners and allies for sticking with past policies, for example, when it comes to weapons deliveries to Ukraine or maintaining its economic

⁴⁵ German Ministry of Defence, Konzeption der Bundeswehr, 20 July 2018, p. 38-46.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁶ Interviews, Berlin, November 2022.

⁴⁷ Scholz, Olaf, "The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era", Foreign Affairs, January/February 2023

⁴⁸ Bundesministrium der Verteidigung. "Bundeswehr: Erste Zwischenergebnisse der kritischen Bestandsaufnahme", 8 July 2022.

relationship with China.⁴⁹ In late 2022, in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, Chancellor Scholz argued that Germany's priority is to continue to foster the global rules-based order, be a guarantor of European security, a bridge-builder within the EU and an advocate for multilateral solutions. The West, he argues, "must avoid the temptation to once again divide the world into blocs."⁵⁰

How Germany's strategic priorities will change will likely be outlined in the anticipated national security strategy, Germany's first ever such document. Intended to replace the 2016 *White Paper*, the national security strategy was to be published in February 2023, but has reportedly been delayed due to disagreements between the coalition partners, including on the division of responsibilities within the government and Germany's future policy towards China. ⁵¹ According to the former German defence minister, Christine Lambrecht, the most important task of the national security strategy is to bring about change. In the minister's view, this change will not only require more economic resources, but above all a mental shift and a recognition of the fundamental role of the armed forces in ensuring national security. Germany must also be ready to assume more responsibility within NATO and the EU and take on a role as a leading power (*Führungsmacht*). ⁵²

2.4 Analysis: A strategic transition towards deterrence and defence

The UK, France, and Germany are all in different stages of a strategic transition, away from crisis management operations abroad and towards a defence posture focussed on deterrence and defence of national and NATO territory. This shift has been present in strategic documents and debates in all three countries since 2014, with a strong acceleration since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Of the E3 countries, France has made the most rapid transition, with a clearly articulated strategic aim of readying its armed forces for high-intensity conflict. In February 2023, one year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, France published its 2022 *Strategic Review* and announced a subsequent defence law (military programming law), while the UK and Germany were still in the process of updating and publishing strategic documents, the 2023 *Refresh* and the forthcoming national security strategy, respectively.

In part, France's headway is partly a reflection of its emphasis on strategic autonomy, a policy tradition that has fostered a strategic culture independent from

⁵⁰ Scholz, "The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era," Foreign Affairs.

⁴⁹ Tallis, Benjamin, "What Zeitenwende?", Internationale Politik Quarterly, 19 October 2022.

⁵¹ Hoff, Henning, "Germany's National Security Strategy Is in Limbo," *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 4 January 2023.

⁵² Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Grundsatzrede zur Sicherheitsstrategie: Streitkräfte wieder in den Fokus rücken, 13 September 2022.

NATO and European partners, but also its forward-leaning stance on European security and defence issues. In France, moreover, the current strategic environment is not seen as requiring a significant reassessment of the previous defence policy. As described by analyst Camille Grand, the view in Paris is that there has been an acceleration of the trends identified in previous strategic reviews. ⁵³ Control over defence policy is concentrated in the executive branch, leading to a degree of flexibility.

At face value, German rhetoric following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine indicated a fundamental reassessment of the German role in European defence and security. However, the German policy tradition of restraint in security and defence has proven resistant to rapid change. Upending decades of policy assumptions requires significant consultation with and input from other branches of Germany's government and politics, leading to a prolonged process with, to a certain extent, an unclear outcome.

In the UK, the strategic transition away from crisis management towards deterrence and defence has entailed a continuing focus on the UK's role as a global security actor, a policy tradition that appears intact despite the recent abandonment of "Global Britain." That the UK's global outlook is combined with a reduction in force size raises questions about a possible implementation gap. In a European context, this is not a phenomenon unique to the UK, yet the British defence policy trajectory has an added uncertainty due to continuing adaptation to the post-Brexit environment and differences among major political parties regarding the UK's global role.

In all three countries, there appear to be two factors at play that contribute to the strategic transition, one external and one internal. Firstly, the assessment of the global security environment as deteriorating as a result of increasing great power competition has been present in all countries since 2014. This reading is based on global strategic competition from both Russia and China. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 clearly accelerated this trend and spurred all countries to update their strategic analyses to reflect intensified competition and the reality of state conflict on the European continent. Indications are that, in France and Germany, this shift occurred within the armed forces before any decision at the strategic level, but without receiving sufficient political or financial backing.

Secondly, decision-makers in the UK, France and Germany are still grappling internally with failures of crisis management and security cooperation abroad. For the UK and Germany, the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and the fall of Kabul, after decades of engagement, will continue to limit public and political support for high-risk crisis management operations for the foreseeable future. For France, the unravelling of its relations with Mali, and subsequent military

⁵³ Grand, Camille. "The Missing European Dimension of Germany's Zeitenwende; A View from France", Internationale Politik Quarterly, 23 February 2023.

withdrawal from the country, after a decade-long intervention, will similarly limit the desire for resource-heavy military engagements abroad. How to support partner countries and contribute to crisis management efforts, short of an extensive military engagement, will be the subject of debate in all E3 countries for years to come.

3 Operational priorities

3.1 The UK: A committed ally with resource constraints

The UK's armed forces have a global presence, in line with the UK's international orientation and strategic focus on multilateralism. The UK is militarily engaged in multilateral formats, contributing personnel to UN peacekeeping missions in Mali and Cyprus, and to NATO's deterrence and defence operations in the Baltics, specifically to the eFP in Estonia and Poland. Bilaterally, the UK engages in defence cooperation with several partner countries, providing training and advisory assistance to Kenya and Nigeria, among others. The UK also maintains overseas military bases across the globe to which military personnel are deployed for training and operations.⁵⁴

As part of having a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the UK has consistently contributed to UN peacekeeping missions. Since 2020, the UK's largest deployment to an international crisis management operation is to the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA in Mali, where the UK has until recently contributed a long-range reconnaissance group composed of 300 troops. For the UK, an ambition within MINUSMA has been to contribute to progress and reform within peacekeeping operations, while at the same time providing high-end capabilities in the UN.⁵⁵ According to a policy official in London, the British decision to deploy to Mali was also partly motivated by a desire to provide support to partner country France, which has since withdrawn from the country.⁵⁶

In late 2022, the UK announced that it would also withdraw from MINUSMA due to souring relations and difficulties with the Malian government. According to one interviewee in London, the decision to leave Mali was influenced both by a desire to avoid risk and a lack of resources.⁵⁷ Even though the UN is a low priority for the UK in terms of military resources, partly a consequence of the UK's turning its attention to deterrence and defence, it remains important to demonstrate international responsibility by contributing to a peacekeeping mission. The UK will thus likely maintain a contribution to the UN mission in Cyprus.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ For an overview of the UK's military installations in Africa, see Sjökvist. "The United Kingdom – Training Troops and Maintaining Influence in Africa," 2019.

⁵⁵ UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office. "Improving peacekeeping operations around the world – Statement by Ambassador James Roscoe, Acting UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council briefing on peacekeeping operations reform," 15 September 2020.

⁵⁶ Interviews, London, November 2022.

⁵⁷ Interview, London, November 2022.

⁵⁸ Interviews, London, November 2022.

For the UK, NATO priorities are leading. The UK's focus on NATO is linked to the importance attached to the relationship with the US, its foremost ally. The 2021 *Integrated Review* and the 2023 *Refresh* affirm that the US is the UK's most important strategic ally and partner, across the whole spectrum of defence, including the nuclear deterrent. ⁵⁹ In line with NATO's reorientation towards deterrence and defence, a change agreed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, and the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the UK has been spearheading a battlegroup in Estonia as part of NATO's eFP. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the UK doubled its troop contribution and added helicopter capabilities, in addition to its contributions to air policing operations. ⁶⁰ However, media reports indicate that the reinforcements to Estonia were unsustainable, leading to a withdrawal of the added forces and raising questions about the UK's force size. ⁶¹ Instead of an additional battlegroup, the UK holds the "balance of a brigade" at high readiness in the UK, able to reinforce if needed. ⁶²

The British-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is becoming increasingly important to affirming the UK's role in European security. While not a formal NATO structure, JEF is a pool of contingent forces from ten NATO allies and partner countries in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea, with the UK as framework nation. The JEF was initially launched as an expeditionary force with a global reach, but has increasingly gained a regional focus on Northern Europe, having deployed on several exercises and patrols in the Baltic Sea. ⁶³ According to interviewees in London, the JEF will remain an important partnership in the UK's strategic transition. ⁶⁴ The JEF is viewed as a way of building on operational experiences in Afghanistan and strengthening ties between like-minded partner nations. ⁶⁵ Several of the UK's JEF partners, including Sweden, have contributed to Operation Interflex, the British training operation for the Ukrainian armed forces in the UK. ⁶⁶ Together with the British-French Combined Joint Expeditionary force (CJEF), the JEF is a key component of the UK's defence partnerships after Brexit.

Although the "Global Britain" motto has receded from official use, the 2023 Refresh outlined the continuation of a global presence. Under the banner of

⁵⁹ HM Government. Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, p. 60; HM Government. Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World, p. 9.

⁶⁰ UK Ministry of Defence. "UK and Estonia commit to closer defence cooperation," 8 November 2022.

⁶¹ Brown, Larisa. "Britain to halve soldiers in Estonia force amid rising tension with Russia," *The Times*, 28 September 2022.

⁶² Brooke-Hollands, Louisa. UK forces in Estonia. London: House of Commons Library, 21 November 2022.

⁶³ Monaghan, Sean. "The Joint Expeditionary Force: Global Britain in Northern Europe?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, 25 March 2022.

⁶⁴ Interviews, London, November 2022.

⁶⁵ Hagström Frisell, Eva and Emma Sjökvist. Military Cooperation Around Framework Nations: A European Solution to the Problem of Limited Defence Capabilities.

⁶⁶ Manuel, Rojoef. "Netherlands to Continue Training Ukrainian Recruits," The Defence Post, 26 October 2022.

persistent engagement, the UK intends to develop a larger force of permanently deployed personnel and engage in long-term capacity building with its partner states.⁶⁷ The number of forces deployed overseas is envisioned to increase, along with the time that they are deployed. Abroad, the armed forces are developing their bases in Cyprus, Gibraltar, Kenya, Oman and Germany.⁶⁸

Whereas the interest in military interventions abroad is significantly reduced in the aftermath of Iraq and Afghanistan, crisis management and security cooperation, broadly speaking, continue to be part of British defence activities. In recent years, such efforts have focussed on building the capacity of partner countries' armed forces. In Africa, the UK has a range of military assistance programmes for the training of African troops, for example in counterterrorism. ⁶⁹ British forces have been training the Ukrainian armed forces since 2015, first through the short-term training, Operation Orbital, in Ukraine, and more recently through Operation Interflex, in the UK, which aims to train 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers every 120 days. ⁷⁰

As part of a restructuring of the British Army following publication of the 2021 Defence Command Paper, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, capacity building tasks have been concentrated within the newly created Rangers Regiment, part of the Special Operations Brigade.⁷¹ This new niche capability is intended to take over capacity building tasks from the Army special operations forces, through training, advising, and accompanying partner forces.⁷² Parts of the Rangers Regiment have already been deployed in Africa and in Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, prior to Russia's full-scale invasion.⁷³ Concentrating capacity building in this way frees up the rest of the Army and special operations forces for other, prioritised tasks, suggesting that it has decreased in priority for the armed forces as a whole.

The 2021 *Integrated Review* has been criticised for increasing the ambitions for troop deployments abroad, while at the same time reducing the armed forces' conventional capabilities. ⁷⁴ Instead of personnel, the UK armed forces are focussing on the development of new technology. According to a policy official in London, the "new Cold War" will be about technology, rather than mass. ⁷⁵ Analysts have pointed to the risks of focussing on new technology, given the

⁶⁷ UK Ministry of Defence. Defence in a Competitive Age, 2021; HM Government. Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, p. 74.

⁶⁸ UK Ministry of Defence. *Defence in a Competitive Age*, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Sjökvist "The United Kingdom – Training Troops and Maintaining Influence in Africa," 2019.

Mills, Claire. Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion. London: House of Commons Library, 21 February 2023.

⁷¹ UK Ministry of Defence. Defence in a Competitive Age.

⁷² Forces News. "Ranger Regiment: What we know about the British Army's elite force." Forces News, 18 November 2022.

⁷³ British Army. "Action-packed first year for Ranger Regiment," 1 December 2022.

⁷⁴ O'Neill, Paul. "The UK's Integrated Review at One Year – Fit for Purpose?" Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 31 March 2022.

⁷⁵ Interview, London, November 2022.

scenes of conventional fighting seen in the war in Ukraine, and the potential for overstretch of the UK armed forces. ⁷⁶

3.2 France: An ambitious but limited lead nation

France has had and continues to have a global military presence, via its overseas territories, military bases abroad, alliance commitments, and a series of military interventions. Since the end of the Cold War, French armed forces have primarily focused on crisis management, specifically counterterrorism, and have consistently conducted military operations abroad. Most of these have taken place on the African continent.⁷⁷ According to a defence researcher in Paris, France's operational commitments in Africa hindered France from assuming the role of framework nation in NATO's eFP in 2016.⁷⁸ French operations in Africa did not result in a complete shift towards expeditionary warfare, however, as France has maintained full-spectrum capabilities and training.⁷⁹

Additionally, French armed forces have been deployed domestically in Operation Sentinelle, in response to terrorist attacks in 2015. Up to 10,000 French troops have been deployed, affecting the French armed forces' readiness and availability. ⁸⁰ As acknowledged in the 2022 *Strategic Review*, military overstretch has increasingly become an issue for the French armed forces. ⁸¹ Within this context, it can be argued that the eastern flank has not, until recently, been the priority in terms of troop deployments. ⁸²

Within the EU, France has actively driven greater integration among member states in the field of security and defence. In part, this has included pushing for the deployment of EU missions and operations. France was instrumental in launching EU training missions and UN operations in the Central African Republic and Mali. ⁸³ However, France has not contributed substantively to operations under the remit of the UN or EU in its former colonies, preferring to conduct national or ad hoc operations in parallel.

Aronson. "Global Britain – Navigating between Europe and the Indo-Pacific?", 2021; Interview, London, November 2022; O'Neill. "The UK's Integrated Review at One Year – Fit for Purpose?" 2022.

⁷⁷ For an overview of France's operations in Africa, see Tardy, Thierry. "France's military operations in Africa: Between institutional pragmatism and agnosticism," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2020: 534–559.

⁷⁸ Interview, Paris, November 2022.

⁷⁹ Pezard, Stephanie, et al. A Strong Ally Stretched Thin. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2021.

⁸⁰ Ministère des Armées. "Opération Sentinelle"; Pannier and Schmitt. "To fight another day: France between the fight against terrorism and future warfare."

⁸¹ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. National Strategic Review.

⁸² Pannier and Schmitt. "To fight another day: France between the fight against terrorism and future warfare."

⁸³ Tardy. "France's military operations in Africa: Between institutional pragmatism and agnosticism."

Nonetheless, for France, EU military operations present important opportunities for EU member states to forge a common strategic culture, in the form of common responses to challenges in specific geographies. This situation is also entangled with French ambitions for the EU's strategic autonomy and its desire for the EU to assume a more prominent role on the world stage, to avoid being overshadowed by great power competition. France was active in advocating for the European Peace Facility (EPF). According to a policy official in Paris, France sees new possibilities arising from the EPF for EU stabilisation support, such as the possibility for EU delegations to give capability offers to partners without a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission.⁸⁴

Given France's emphasis on European strategic autonomy, France will likely push for greater European defence integration using the potential momentum provided by the launch of the EU's Strategic Compass, in 2022. According to the 2022 *Strategic Review*, France is keen to develop the EU's rapid deployment capability. To this end, it will continue to advocate flexible decision-making with Article 44 of the EU Treaty, which would allow the Council to entrust a task to a group of states. Specifically, the EU should be able to mobilise ad hoc formats when necessary, with the French-led Task Force Takuba as a successful model. 85 In part, the French approach reflects the fact that policymakers in Paris do not regard the EU as a suitable framework for all military operations, since the need for unanimous decision-making renders executive mandates unfeasible. 86 Rather, the EU is seen as a useful framework for crisis management or security cooperation operations, for example training or peacekeeping. 87

In fact, the 2022 Strategic Review clearly states that NATO is the foundation for Europe's collective security. 88 France has historically had a troubled role within NATO, having withdrawn from NATO's command structures in the 1960s and reintegrated in 2009 (but continues to refrain from participating in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group and does not share nuclear planning). 89 Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, however, France has made efforts to demonstrate its commitment to the alliance by contributing to and leading deterrence and defence initiatives on the eastern flank. President Macron has likened the effect of Russia's full-scale invasion to that of an "electric shock" on NATO, signalling a

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⁸⁴ Interview, Paris, November 2022.

⁸⁵ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. National Strategic Review.

⁸⁶ In the EU, executive operations are mandated to conduct actions on behalf of the host state. Council of the European Union. European Union Concept for EU-led Military Operations and Missions. 19 December 2014; European Union External Action. "Missions and Operations," 23 January 2023.

⁸⁷ Tull, Denis M. "France and the Rest: Testing Alliances in Europe by Providing Security in the Sahel." In Sahel: 10 Years of Instability, Carbone, Giovanni et al. (eds.), Milan: ISPI, October 2022; Erforth, Benedikt. "Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the Sahel," Journal of Strategic Studies. Vol. 43, No. 4, 2020: 560–582.

⁸⁸ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. National Strategic Review, p. 14.

⁸⁹ Rydkvist, John and Granholm, Niklas. Nuclear weapons in Europe: British and French deterrence forces. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), 2018.

dramatic shift among France's political leadership. Ocooperation between the EU and NATO, moreover, is presented in the 2022 *Strategic Review* as essential for both European strategic autonomy and the transatlantic relationship. According to a policy official in Paris, one day the EU will ideally be capable of conducting high-intensity entry operations to compensate for the US shift towards Asia.

For military missions abroad, there is an openness in France towards various institutions and formats. Previous research has shown that, in Paris, the mission determines the coalition, rather than the other way around – an approach also known as "forum shopping," or "institutional agnosticism." In part, France sees ad hoc coalitions as more pragmatic, faster and more flexible, enabling France to act as leading nation when established institutional frameworks are unable or unwilling to act. The French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is an example of such a structure, one that allows the formation of a strategic culture and enhanced cooperation, with France as the framework nation, in operational commitments. 94

In terms of bilateral cooperation, the US is often described as a preferred partner, with French-US cooperation in intelligence and special operations as key to operational successes. 95 Additionally, France wishes to build on operational experiences in the Sahel with countries involved in Task Force Takuba and Operation Barkhane. According to an analysis by Denis Tull, there is recognition in France that partner countries' contributions to French operations in the Sahel were premised on French contributions to deterrence and defence in Northern and Eastern Europe. 96

For France, maintaining autonomous expeditionary capabilities continues to be a key priority. The 2022 *Strategic Review* states that France have deployable capabilities to plan, conduct and control operations, both autonomously and with France as a framework nation. For this purpose, the French armed forces must retain national capabilities even though the preference is collective action, outside of French national territories. This includes both the ability to deploy at short notice and first entry capabilities, with or without support from allied countries. Intelligence capabilities play a significant role in support of military operations.⁹⁷

⁹³ Tull. "France and the Rest: Testing Alliances in Europe by Providing Security in the Sahel."; Tardy. "France's military operations in Africa: Between institutional pragmatism and agnosticism."

⁹⁰ Reuters. "L'invasion de l'Ukraine par la Russie a déclenché un électrochoc à l'Otan, dit Macron." 17 March 2022.

⁹¹ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. National Strategic Review, p. 14.

⁹² Interview, Paris, November 2022.

⁹⁴ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*.

⁹⁵ Pannier and Schmitt. "To fight another day: France between the fight against terrorism and future warfare."

⁹⁶ Tull. "France and the Rest: Testing Alliances in Europe by Providing Security in the Sahel."

⁹⁷ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, p. 51, p. 47.

The upcoming military programming law (*Loi de Programmation Militaire 2024–2030*) translates the strategic shift towards deterrence and defence into prioritised capabilities for the armed forces. While not yet approved by the French parliament at the time of writing, President Macron has announced that with the help of an increase in 413 billion euros to the defence budget, the armed forces are to pivot from an expeditionary model designed for operations where the "freedom to act was strong" to one in "challenging environments, against battle-hardened adversaries." According to the President, France must be prepared for wars that will be "more brutal, more numerous but also more ambiguous."

Among other capabilities, President Macron outlined increased investments in the nuclear deterrent, intelligence, and air defence. International partnerships will be prioritised, with France able to assume command of a large-scale operation, deploying a joint force of up to 20,000 people. 99 As part of the transition to high-intensity warfare, France conducted the Orion exercise in early 2023, the largest exercise of its kind, involving 12,000 soldiers as well as civilian components. 100 Whereas the Orion exercise demonstrated France's operational transition to focussing on high-intensity warfare against a peer competitor, analysts have questioned whether the priorities in the upcoming military programming law match French ambitions. 101

3.3 Germany: A questioned multilateralist

Following a series of legal rulings since the 1990s, the German government can only deploy military forces in operations abroad if they are part of a system of collective security. This means that the German armed forces primarily act within a multilateral framework abroad and that Germany is unwilling to participate in ad hoc frameworks. A key German rationale for engaging in international military operations has been to demonstrate solidarity with its NATO and EU partners. ¹⁰²

Another guiding principle for Germany is the whole-of-government approach to international operations, seeing the military instrument as part of a broader effort. In line with this approach, in 2011 Germany established the Enable and Enhance initiative, jointly led by the Ministries of Defence and for Foreign Affairs, to support security cooperation and capacity building in its partner nations. The ambition was to provide advice, training and equipment so that local actors could

⁹⁸ Macron, Emmanuel. New Year's Greetings to the Armed Forces from Air Base 118 in Mont-de-Marsan, 20 January 2023.

⁹⁹ Mackenzie, Christina. "France's military budget leap 'corresponds to the threat,' defense minister says," Breaking Defense, 25 January 2023.

¹⁰⁰ AFP. "France to conduct biggest ever war games in 2023," France 24, 15 November 2022.

Momtaz, Rym. "ORION 2023 raises questions about France's draft defence budget," *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)*, 26 May 202; Tenenbaum, Elie. "La loi de programmation militaire propose un échantillonnage des moyens qui n'est soutenable qu'en temps de paix," *Le Monde*, 27 May 2023.

¹⁰² Interview, Berlin, November 2022.

assume the responsibility for security, thereby allowing international actors to scale down their presence. ¹⁰³ Recent setbacks in large-scale crisis management operations, e.g., in Afghanistan and Mali, will likely reinforce this trend. ¹⁰⁴

Since 2014, Germany has aimed to take a larger responsibility by deploying more forces and assuming leadership positions in UN, NATO and EU operations and missions. As of December 2022, a total of 3155 German soldiers were deployed in operations and missions abroad. The Bundeswehr's largest operation abroad was the contingent deployed to MINUSMA in Mali, approximately 1100 soldiers. In addition, Germany sent smaller numbers of soldiers to UN missions in Lebanon, South Sudan and West Sahara. ¹⁰⁵ According to experts in Berlin, German troop contributions to UN operations were linked to Germany's ambition to assume a seat at the UN Security Council. ¹⁰⁶

Over time, and particularly since 2022, Germany's deployments in support of NATO's assurance and deterrence measures on the eastern flank have grown in importance. In December 2022, Germany had 900 soldiers deployed to NATO's eFP in Lithuania and approximately 500 soldiers to NATO's enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA) in Slovakia, which constituted Germany's second- and third-largest deployments abroad. ¹⁰⁷ In addition, in 2023 the German armed forces have been providing the leadership and the bulk of the forces, approximately 8000 soldiers on stand-by, for NATO's Very High Readiness Task Force (VJTF). ¹⁰⁸

The 2016 *White Paper* stresses that NATO has the primary responsibility for European security. However, experts underline that in order for allies and partners to tie their forces to the German armed forces, Germany must demonstrate both capability and will to assume leadership. ¹⁰⁹ In 2014, Germany launched the Framework Nations Concept (FNC) as a way to demonstrate leadership and overcome such criticism. The concept is a framework for European NATO members to contribute to NATO's force structure by pooling capabilities in clusters and arranging forces in multinational formations.

In Germany, the EU is viewed as playing a complementary role to NATO for European security. The EU has instruments that NATO lacks, for example the full range of foreign and security policy, economic, trade, energy and development policy instruments. The EU also plays a critical role for European capability development and defence industrial cooperation. ¹¹⁰ Following Russia's full-scale

¹⁰³ German Federal Government. White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, p. 50–52, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Berlin, November 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Bundeswehr. "Wie Lauten die Einsatztzahlen?" Bundeswehr.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews, Berlin, November 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Bundeswehr. "Wie Lauten die Einsatztzahlen?"

¹⁰⁸ Bundeswehr. "Die VJTF 2023."

¹⁰⁹ German Federal Government. White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, p. 67 and 69; Interview, Berlin, November 2022.

¹¹⁰ German Federal Government. White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, p. 69.

invasion of Ukraine, in 2022, Germany has supported EU initiatives to finance military assistance to Ukraine, enable joint procurement and enhance military mobility. ¹¹¹ The EU is valued for its ability to act across multiple policy areas. Moving forward, Germany wants to strengthen the union's military capacity to act. ¹¹² Accordingly, Germany has proposed to provide the backbone of the EU's new Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), consisting of up to 5000 soldiers, in 2025. ¹¹³

The changing security environment and the gradual shift towards deterrence and defence has placed new demands on the German armed forces. The 2016 *White Paper* recognised that Germany's means and instruments were limited and that strategic decisions were needed prior to new commitments. ¹¹⁴ The 2018 conceptual guidelines made clear that national and collective defence should constitute the basic line-up of the Bundeswehr and that special mission packages would be set up for crisis management. In a new guidance paper from 2022, the Chief of Defence reiterated that more resources would be devoted to national and collective defence and less to international operations. ¹¹⁵

The capability development of the Bundeswehr is closely linked to NATO requirements. The former German defence minister, Christine Lambrecht, stressed that the German armed forces must be able to contribute to securing NATO's eastern flank and that Europe must be prepared to take a greater responsibility for its security and relieve the US of commitments in Europe. ¹¹⁶ By 2025, Germany aims to maintain one army division as well as naval and air capabilities, amounting to approximately 30,000 soldiers, at high readiness (30 days) as part of NATO's new force model. By 2027, the goal is to add a second division. ¹¹⁷

On the one hand, national and collective defence requires a capability to fight at higher echelons and in full-spectrum operations, compared to the more limited capabilities required for crisis management operations. This means that Germany must develop the capability to fight at corps and division levels and improve logistics chains in order to secure access to spare parts, the appropriate stocks of ammunition and medical services. There is also an urgent need to provide all soldiers with personal equipment, such as helmets, combat vests and protective

¹¹¹ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. Grundsatzrede zur Sicherheitsstrategie: Streitkräfte wieder in den Fokus rücken.

¹¹² German Federal Government. White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, p. 71.

¹¹³ Dahm, Julia. "Germany wants to be at 'core' of new EU rapid response capacity," *Euractiv*, 22 March 2022.

¹¹⁴ German Federal Government. White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, p. 57.

¹¹⁵ Gebauer, Matthias and Kormbaki, Marina. "Bundeswehr: Vertrauliches Strategiepapier sieht Stärkung der Kampfkraft vor," *Der Spiegel*, 14 November 2022.

¹¹⁶ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Grundsatzrede zur Sicherheitsstrategie: Streitkräfte wieder in den Fokus rücken.

¹¹⁷ Gebauer, Matthias and von Hammerstein, Konstantin. "The Bad News Bundeswehr: An Examination of the Truly Dire State of Germany's Military," *Der Spiegel*, 17 January 2023.

gear. On the other hand, the need for strategic transportation may be less, as NATO's eastern flank is closer to Germany than earlier crisis management operations were. 118

In 2022, Germany also made decisions on major investment in capabilities important for deterrence and defence. The first decisions on how to spend the special fund for defence were taken in December 2022 and included the acquisition of 35 F-35A dual-use aircraft to uphold Germany's ability to take part in NATO's nuclear-sharing arrangements, as well as digital radio systems and assault rifles for the army. ¹¹⁹ In October 2022, Germany announced the ambition to strengthen NATO's air and missile defence by establishing the European Sky Shield Initiative, together with several European partners. ¹²⁰

However, the priority given to deterrence and defence has revealed major shortfalls in the German armed forces, affecting both the operational readiness of its forces and the sustainability for large-scale warfighting. Problems relating to the material readiness of the Bundeswehr's units, for example, negatively affected the operational capability of forces assigned to NATO's VJTF on stand-by in 2023. ¹²¹ As the German defence acquisition and development processes are known to be slow and cumbersome, any rapid improvements to Germany's operational readiness are unlikely. There are also reports that the investments planned to be covered by the special fund will shrink due to cost increases. ¹²²

3.4 Analysis: The beginnings of a division of labour?

The strategic transition towards deterrence and defence will impact all E3 countries' operational priorities regarding military engagements abroad. Within deterrence and defence, there are indications that their operational priorities are developing in different directions. For the UK, its operational priorities suggest ambitions for a global presence of lighter forces along with a growing regional specialisation towards Northern Europe, with the British-led JEF as a first responder. Per Germany, meanwhile, the transition to collective defence means first and foremost developing large formations with corresponding capabilities so

¹¹⁸ Interview, Berlin, November 2022; Gebauer and von Hammerstein. "The Bad News Bundeswehr: An Examination of the Truly Dire State of Germany's Military," *Der Spiegel*.

¹¹⁹ Wiegold, Thomas, "Haushaltsausschuss billigt Bundeswehr-Beschaffungen für 13 Mrd Euro – Erste Bestellungen aus dem Sondervermögen," *Augen Geradeaus! Blog*, 14 December 2022.

¹²⁰ Scholz, "The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era," Foreign Affairs.

¹²¹ Gebauer, Matthias. "Nato: Bundeswehr kann Aufgaben nur eingeschränkt erfüllen," *Der Spiegel*, 14 December 2022.

¹²² Petersen, Lars. "Trotz 100 Milliarden Euro extra: Bundeswehr muss Einkaufsliste für neue Waffen for zusammenstreichen, weil das Geld nicht mehr reicht," Business Insider, 21 October 2022.

¹²³ Monaghan. "The Joint Expeditionary Force: Global Britain in Northern Europe?" 2022.

as to be able to secure NATO's eastern flank. In France, the operational focus is on transitioning the armed forces away from an expeditionary model towards high-intensity warfare, including rapid-response capabilities, in preparation for, in President Macron's words, the "next war." ¹²⁴

In certain areas, the E3 will cooperate in bilateral and multilateral formats. Both the UK and Germany are likely to prioritise deployments within NATO and other multilateral formats involving the US, in which other small states can exert some influence. For France, NATO is considered the main format for deterrence and defence, but France will also continue to pursue defence initiatives within the EU.

As a result, a possible division of labour may emerge between the EU and NATO. The latter has been revitalised as the main forum for collective defence in Europe among all E3 countries, as crisis management is decreasing in priority. At the same time, both France and Germany are focussing on developing the EU's RDC, while France speaks of strengthening the EU's capabilities to act in its neighbourhood. Given the significance of the French-German "engine" in EU matters, indications are that the EU may grow in importance for crisis management, with NATO focussed on its main task of deterrence and defence of NATO territory.

Whereas France may pursue operations within an EU or NATO context, it may also pursue ad hoc formations in which it can maintain operational autonomy. In practice, however, France has relied on support in mission theatres from partners such as the US and is unlikely to pursue operations if it is completely without backing. In the event of a crisis management deployment, France is therefore likely to request assistance from its partners, whether within institutions such as NATO or the EU, or within ad hoc coalitions.

At this time, it is unclear how the British and German strategic transition will translate into changes in capabilities regarding the international military engagements of their armed forces. There are no indications, yet, that the UK's reduction in forces, as well as the emphasis on technology development that was outlined in the 2021 *Integrated Review*, will be revised following the 2023 *Refresh*. For Germany's announced policy pivot, or *Zeitenwende*, to materialise in practice, the significant capability gaps in its armed forces will need addressing. Meanwhile, France's announced increase in defence spending is said to remodel the armed forces to be able to meet an advanced adversary far from metropolitan France. Although questions have been raised regarding the match between French capabilities and ambitions, early indications are that France is at the forefront of transitioning its armed forces in the changing European strategic context.

As a result of the ongoing transition towards deterrence and defence, crisis management and security cooperation have decreased as a priority task for all E3 states. For the UK and France, efforts related to crises are focussed on prevention,

¹²⁴ Macron. New Year's Greetings to the Armed Forces from Air Base 118 in Mont-de-Marsan.

in line with NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept. The UK will address increased state competition partly through focusing on persistent engagement abroad and "operating" tasks below the threshold of war in order to detect and tackle problems early. This could include providing military support to partner countries or deploying the JEF. For France, crisis management will remain important but will likely assume a different shape, for example with pre-positioned forces in partner countries. Due to legal restrictions, Germany will only participate in crisis management operations within an institutional format such as the UN, NATO or EU. German participation is also constrained by limited defence capabilities, an issue that will be especially acute when defence resources are redirected towards deterrence and defence.

Although all E3 countries will continue with either capacity building or security cooperation tasks, they will likely ascribe them a lower priority. The UK, France and Germany each have bilateral partnerships with selected countries to whom they offer military training and other capacity building support. The UK will continue to offer bilateral capacity building to its partners via the newly created Rangers Regiment. Indications are that France's new Africa strategy will similarly focus on developing relationships with partner forces through training and other forms of military support. Together with Germany, France will likely also channel capacity building through EU training missions and similar initiatives.

The EU has in recent years increased its capacity building ambitions, leading to a higher demand for contributions from member states. As European military personnel are increasingly needed at home and within NATO, already pressing force-generation challenges within the EU will likely be exacerbated. A potential development for Germany and France is that military support in the form of provision of defence materiel and equipment, for example via the EU's EPF, will increase, while contributing personnel for capacity building tasks decreases.

Given the international outlook of all three countries, crisis management and security cooperation are likely to continue to be featured, despite a strategic focus on deterrence and defence. The types of operations, and their duration, will be subject to change, however, in accordance with new strategic priorities. As a result, the three countries may place more emphasis on their bilateral relationships with partner countries and on maintaining a smaller military presence to free up defence resources for the prioritised deterrence and defence tasks. This is as much a reflection of the strategic transition underway as it is of the need to prioritise limited military resources for defence.

4 Geographic priorities

4.1 The UK

4.1.1 Growing focus on Northern Europe

In line with the strategic shift towards deterrence and defence within NATO, the UK has simultaneously redirected its attention from the Middle East and Africa towards Europe. The 2023 *Refresh* states clearly that the UK's overriding strategic priority is the Euro-Atlantic, with NATO as the "bedrock of Euro-Atlantic security." In both the 2021 *Integrated Review* and the 2023 *Refresh*, the UK presents itself as having a leading role in the alliance. Within NATO, the UK armed forces are engaged in the eFP in Poland and in Estonia, where they lead a multinational battlegroup and have the "balance of a brigade" at high readiness in the UK, able to reinforce if needed. Additionally, British forces are engaged in the alliance's Baltic Air Policing. The Royal Navy regularly participates in exercises in the Baltic, Mediterranean, and Black Seas.

Following Brexit, the UK has invested in defence partnerships with European countries to demonstrate its willingness to remain a key actor in European security, not only within NATO but also other formats, such as the British-led JEF and the CJEF. The latter two received significant attention in the 2023 *Refresh*, specifically in the context of the UK's role in Northern European security.

Northern Europe is given particular priority in the 2023 *Refresh*, indicating a growing regional specialisation for the UK in Europe. The UK Armed Forces participate in cold weather exercises and training in the Arctic. ¹³⁰ The 2021 Defence Command Paper outlines the strategic importance of the Arctic and High North region, referring to the UK's ability to project forces into NATO's northern flanks via the JEF. ¹³¹ Between 2022 and 2023, the UK released a High North

¹²⁵ HM Government. Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World, p. 20, 33.

¹²⁶ HM Government. Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, p. 6; HM Government. Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World, March 2023.

¹²⁷ Brooke-Hollands, Louisa. *UK forces in Estonia*. London: House of Commons Library, 21 November 2022.

¹²⁸ British Army, "Baltics", Accessed 17 March 2023; British Army. "British Army rotates troops in Poland as part of NATO's enhanced forward presence," 18 October 2022; Molyneaux, Ian. "UK and German jets intercept Russian plane in first joint op," *Aerospace Hub*, 15 March 2023.

¹²⁹ Royal Navy. "Operations," accessed 17 March 2023.

¹³⁰ Royal Navy. "Cold Weather Training," accessed 17 March 2023.

¹³¹ UK Ministry of Defence. Defence in a Competitive Age, p. 19; Interview, London, November 2022.

Strategy and Arctic Policy Framework, both of which note with concern Russia's military activities in the region. ¹³²

At the same time, the UK has been one of the driving European countries behind support to Ukraine, signalling a willingness to take on a leadership role in European security. According to the 2023 *Refresh*, the UK's most urgent priority in the Euro-Atlantic is to "support Ukraine to reassert sovereignty and deny Russia a strategic benefit from its invasion." As of February 2023, the UK has provided 4.9 billion euro in military assistance to Ukraine and initiated a long-term training programme, Operation Interflex, which aims to train 10,000 soldiers every 120 days in the UK. ¹³⁴ In addition to Ukraine, the 2023 *Refresh* points to the Western Balkans as of vital importance to regional stability. ¹³⁵

4.1.2 Alliance politics in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific received significant attention in the 2021 *Integrated Review*, with a much-publicised 'Indo-Pacific tilt.' The UK's partnerships in the region include AUKUS, which brings together Australia, the UK, and the US, as well as bilateral partnerships with Japan, India, and South Korea. ¹³⁶

In 2021, the UK deployed a Carrier Strike Group to the Indo-Pacific to train with its partners. At the time, this was seen as an important demonstration of "Global Britain" in the region. ¹³⁷ For the UK, as for many European countries, the Indo-Pacific and the route thereto is strategically important for trade and commerce. According to the 2021 *Integrated Review*, the UK will contribute to ensuring the freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aden and maritime security in the Indian Ocean. In March 2023, the UK and France jointly announced their ambition to sequence carrier deployments to ensure a persistent European presence in the region. ¹³⁸

The 2021 *Integrated Review* justifies the tilt with reference to geopolitical competition and partnership expectations. This justification was recurring in interviews with British policy officials and researchers. The UK's presence in the Indo-Pacific is seen as driven both by a US desire to see European Allies contributing in the region, as well as an ambition to counteract a developing relationship

¹³² UK Ministry of Defence. The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North. 2022; UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office. Looking North: The UK and the Arctic. The United Kingdom's Arctic Policy Framework, 9 February 2023.

¹³³ HM Government. Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World, p. 41.

¹³⁴ Mills. Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion. 2023.

¹³⁵ HM Government. Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World, p. 20.

¹³⁶ Chuter, Andrew. "UK, Japan ink agreement to enable bilateral troop deployments," *Defense News*, 11 January 2023; Kim, Saeme. "The UK and South Korea: Attention to Detail," *Royal United Services Institute*, 2 September 2021; British High Commission New Delhi. "UK and India Prime Ministers announce Enhanced Defence Cooperation," 4 May 2021.

¹³⁷ Graham, Euan. "Reflections on the Royal Navy's Indo-Pacific engagement," *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)*, 19 October 2021.

¹³⁸ UK Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street. "UK-France Joint Leaders' Declaration," 10 March 2023.

between Russia and China. The AUKUS partnership, meanwhile, is also about preventing Chinese access to technology, in addition to further developing the Five Eyes alliance, which includes sharing science and technology. ¹³⁹

However, it remains to be seen how the UK will prioritise resources for the Indo-Pacific given budgetary pressures at home. According to the 2023 *Refresh*, the tilt was achieved without significantly increasing the military presence, indicating that it is more of a security policy focus than a substantial military engagement. ¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, the deployment of a Carrier Strike Group and other assets in the Indo-Pacific can be viewed through the lens of defence diplomacy, for the purpose of engagement and training with partners, such as Japan and Australia, rather than as permanent deployments of hard military power. ¹⁴¹ The British government's focus on the Indo-Pacific has been criticised by the opposition Labour Party for misdirecting scarce defence resources away from Europe, and may therefore be subject to adjustment in the event of a change in government. ¹⁴²

4.1.3 Building capacity of partners in Africa

The UK's military presence in Africa dates back to the colonial era. Since the wave of independence in the 1950s and '60s, the UK has maintained a training facility in Kenya for conducting exercises and training of both British and Kenyan defence personnel. The 2021 Defence Command Paper affirms the strategic importance of East Africa to UK interests, with reference to violent extremism and terrorism. ¹⁴³ In addition to the military facility in Kenya, the UK has deployed a variety of training teams for short-term military support and capacity building operations of African partners. For instance, the UK has trained soldiers in Malawi for deployment to the UN operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. ¹⁴⁴

Maintaining security links with African states was a part of the UK's previous "Global Britain" strategy, to preserve the UK's status and influence post-Brexit. 145 Capacity building tasks are now to be concentrated within the newly created Rangers Regiment, which is deployed in both East and West Africa. 146 Concentrating capacity building tasks will render it less of a priority for the remainder of the Army and special operations forces and allow them to focus their attention elsewhere. The UK's withdrawal from the UN mission in Mali,

¹³⁹ Interview, London, November 2022.

¹⁴⁰ HM Government. Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Nouwens, Veerle. "How Labour Can Reform, Rather Than Do Away With, the UK's Indo-Pacific Tilt," Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), 14 February 2023.

¹⁴² Healey. "Britain needs a national strategy which is relentlessly pragmatic."

¹⁴³ UK Ministry of Defence. Defence in a Competitive Age, p. 30.

¹⁴⁴ Forces News, "What Are British Soldiers Doing In Malawi?" 9 July 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Sjökvist. "The United Kingdom – Training Troops and Maintaining Influence in Africa," 2019.

¹⁴⁶ UK Army. "The Ranger Regiment"; Interview, London, November 2022.

MINUSMA, and the lack of a clear Africa strategy, indicate that Africa may not be a key geographical priority for its military engagements.

4.2 France

4.2.1 Rapid response capabilities in Europe

Whereas French involvement in deterrence and defence activities in Europe had until recently been limited, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has elevated Europe as a geographic priority for France. France's 2022 *Strategic Review* affirms that NATO's collective defence guarantees comprise the central pillar of Euro-Atlantic security. ¹⁴⁷ Since 2022, France has assumed the role of framework nation for NATO's eFP in Romania and contributes to Baltic Air Policing operations.

According to its 2022 *Strategic Review*, France wants to strengthen the European pillar of NATO, for instance by developing the EU's capability in its immediate environment. ¹⁴⁸ In the near term, France will continue to push for the development of the EU's RDC, launched as part of the EU's Strategic Compass, as well as the strengthening of CSDP mandates. Moreover, analysts have pointed to a shift in Paris, where EU enlargement is increasingly viewed through a geopolitical lens. ¹⁴⁹ Having previously opposed further EU enlargement and instead advocated a "deepening" of the union, France now supports Ukraine's EU candidate status. France is also a driver of CSDP measures in Europe's neighbourhood, for example through establishing CSDP missions or providing assistance through the EPF.

France's 2022 *Strategic Review* notes that, in addition to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the Western Balkans is likely to be an area of fragility in the short term, potentially exploited by Russia and China with the aim of weakening Europe. ¹⁵⁰ Due to this concern, France has increased its troop contributions to the EU's Operation Althea in Bosnia Herzegovina. According to a policy official in Paris, the Mediterranean Sea is considered an important area of operations, where cooperation with southern European countries is required in order to uphold sea lines of communication and hinder illegal migration. ¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁸ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, p. 14, 41.

¹⁴⁹ German Marshall Fund. "Transatlantic Tuesdays: France and the Western Response to Russia's War on Ukraine," Webinar. 22 March 2022.

¹⁵⁰ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, p. 12.

¹⁵¹ Interview, Paris, November 2022.

4.2.2 A bilateral approach in Africa

The recent unravelling of French relations with Mali is expected to have a significant impact on the new French Africa strategy, to be published in 2023. France will also review the presence of foreign bases in Africa. Interviewees in Paris indicated that the previous approach of pursuing a large, and visible, military presence was seen as backfiring in Mali.

As part of the new approach, French relationships on the continent should rather be based on African partners' requests, with African partners leading and France in a supporting role. ¹⁵³ For France, this will likely mean a smaller military presence, focussed on reinforcing the capacity of local armies. According to several interviewees in Paris, there will potentially be a focus on Niger and the Accra Initiative, a regional cooperative security mechanism in the Sahel, as France revaluates its presence on the continent. ¹⁵⁴

French military operations in Africa may decrease, but the French military presence on the continent is unlikely to disappear completely. According to a policy official in Paris, there is a concern for the potential for state collapse and the safety of French nationals in the region. ¹⁵⁵ At the same time, France is keen to Europeanise its presence in Africa. The 2022 *Strategic Review* notes with concern the ability of strategic competitors to offer alternative models based more on transaction than norms. ¹⁵⁶ A French policy official reflected, in an interview, that the EU should be a credible military actor capable of competing with other actors. ¹⁵⁷ Even in a multilateral framework such as the EU, France is likely to want to remain the framework nation, with a key role in the decision-making process.

4.2.3 Protecting national interests in the Indo-Pacific

From the French perspective, France is an Indo-Pacific state and plays a key military role in the region. France employs a relatively broad definition of the Indo-Pacific, seeing it as stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to French Polynesia in the Pacific Ocean. ¹⁵⁸ French overseas territories in the region are home to 1.5 million French nationals, while French trade in the region is increasing. ¹⁵⁹ The French military presence is significant, with 8000 French

155 Interview, Paris, November 2022.

¹⁵⁸ French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. France's Indo-Pacific Strategy, p. 26.

¹⁵² For an account, in Swedish, of French-Malian relations, see Gunnarson and Körling. Relationerna mellan Frankrike och Mali 2017–2022: Historien om en skilsmässa. 2023.

¹⁵³ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. National Strategic Review.

¹⁵⁴ Interviews, Paris, November 2022.

¹⁵⁶ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. National Strategic Review, p. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Paris, November 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Gunnarson, Carina. "Frankrikes Indopacifiska Strategi." Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), February 2022; French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. "The Indo-Pacific region: A priority for France," November 2021.

soldiers deployed across several naval and air bases, including permanent bases in the United Arab Emirates and Djibouti. 160

In the Indo-Pacific Strategy, published in 2019, France outlines its role as a stabilising power. China's military rhetoric and actions are noted with particular concern. At the same time, under President Macron, France has sought diplomatic and commercial ties with China, and made efforts to carve out an independent relationship with reference to European strategic autonomy. According to a defence researcher in Paris, France wants to cooperate with the US, but not fuel escalation with China, in keeping with France's self-image as a power balancer. 163

The 2022 Strategic Review notes that France has the means, in coordination with its partners, to discourage or hinder a competitor in the region. ¹⁶⁴ Strategic partnerships are key to this. France has an extensive diplomatic presence in the region and is developing its partnerships with India, Indonesia and Australia. The relationship with the latter has improved notably since the fallout from the launch of the AUKUS pact in 2021 between Australia, the UK, and the US, which meant the end of a significant French defence contract for the production of submarines. ¹⁶⁵

For France, keeping shipping lanes open between Europe and the Indo-Pacific is of paramount importance. Along with eight other European countries, including Germany, France is involved in the European-led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH), to secure shipping passages. According to policy officials in Paris, there is a need to improve coordination between, and consider merging, EMASoH and the EU Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR) Operation Atalanta in the North Western Indian Ocean, for a sustained European maritime presence in the region. ¹⁶⁶

4.3 Germany

4.3.1 Logistical hub for reinforcements to the eastern flank

Germany's highest priority is to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence on the eastern flank. Since the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022, the German armed

¹⁶⁰ French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. France's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

Most recently evidenced by President Macron's visit to Beijing, in April 2023. Anderlini, Jamie and Caulcutt, Clea. "Europe must resist pressure to become 'America's followers,' says Macron," *Politico*, 9 April 2023.

¹⁶³ Interview, Paris, November 2022.

¹⁶⁴ French Ministry for the Armed Forces. *National Strategic Review*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁵ French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. "Joint Statement – Second France-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations (Paris, 30 Jan. 2023)."

¹⁶⁶ Interviews, Paris, November 2022.

forces have strengthened the eFP battle group, under German leadership, in Lithuania. In line with decisions made at NATO's Madrid summit, the German armed forces plan to deploy brigade elements to Lithuania, in order to be able to reinforce its presence there, up to brigade level, when required. ¹⁶⁷ Germany has also contributed a Patriot battery and a reinforced infantry company to the multinational battle group established in Slovakia and three Patriot batteries to Poland. ¹⁶⁸ In addition, the German armed forces have taken part in Baltic Air Policing missions in Estonia and Poland and monitoring in the Baltic Sea. ¹⁶⁹

Germany is also stressing its role as a rear area for reinforcements to the eastern flank. Accordingly, the Bundeswehr must have the capability to support the receiving, staging and onward movement of troops of other NATO and EU allies. In October 2022, the Bundeswehr established a new territorial defence command tasked with leading national operations, as well as the operational movement of EU and NATO forces transiting through Germany. ¹⁷⁰ The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has also shifted Germany's stance towards Europe's eastern neighbourhood, which is increasingly viewed in geopolitical terms. For example, Germany now backs the integration of countries around the Black Sea (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) and the Western Balkans into the EU. ¹⁷¹ In 2022, the German armed forces, for the first time in ten years, sent personnel to the European Union Force (EUFOR) Operation Althea in Bosnia-Hercegovina, which in 2022 doubled its number of soldiers due to the deteriorating security situation. ¹⁷²

4.3.2 Scaling down in Africa amid reprioritisation

Germany's engagement in the Sahel has in official documents largely been underpinned by a normative agenda, lending support for multilateral efforts in the region, such as the UN and EU operations in Mali. However, Germany's engagement has also been linked to the challenge of illegal migration and the need to lend support to and relieve close European partners active in the region, such as France and the Netherlands.¹⁷³

In 2022, the military deployments to Mali were increasingly debated in the German government. The growing presence of the Russian Wagner Group and the fallout

169 Scholz, "The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era," Foreign Affairs.

¹⁷² Federal Foreign Office. "Start of German participation in EUFOR_ALTHEA, the EU stabilisation force in Bosnia and Herzegovina," 17 August 2022.

¹⁶⁷ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Grundsatzrede zur Sicherheitsstrategie: Streitkräfte wieder in den Fokus rücken.

¹⁶⁸ Bundeswehr. "Flugabwehrsysteme verlegen nach Polen."

¹⁷⁰ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. "Bundeswehr stellt Territoriales Führungskommando auf," 13 June 2022.

¹⁷¹ Scholz, "The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era," Foreign Affairs.

¹⁷³ Hagström Frisell, Eva. "Germany – Linking Military Deployments in Africa to National Security." Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), August 2019.

between the Malian government and France posed severe challenges for the countries still contributing troops to MINUSMA. The Malian government started to use its control over the access to Malian territory and air space to make the logistical support to the operation more difficult. For example, it blocked a German troop-rotation plane from landing in Bamako and prevented reconnaissance drones from taking off due to air restrictions. In November 2022, after intense domestic debate, the German government announced its intention to start the withdrawal of the German forces in MINUSMA by the summer of 2023, to be completed by May 2024. The German Minister of Defence has since suggested that their departure could occur earlier, calling the mission a waste of time and resources. ¹⁷⁵

Instead, Germany has decided to participate in the new EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM) in Niger. The support to EUMPM will follow from the previous bilateral German capacity building mission in Niger, operation Gazelle. In the past four years, the German armed forces have trained the special forces and provided equipment support to Niger. Germany also intends to build a military hospital in Niger and retain its air-support operations base in Niamey. 176

4.3.3 Symbolic military presence in the Indo-Pacific

The German interest in the Indo-Pacific region is rooted in its commitment to a rules-based world order and the need to secure access to communication and transportation routes, which according to the 2016 *White Paper* forms the basis for Germany's prosperity and the wellbeing of its citizens. ¹⁷⁷ In 2020, Germany adopted policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, a goal of which is to maintain the rules-based maritime order. ¹⁷⁸

Since 2021, the German armed forces have begun deploying forces to the wider Indo-Pacific region to conduct exercises together with regional partners. In 2021, a German frigate toured the region and in 2022, the air force deployed fighter and tanker aircraft to participate in exercises in Australia, Singapore, Japan and South Korea. ¹⁷⁹ More recently, in March 2023, Germany and Japan announced an intensification of defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. ¹⁸⁰ However, Germany's occasional deployments can be interpreted as instruments of defence diplomacy rather than preparations for a new task for the armed forces. In addition, in March

¹⁷⁶ Küstner, Kai. "Warum Niger für die Bundeswehr wichtig ist", *Tagesschau*, 16 December 2022.

¹⁷⁴ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. "Bundesregierung hat entschieden: Bundeswehr zieht bis Mai 2024 aus Mali ab", 23 November 2022.

¹⁷⁵ Zeit Online. "Boris Pistorius erwägt früheren Abzug aus Mali", 30 January 2023.

¹⁷⁷ German Federal Government. White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, p. 41.

¹⁷⁸ German Federal Government. Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Machi, Vivienne, "German Air Force takes flight for first Indo-Pacific deployment", *Defence News*, 15 August 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. "Deutschland und Japan: Militärkooperation im Indo-Pazifik wird ausgebaut", 19 March 2023.

2022, the German government decided to end the more than 12-year-long German engagement in the EU operation, EUNAVFOR Somalia/Operation Atalanta, in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean. 181

4.4 Analysis: Posture shifting north and east

The strategic transition among the E3 countries has elevated deterrence and defence in Europe to the position of the most prioritised task for the British, French and German armed forces. Within the NATO context, the eastern flank has increased in importance, a trend that seems likely to continue with corresponding demands for deterrence measures. As the US continues to shift its focus towards Asia, the E3 and other European states will meet greater demands for burdensharing on the European continent.

Indications are that the UK is developing a regional specialisation towards Northern Europe, with the JEF at the forefront. France is focussed on developing rapid-response capabilities, both national and within the EU, to enhance European capabilities to act in its immediate environment. For Germany, the emphasis is on developing large formations for securing the eastern flank. Germany is also preparing to become a logistical hub for allied reinforcements to the East.

European states will face increasing demands to support states in Europe's eastern neighbourhood, not only Ukraine. The EU's newly launched civilian monitoring mission to the Armenian side of the Armenia-Azerbaijani border, and NATO's political consultations with both countries, are indicative of the growing focus on the broader region. Within France and Germany, as well as the EU, there are also concerns about instability in the Western Balkans, leading to a renewed focus on the EU's Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the same time, the UK, Germany and France are increasing their military presence in the Indo-Pacific. For all E3 countries, the Indo-Pacific is a significant region for protecting sea routes and sea lines of communication. In the case of the UK and Germany, the increased focus on the Indo-Pacific should be seen in the context of the US's shifting defence policy focus and partnership expectations. Budgetary restraints and the level of ambition suggest that German and British military presence in the Indo-Pacific is likely to be more symbolic, characterised by defence diplomacy and security cooperation, rather than permanent military deployments. For France, its strengthened military presence is motivated by a concern for the potential exposure of overseas territories to geopolitical tensions

¹⁸¹ Bundeswehr. "Horn von Afrika – EUNAVFORSOM Operation Atalanta."

¹⁸² NATO. "NATO strengthens political dialogue with partners Armenia and Azerbaijan," 20 January 2023; EU Mission in Armenia. "About European Union Mission in Armenia," 26 January 2023.

in the region. NATO is also strengthening its partnerships with countries there, including Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. 183

Barring a new or escalated crisis, or a US policy shift, the Indo-Pacific will feature heavily in the security cooperation activities of all E3 states. Within this context, the EU's coordinated maritime presences and European operations in the region, such as EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EMASoH, may also gain greater significance.

In a context of limited defence resources, directing them to Europe's eastern flank and the Indo-Pacific by necessity means moving them from elsewhere. Accordingly, the scaling back of the E3's military presence in Africa is already underway. The shift in European military engagement is most visible in the Sahel, where France has completely withdrawn its troops from Mali, because of its fractured relationship with the government, after a decade long intervention. The UK and Germany are also withdrawing their troops from the UN operation in Mali.

Instead, the E3 countries are moving towards an approach emphasising local partnerships and capacity building, with a reduced military presence. It is likely that smaller European countries, which have in large part relied on French leadership in the region, will follow suit. France and Germany will continue to have a presence, albeit smaller, in line with their new strategic approach, in other countries in the Sahel and West Africa than Mali. The UK may focus its security cooperation and capacity building efforts in East Africa, where it has traditionally held a stronger military presence and military partnerships.

Underlying the operational reprioritisation of all E3 countries is an assessment of a strategic environment in Europe undergoing rapid change. However, European countries are likely to have to address growing instability outside of the continent. Even with indications beforehand, crises have a tendency to appear suddenly, and can lead to further reprioritisations. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Africa was arguably the focus of European defence and security policy, and the underlying issues contributing to insecurity on the continent have not dramatically changed. 184 The same could be said for parts of the Middle East.

As European countries withdraw from parts of Africa and the Middle East, amidst growing instability, potential opportunities arise for other actors to step in and offer military support. The geopolitical contest via foreign military installations and activities, as a feature of the African continent, is likely to continue. ¹⁸⁵ As the E3 increasingly adapt their postures to great power competition, their military engagements abroad may be subject to the geopolitical calculi of their leadership.

¹⁸³ NATO. "Relations with partners in the Indo-Pacific region," 11 April 2023.

¹⁸⁴ Tull. "France and the Rest: Testing Alliances in Europe by Providing Security in the Sahel." 2022.

¹⁸⁵ For more on this topic, see Gasinska, Karolina (ed.). Foreign military bases and installations in Africa. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), August 2019.

5 Conclusions

The UK, France and Germany are undergoing a strategic transition towards deterrence and defence as the main tasks of their armed forces. Crisis management, which has been a defining feature of the E3's defence policies after the Cold War, is decreasing in priority. The new strategic trajectory entails a shift in posture towards deterrence and defence in Europe, alongside a strengthened military presence in the Indo-Pacific, a region facing increasing geopolitical tension. Understanding these shifts allows smaller European states to formulate realistic expectations regarding the types of requests that they may receive in the future landscape of European military engagements abroad.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the E3's policy shifts have occurred neither spontaneously nor rapidly. The strategic transition towards deterrence and defence has, in all three countries, developed more or less incrementally since 2014, and been influenced by both the external security environment and domestic policy developments. This even appears to be the case in Germany, where the suddenly announced policy pivot, *Zeitenwende*, after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, gave political support and financial backing to a transition already underway in the armed forces.

In Europe, a division of labour, whereby NATO focusses on deterrence and defence "at home" and the EU assumes greater responsibility for crisis management and security cooperation outside of the EU and NATO, is looking increasingly conceivable. For all E3 countries, NATO comprises the backbone of Europe's collective defence. NATO's 2022 *Strategic Concept*, in turn, indicates that the alliance is returning to its primary task of deterrence and defence of NATO territory. At the same time, France and Germany support strengthened crisis management ambitions for the EU, including the EU's announced rapid deployment capacity, the RDC.

Russia's war against Ukraine has highlighted the extent to which European states have relied on the US as a security partner on the continent. As the US continues its gradual shift towards Asia, European states will face demands to assume a greater burden for defence. In addition to NATO's deterrence and defence measures, smaller European states may be asked to participate in the E3's defence cooperation formats, such as the UK's JEF, France's E12, and Germany's FNC, as they gain greater significance for European burden sharing.

Not only will European states have to assume a greater burden for defence in Europe, they will likely also have to address crises that erupt in Europe's neighbourhood. Even if crisis management is decreasing in priority, in the event of a crisis in a neighbouring, or prioritised, region, the E3 will face political pressure to contribute to crisis management efforts. This is as much a reflection of partner expectations as it is of the need to pool limited European defence resources.

The question of how to support partner states and contribute to stability in Europe's eastern and southern neighbourhoods will continue to be important. There is increasing recognition among the E3 that declining engagement in Africa, amidst growing instability, may provide opportunities for great powers with less concern for human rights and the rule of law, such as Russia and China, to increase their presence in and support to African states. Moreover, activities to support states in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans that are not members of the EU and NATO will likely be on the agenda, given the E3's increasing focus on those regions, as well as the shifts in Germany and France regarding EU enlargement. In these regions, the E3 countries look likely to focus on security cooperation formats involving partnerships and capacity building of local security forces.

Security cooperation activities will take place in a variety of different formats and contexts. On the one hand, the E3 will engage in security cooperation in regions facing instability, with the purpose of strengthening partner states. On the other hand, security cooperation will occur with allies in geopolitically tense contexts with the aim of protecting strategic interests. The latter tendency is on the rise in the Indo-Pacific, as the UK, France, and Germany increase their geopolitical positioning in the region. The E3 and other European states also have a strategic interest in securing sea lines of communication and trade routes between the Western Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. This will likely lead to a continuing demand for European maritime presence in the area.

Geopolitics and great power competition are recurring themes in the strategic assessments of the E3, in particular the UK and France, concerning their military engagements abroad. A possible development is that future European crisis management and security cooperation activities will increasingly have explicit geopolitical underpinnings. This would potentially mark a departure from the previous normative discourse that evoked commitments to values such as the protection of human rights and the rule of law in European support to partners in security and defence. A key question for future European military engagements abroad will likely be how to combine the two – geopolitical interests and a focus on norms and values – in order to promote stability and remain credible security providers in a shifting strategic context.

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Policy official at the German Federal Foreign Office	Berlin	November 2022
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Researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)	Berlin	November 2022

Officials at the Swedish Embassy, UK	London	November 2022
Policy official at the UK Ministry of Defence	London	November 2022
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Researchers at RAND Europe	London	November 2022
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