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**9:10 — 10:10 AM**

**NATO, Europe, and Ukraine**

**General Christopher Cavoli**, Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander, United States European Command

**Jens Plötner**, Foreign and Security Policy Advisor to the Chancellor, Germany

**Stefano Sannino**, Secretary General, European External Action Service

**Jonatan Vsevirov**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Estonia

Moderator: **Shashank Joshi**, Defence Editor, The Economist

Youtube session: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvppm-IDRYc>

Shashank Joshi:

Joining us, this is a absolutely stellar panel to discuss Europe and European security. We have four Europeans, but I hear general Kali's, Russian and Italian are both pretty good, so you can be an honorary European for the purposes of this panel. This is a sort of really critical juncture in Europe. We're watching as Ukraine's position on the battlefield has been eroding. Europe is preoccupied with a series of domestic elections in which many countries are looking to turn inwards or preoccupied with domestic concerns in which often hard right parties have been on their political ascendancy, challenging some of the ideas and assumptions that Anya outlined yesterday in her introduction about partnerships and internationalism and in which the bedrock of European security policy, the bedrock assumptions of its most important partnership that with the United States are under the greatest doubt they have been for many, many decades. And so I'm really pleased we have such an excellent panel to discuss all of these issues with me today. General Vodi, I'm going to start with you because yesterday we heard on the panel on the NDS Commission from Jack Keane, a very dark picture, a picture of us and allies that are not ready for war that could lose a conflict, a sense of urgency. You are the man tasked with ensuring a war is not lost in Europe, that it can be waged effectively overseeing it. And you've been very Busy.

General Christopher Cavoli:

You better be going then

Shashank Joshi:

And you've been very busy and active. You are fresh off the back of the NATO summit. I know having heard you before, you're not a man who bores audiences, bores audiences with how many countries are meeting 2%. You'll get into the nitty gritty. You're doing the serious stuff. Tell us what you've been doing.

General Christopher Cavoli:

Thanks. It's a very important question because I share general Keen's general view that there's a lot of work to be done and there are big challenges looming. Some of them are right in our face right now. In my case, it's really the chronic threat of Russia. That's the

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immediate press. Of course, in a global sense it's well connected to China, increasingly so in Europe, what we've been doing in the NATO alliance since the Madrid Summit in June of 22, just after the second Russian invasion of Ukraine, heads of state and government instructed Sackler, which at the time was Todd Walters, but a week later was May to immediately implement a strategy to deter Russia and to defend the alliance's territory, which was an enormous sea change. That was the business we were in during the Cold War, but after the Cold War, it was no longer necessary and we turned our attention to out of area operations, those out of area operations.

Think Kosovo, the Balkans Afghanistan tended to be small scale. They tended to require smaller forces and they happened on a very predictable basis, which allowed for a cyclical force generating process that allowed us to take many, many economies every place else except for the unit that was deployed. All nations in NATO happily took the peace dividend and it built a force that was optimized for that sort of operation. That all changed with the refocus on collective territorial defense could not be more different. We need standing forces at standing levels of readiness, geographically focused on specific areas. And so we wrote war plans, operational plans to do this. The key ones are three regional plans in the northwest of Europe and the center of Europe and in the southeast of Europe. And they're classical plans that describe how to defend a certain piece of geography with what forces and what methods.

This has led to a huge raft of advances that we're working on NATO right now. The first and most fundamental one is it leads to a four structure requirement. These are the forces that I need to execute this plan. That really becomes the blueprint for why 2%. So previously I'd get asked sometimes isn't 2% an arbitrary figure and the answer is a little bit, but now it's not. There's a shopping list and that shopping list has been put into place. It's been embraced by nations who are, as we can see, stumping up the money to do something about it. It's also led to changes in our command and control. It's led to changes in our exercise program. It's led to changes in the posture of our forces across the alliance. As you know, we've shifted significantly farther east, but all of these things are really going to lead us to a healthier alliance that's focused on the core task of collective territorial defense.

Shashank Joshi:

Thanks Chris. Before I move on very, very briefly, you have a plan. You have a shopping list to be able to fight. That plan is very candidly is 2% sufficient to meet and fight those plans properly,

General Christopher Cavoli:

Right? So 2% is the agreed goal. It's also been agreed that 2% is a floor, not a ceiling. And I think nations are making their own decisions as they look at what they need to do to contribute their part to the specific plans that they're associated with. And I think it's pretty clear that many nations are concluding that 2% is not enough, that they're going to have to go higher than that. A number have announced that Poland is spending upwards of 4% right now. The UK is coming up to 2.5% is their announced goal. I think we'll see that across the

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board. The four structure requirement is really designed for technologies and systems that exist today because I might have to fight it today, but advances in technology and weaponry will give us the opportunity to do things more effectively, more efficiently in nation. Search for those all the time.

Shashank Joshi:

Thanks very much. Okay, I'm going to sort of move on to you Stefano. Now to talk a little bit about the European view. You head up the European External Action Service. You sit at the top of European diplomacy and this is a big week for you, right? We've had the reelection of Ursula Van Deline at the commission. I was reading a blockbuster piece of reading this morning called Europe's Choice Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission. And this may not sound like hot reading material, but this sets out some things that this would've seemed extraordinary a few years ago because it sets out Avon lions plans for a defense union. And if I'd said to you two years ago or to any of us, the European Union will be funding the production of shells that we will give to Ukraine to kill Russians, we would've thought this is a good short story.

This is funny. But here you are. We have a document in which you are setting out plans for a defense union. You are asking countries to buy 60% of their equipment from within the union, which is a very difficult target. You are talking about a European air shield I just read about in this document as well. So first of all, tell us what's the ambition here, but also how can you persuade General Oli but also NATO partners that this is not going to be duplicative or a clash or encroach on those NATO issues as well.

Stefano Sannino:

Thanks. Well first of all, it's a good day because the reelection of President from the Lion means a lot in terms of continuity for the action of the European Union. And the majority that she has received is strong enough to give her a very broad mandate for the future. I don't know if it's a hot piece to read, but certainly for us it is a very important one because it's essentially it's the overall program that she wants a European Union hopefully I would like to implement for the next years. I think that there is one element which is important in all this, that this is the security is really very much at the center of this process. Security in a broad concept and holistic concept. European Union is not a military organization. And then I've come to the point also about nato non duplicative efforts.

It's not a military organization but it's a security provider and we considered security in a broader perspective including the increase of the competitiveness of our system or the work that we are doing in research and development. All this is providing a much more secure environment for the all of us. But in this context, it is true that this is a very bold decision that President Lion has taken to identify the creation of a defense union for the European Union, which I think it's a very relevant point. I mean it's about fixing the past lack of investments that we have not had for many years is about looking at the future and what needs to be done in terms of the capabilities for DEU. And it's about reassuring and ensuring the security of Ukraine which will remain on the top of our agenda. And it is about creating and

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having projects that can help the security of the European Union, but more generally speaking, the security of all.

One important point that it is in the political guidelines as well is that this is not done let's say to decouple the European Union from nato. This is something that have been selling for a few years by now that on the contrary, all the effort that we are making are in the framework of the NATO alliances to strengthen the capacity of the alliance because we do believe, and we have reiterate including now in Washington at the NATO summit, that the NATO remains the cornerstone of the security in the transatlantic community. But this does not mean that the European pillar does not need to be strong and well end out and with the capacity of providing its own part of the story about the 2%. As you will say, there are a number of member states that have gone well above two per se. Others they still need to catch up. But I think that this is the, I'm not putting any figure on the table hands don't work because this is, the budget is always very, very important. But certainly there will be a huge effort from European Union, not only from the EU budget but also from how to involve the private sector, the European Investment bank. So a collective effort that can strengthen the security pillar of the alliance on the European side.

Shashank Joshi:

Thank you so much. And one quick follow up of you two, Stefano, which is this question of how you balance your responsibilities. You are sitting above a very disparate block and in a way that's your strength. You have a very large block bears huge economic powers, regulatory powers, all kinds of things. It also has an obvious diversity of views and we've just seen one member state talk very up close and personal with Vladimir Putin with ideas that don't resonate as a victor band. Of course that doesn't resonate very much with a lot of other states who are alarmed and concerned by this. So I guess the question some people may be asking is how do we know Europe is united, is Europe united and is this a sign of a serious dissonance? Does this break European unity in a serious way?

Stefano Sannino:

European Union is a union of 27 sovereign states and this is something that we cannot forget, which means that essentially we have not giving, we are not a federation or a confederation, we are still a union of equals. But it is also true that when there are dissonant voices, and I'm not trying to hide it, there is one in this moment when it comes to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. This does not mean that the union is paralyzed or is not able to take decisions over time. We have mobilized for Ukraine, if I'm not wrong, 157 billion Euro in terms of military and civilian assistance. We have agreed to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and we have never stopped, let's say supporting Ukraine militarily, economically, financially diplomatically. So I mean I'm not, again, I'm not trying to gloss over this difference, but this does not mean that the union is paralyzed.

Shashank Joshi:

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Okay, well I'm sure we'll come back to Ukraine. You mentioned Ukraine and the question of enlargement, accession talks very, very important. I hope we come back to that in a second. But yes, let me move on to you and your foreign security policy advisor to the chancellor. I just want to raise with you the sort of paradox of Germany, right? You are on the cusp of being the biggest military power in Europe by spending, which is a big deal. You are the biggest contributor of aid to Ukraine in Europe. I think by value, someone can correct me if I'm wrong on that, you're the only European country I think that is sent is deploying a whole brigade on the eastern front, which is a significant commitment to the Bundeswehr and an important contribution to the defense of the alliance. And at the same time there are the questions over German leadership questions over your commitment to 2% when you will reach it. And the question particularly of what happens beyond 2028, your special funds run out the question of whether the eight Ukraine has fallen in this year's budget and questions over whether in a time when Britain is in transition, France is looking inwards whether German leadership is strong enough. So can you give me a sense of how you see Germany's place in Europe right now and how you respond to the criticism that there is a vacuum of German leadership still in this area?

Jens Plötner:

So you mentioned a few of the contributions we have

Shashank Joshi:

Preempted you so you couldn't

Jens Plötner:

Exactly, but I still have a few things to add. Number one being that we are at 2% this year already.

Shashank Joshi:

Will you stay there? That's what we want to know.

Jens Plötner:

And the budget proposal for next year before it has reached parliament where figures might even increase, who knows, it's the parliament which decides also has above 2%. And in the financial forecast 2% are also depicted. So I mean these are all democracies here and I don't know of any legal or technical means to fix a budget beyond the three year horizon. What can be done is to give an ironclad political commitment and that has been done by the leaders of all three parties which formed the current coalition. It has been done by the major opposition party in Germany. So honestly speaking, I don't know what we can do more to guarantee that yes, we will meet this floor of 2% and that's an ironclad commitment.

Shashank Joshi:

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And on Ukraine aid, we've seen reports this week that the budget has reduced the level of Ukraine aid, I think halved it relative to last year. Is that something that will be changed over the next weeks? Are you anticipating that levels will stay steady of aid to Ukraine?

Jens Plötner:

I cannot preempt what the parliament will do, which has the last word, but I think we need to put this figure into context. So at the moment we have in the draft budget 4 billion. If you take the sum of 4 billion, if that would remain it, it's still more than any other country in the European Union in Europe has provided for Ukraine this year. So that is for sure that's going to be the floor. But the decisive point lies in what the G seven decided in Italy a few weeks ago where after very complicated and long discussions, which lasted almost a year, we decided to use the windfall profits of frozen Russian assets to mobilize a credit line for Ukraine amounting to 50 billion. Now we still have a lot of work to do when it comes to the governance of this discred line, but this is work which is underway in Europe.

This will be done by the European Commission for our side of the Atlantic so to speak. I'm not sure whether it might not even increase this sum, but this is a sum which guarantees to Ukraine that independently of budget constraints which countries might have. The guarantee is Ukraine for the next year has 50 billion it can use for defense spending. And if you look at the average of the last two years roughly the contribution was 40 billion, transatlantic contribution was 40 billion. So it's already 10 billion above that you add to that the 4 billion we will be giving and I hope we won't be the only ones in the European Union to add. So I think that the message is clear, Ukraine is out of the danger zone to finance its defense spending next year and that's the double message. It's a message to Ukraine to our partners in Kiev. But just as importantly it's a message to Moscow, you cannot wait us out. That's

Shashank Joshi:

Hugely important. Before I go to Jonathan, I want to ask you one more thing on China and China policy and heard a China panel here on Tuesday evening and you German government have also been taking some big decisions recently. Your Huawei decision came within the last couple of weeks. You're also debating as saw many countries about the question of Chinese EV imports and tariffs and all the other issues that the commission is looking at. What I want to ask is there is still a sense in Washington that there is a chasm between the way that Europeans, but particularly a country like Germany looks at the threat posed by China and the way that Americans do. And I wanted to ask whether you see that chasm as narrowing more recently? Are you bridging it successfully? What are those conversations like these days?

Jens Plötner:

I think the more on both sides of the Atlantic we coordinate our trade policies, our punitive policy elements in trade politics towards China, the smaller the risk that there is a chasm. And I think as Mark Twain said, the biggest room in the world is the room for



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improvement. And I think that is obviously also true in the case of coordination of policies towards China. But I think it's such a complicated question because to my mind in this century we face two major global challenges. One is climate change and the second one is how do we manage the rise of China? And the rise of China has different facets, militarily, regionally, global trade and it is imperative that we come to a common understanding. And I think one of the main tasks of the new commission will be to intensify the discussions we are having with Washington, with this administration, with the administration, which will result from the elections in November. Because as I said, I think managing the rise of China and avoiding that this leads to a war, God forbid, a hot war or a trade war, a global trade war. I think that is the challenge of the century.

Shashank Joshi:

And just very, very briefly, because you've ended on such an important note, what is the European role in deterring such a conflict, if any? I don't necessarily mean through military resources, I mean through any means at your disposal.

Jens Plötner:

So I think we all or most of us preach rules-based international order as something we should aspire for. And I think that is true for the way states deal, which is with one another when it comes to questions of peace or war. But it should also be true when it comes to trade and that's why I think the good old WTO, if it needs to be reformed, let's do it. But those are the rules which for quite a long time work quite well and I still am convinced and we still are convinced that reactivating WTO is the best way to allow China to develop economically, which I think is inevitable, but in doing so, not crush all the others but do that in a rules-based environment.

Shashank Joshi:

Great. Jonathan, can I turn to you and I'm very glad Yz set me up with his reference to the next administration, the elections and the elephants in the room that we must tackle is the question of European preparedness to deal with a drastic change in American policy. Of course we've all been watching the RNC this week, we've seen the signs that say Trump will end the war in one day. We've seen the comments by the vice presidential pick for former President Trump and his views on Ukraine. I frankly don't care what happens to that country. And my question to you really is are we ready for this? If it should happen? I know you can't comment on the domestic politics of this country, you never would, but are we ready for all eventualities? Do you have a plan B?

Jonatan Veseviov:

So I got the easy question.

Good look, I was a studies ambassador in Washington during the last Trump administration and we worked with that administration. We're working with this administration, we're going to work with any future American administration. I'm not in the business of trying to define

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what's best for the United States. My job is to help define what's best for Estonian for Europe. And in our opinion, the transatlantic relationship remains vital. So we need to not just preserve it, but to do everything we can to strengthen it. But what people need to understand is that our house is on fire in Europe, the war in Ukraine is existential and I come from the north, we don't use those words easily. It's existential not because of geographic proximity or even because of Putin having not changed any of his original goals, which are not limited to Ukraine only, but to the fundamental reshaping of the European security order and creating a buffer zone on his borders, which would include my country. It's existential because at the end of this war, whether we want it or not, those most basic of international norms that Ys was referring to will be reshaped. The results matter. Depending on the way this war ends, we'll either go back to an era of great powers dividing up continence between them or not. If we allow it to become the norm that a largest state can change its smaller neighbors borders with force and which border remains secure, which one, if we allow it to become the norm that the largest state can decide whether it's more neighbor gets to exist as a state or choose its neighbors, then aren't we opening a Pandora's box? We should know perfectly well not to reopen. We've seen all of these stories before. We know how they begin, we know how they end. So it's existential our houses on fire and thus for us in Europe, putting this fire out is our priority number one, number two, and number three, we will do anything that's necessary, anything to put it out. I also want to insert a little bit of self-confidence into my fellow Europeans and reassure my American friends here. There's more than 400 million of us Europeans who're amongst the richest people in the world. And we're in this struggle that we describe as existential with a country that Senator John McCain once famously described as nothing but a gas station with nukes. So we've got this, we got this.

Now Europe obviously has to stand on its own two feet, do more. We have been doing more defense spending is going up. Estonia is solidly above 3%. It's not unlikely the rule hit 4% in the very near future, but the list of challenges that this conference has spent considerable time discussing is huge. You mentioned China climate change. I could add to the Middle East being on fire, I could add Africa with huge potential for both good and bad. We're going to be confronted by this list no matter whether we win or we lose in Ukraine, we're going to be much better off after having defending the most basic of international norms in Ukraine and dealing with those challenges together. But alliances are two way streets. So as we Europeans need to do a better job here in the United States explaining what it is that the NATO alliance brings to the Americans, it still remains a two-way street and preserving and strengthening this alliance will require political leadership on both sides of the Atlantic. So we can do our part in Europe. Estonia is convinced that this is absolutely vitally important, but we need the Americans to do your part.

Shashank Joshi:

Jonathan, thank you. And as a European, Chris, I'm coming back to you here because as European stage, think about that future in that possibility of as you described, whatever it takes, which in practice could mean significant increases in defense spending, painful



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trade-offs of countries that have already emptied their armories, depleted their ammunition, stockpiles given away their artillery and other kit and all the countries representative here have done a lot on that. If you are a European country debating this, you have to account for the question, do I allocate more to Ukraine and put the fire out as Jonathan it or do I look to that future that general keen outlined yesterday and replenish my own armories in an environment where populations and publics just like here may not have an appetite to go to 4% or 5% of GDP, how do you advise those countries in that position? What should they do?

General Christopher Cavoli:

Well, so the outcome on the ground in Ukraine is terribly, terribly important vital to future European and global security. I think that's been well recognized over the last couple of days here. I think it's been well expressed on this panel. So supporting Ukraine is vital for our security, but we can't be under any illusions at the end of a conflict in Ukraine. However it concludes we are going to have a very big Russia problem. We are going to have a situation where Russia is reconstituting, its force is located on the borders of nato, is led by largely the same people as it is right now, is convinced that we're the adversary and is very, very angry. So we have a big Russia problem looming as well. So the answer here is yes, you have to do both. The trick is that industrial production and our industrial base has to support that ambition.

The money's there. You've heard this across the board from Jens. The money's being produced by nations right now we're having a little bit more of a challenge having stuff to buy and that's really a strategic problem for the alliance. If I can tie this to a couple of the other responses that came stefano's discussions about the European Union and what they're doing to fortify, this is really an important part because they're working hard on the industrial base. So the Washington Treaty has the famous article five, we're all aware of that and Article five is kind of my job, right? Once we get to that point, I'm responsible for making sure article five works. But before Article five is article three, now article three states that all member nations will provide for their own defense and this really is the sort of thing that European Union is working on.

So this idea of competition really is a thing of the past in the sense that when we were both contemplating small bespoke out of area operations, we might've collided, but the European Union, to the best of my knowledge, has no thought process or procedures in place to conduct large scale continent wide territorial defense. So we kind of moved past that, but we terribly need the European union's efforts to stimulate the industrial basin to provide for nation's article three responsibilities so that I can execute article five when the time comes. And then finally I would say this all goes to what we heard. I think it's underappreciated in our country in the United States, just how much our European allies have awakened to the fact that the house is on fire. This is not a show and this is not just rhetoric, this is true concern about the stability of their continent and the survival of their states. So this is fundamental and we should recognize it and encourage its development.

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Shashank Joshi:

Thank you. Chris. You mentioned in angry Russia, whatever that happens and I think one of the things that we're seeing in the last several months is more and more public evidence of a Russia whose risk tolerance is growing in Europe. A number of acts of sabotage that we've seen. NATO itself issued a rare public warning about Russia's intensifying campaign of hybrid activity as they put it, concerns over threats to maritime infrastructure, undersea cables. We've seen people arrested in the United Kingdom in Estonia and Germany on suspicion of working for Russian intelligence agencies. And yet I want to go to you to ask, we've also seen in the last few weeks news of a plot to kill the head of a major German ask company, which is if true a profoundly reckless and dangerous act that would seem to cross many red lines even beyond those of past Russian assassinations in Europe. And my question is really twofold and I'll come to the others on this as well, which is should we be more frank and open with the public about these or is this something that has to be dealt with secrecy? And secondly, how do you counter these hybrid campaigns? Do you have a plan for deterring or dissuading or stopping these Russian activities? So I'll start with you.

Jens Plötner:

So I would start by saying that and in support of what Chris said, I think in our mindset we need to acknowledge the fact that by the choice of Putin, we are entering into a phase of a long drawn conflict with Russia. And this conflict, its bloodiest manifestation at the moment is the war in Ukraine, but obviously it's not the only one. We have seen hybrid activity across Europe. We have seen hybrid activity in the United States. We have seen Russia reaching out to Africa, we have seen Russia rekindling ties with Tehran or even worth Pyongyang. So I think all of this is part of the bigger picture which we need to acknowledge. Now to your specific question, I presume you will understand that I can't go into details of these cases, but you mentioned a few of them yourself. There have been arrests. Our security establishment is on high alert because we know that the ones we have been able to thwart were not the last ones. And that's why I think we need to strengthen our capabilities to make sure that they are unsuccessful. And secondly, I think one of the most important things is how do we our societies react to this? Do we start to panic, be afraid, think that well maybe we shouldn't anger Moscow. That certainly I'm convinced would be the wrong answer. I think we need to strengthen our resilience and that is why I took this detour of describing what the general picture is. I think we need to tell our public this is the new reality, we need to live with it. We won't be able to stop Russia with good words. And that is why I think our politics as we described it in the last NATO communique to contain Russian aggression and to work against it. And I can tell you that there is an ongoing intensive discussion of how best to counter this, but I also ask for your understanding that that is nothing for public consumption at the moment.

Shashank Joshi:

Okay, so perhaps next year we'll get a hint of the plant

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Jens Plötner:  
Perhaps.

Shashank Joshi:  
Does anyone else want to come in on this question of countering? Yeah, Stefano, you first

Stefano Sannino:

On one point that Chris was making, which I think it's extremely important. I think that we have lost quite a lot of time about this story of competition between you and nato. And I think that we need to, especially now in the context that both Y and Yan have defined, we need to be clear about who our friends are and if we are not clear about that then we make a big mistake because then we will be much weaker vis-a-vis those. I don't want to speak necessarily about enemies but certainly about opponents. And that's a point which I think that we have to keep in mind. And this brings me also to a point that YZ was making about China and about the risks because yesterday we have discussed them and we have heard a lot about the risks inherent to insecurity coming from China.

There is an element I think of calculus in the way China works and this is something that we need to factor in and that's why I fully agree with the fact that we need to step up our cooperation when it comes to how to manage China. We still are doing things, I mean we have a permanent dialogue on China led between us, the acceleration service and the state department. We have a trade and technology council between EU and us, which is dealing with a number of aspects that are very much linked to China. But we need to bring all this strengths of activity together because we need much more impactful and effective in how to influence again the car in China. And the best way to avoid open clash is deterring it and that's what we need to do.

Shashank Joshi:

I want to continue with, did you want to come in Jonathan first

Jonatan Vsevirov:

Just on the hybrid attacks, I need to put it in a bit of a wider context. This war as all wars is obviously extremely costly on all sides. Also in the Russians. For Putin it was supposed to be a short war, he was supposed to fall in a few weeks and then he was supposed to negotiate from position of strength with some in the west. They knew security order for our continent. All of this obviously failed. So currently he's running on one argument that he has left and that's what GenZ alluded to, which is the time is somehow on his side that in a war of attrition he's going to outlast Ukraine and more importantly outlast the democracies of the west come 2025. And assuming that we're able to stay the course and looking at the macro trends, our production picking up our financing, picking up this time is on my side argument is not going to carry water for him anymore.

So he has to derail us at all costs. This year the two tools that he uses against us, fear and false hope, he's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric alongside the hybrid attacks in Europe,

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including in Estonia are him using the tool of fear with the aim of paralyzing over decision making. So the smartest thing for us to do is not to fall into this trap, we're going to obviously have to deal with every case we in Estonia deal with our case publicly. The most important thing is not to communicate fear as this will incentivize further use of these extremely dangerous and destabilizing activities. On the false hope side, I'm sure you've noticed he's talking about peace these days. He's foreign minister I think yesterday talked about peace. This is him laying the trap and it would be enormously foolish for us to fall into this. He's not interested in peace, he's in derailing our policy the way it would work similar to mince three or mince two on steroids or getting the chemical weapons out of Syria case where he creates a diplomatic process that ties us down, derails all alternative politics or policies and eventually doesn't fulfill any of the promises he gives. This I think is the context. It's also I think safe to assume that it's always darkest before dawn. I think the fever will break sometime in 2025, thus it might get worse in the coming months of the fall. So we need to brace ourselves for that eventuality and then deal with every case but not fall in his traps.

Shashank Joshi:

I'd like to broaden us out a little bit beyond Ukraine, Stefan, and come back to you. You are one of your's senior most diplomats and I think it's a sign of the times that you've talked to us about defense industrial capacity. You've just given us a message about the importance of centrality, of deterrence. But beyond that more broadly there's also the question of the sort of middle ground countries. Aren't there countries that are not core allies, that are not adversaries And one of your jobs as a diplomat is to engage those countries And only a week ago we saw one of the most important of those countries India conduct a very high level summit with Vladimir Putin. We saw a warm, very cordial embrace between Nora Modi and Vladimir Putin and we've seen quite understandably a lot of middle ground countries balancing and protecting their own national interests. And I'm wondering, over two years I've been hearing cries in Europe that we must engage the middle ground countries. How much progress have you made on this? Do you feel like you're making progress with these countries that are in those sort of non-aligned or semial aligned camp?

Stefano Sannino:

It's a very good point because it's one of the other aspects that we need to develop in the part, the cooperation on the transatlantic side. And that would say also the transpacific, you are rightly speaking about the France and it comes also speaking about Japan or Australia or New Zealand. But it is true that we need to engage much more and we need to build the partnerships also with countries that maybe are not fully aligned with our policies. All that are developing policy that have a certain degree of India speaking about multifactorial foreign policy, about multi alignment. So with countries that are hedging the back all the time and that are trying to identify which are the best interests for them in each and every moment and do not decide to stay specifically in one camp or the other. And this is the

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reality of our new world, the world which is much more fragmented and hence where you have a less clear division or less clear definition of camps.

And we have to work with this. So we have to work with the imperfection if I may call it like this. And we have to develop instruments that are based on common interests and how we see things and it's what we are trying to do. We have tried to do it in a more advanced way with the countries surrounding Europe, be it the Western Balkans or the North African countries developing strong partnerships. But we are doing this also with countries around the world developing interest instruments like global gateway, which is a sort of infrastructural projects which is mobilizing huge resources to finance infrastructure of common interests. But also,

Shashank Joshi:

So this is a counterbalance to things like the belt and road like the belt and road

Stefano Sannino:

Initiative, but it's a little bit more than that. I say it's to provide a perspective of the common future of a common development. And again, this has to be done necessarily with countries. We do not share all values that we think are very relevant but also to accept it has been the case for

Shashank Joshi:

Not even all the European Union countries share all the values that are important to you these days.

Stefano Sannino:

You made this point already. So in a way I think that we have become slightly more pragmatic than before. At the end of the day, again, we have to live in a world which has become much more complex than it used to be before. And the only way to do it is to do it is to develop specific partnerships which like the one that China, with China, we say that we are the same time cooperating, that we are competing and we are confronting. That's the American way of saying it, but we have cooperation and strategic rivalry at the same time. I do not have let's say a perfect solution, but I think that this is the best that we can do at this stage

Shashank Joshi:

From a national perspective. Do you want to add anything to that in terms of your experience of German engagement with non-aligned countries and how it fits into your core relationships with the Americans and the big powers, but how are you managing these trade-offs and thinking about this in the last year or so?

Jens Plötner:

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I think the word I would like to underline from Stefano is we have become, or few words, we have become more realist. I think we have had a careful look at our engagement in the last decades trying to export our values. And the sad but honest truth is we were not extremely successful. If it doesn't come from within, it can't be parachuted from outside. And I think we need to accept that the global scene will be more chaotic. The way I envisage is kind of a multi-centered world, which with different centers, China will be one, the US will be one, Europe will be one. And the strength of each of these centers will depend on several vectors of influence it has. So one vector is the good old military strength. Another vector is trade, how strong are you? Another vector is how much soft power do you wield to reach out diplomatically?

How attractive is your culture to others? And I think those centers will be strongest, which have the most points accumulated in these different vectors. And one of the vectors which I forgot to mention is how good are you at consolidating relationships with other centers? How good are you in building alliances? And I think this is one of the strong points of the Biden administration that they have managed to consolidate and strengthen the transatlantic alliance in the face of a war in Europe. But also if I look to Asia that I think they have done a remarkably good job to build alliances there. And if you see the world like this, then I think it becomes quite clear that what our task is is to become a strong center ourselves by developing these vectors and then by giving particular attention in our trade as diplomats to the vector of compatibility and cooperativeness with other centers.

Shashank Joshi:

Jonathan, you wanted to come in Jonathan?

Jonatan Vseviov:

I agree with everything that has been said. I just want to add a few points on the global partners look much for the world cares about the UN charter and territorial integrity and all of those principles. The reason why many come across as if they're sitting on the fence when it comes to this war of aggression in Ukraine is because frankly they don't know who's going to win. And that should be a source of concern for us because obviously we're eventually unable to defend the principles which we've promised to defend for decades now in our own backyard. The concepts of territorial integrity and sovereignty, then the hard days on the global stage for us Europeans and I would argue for our allies in the United States will only only begin the best recipe for gaining traction and influence in the world is succeeding in walking the walk as we've talked the talk. And this is what's up at stake in Ukraine.

Shashank Joshi:

Thank you Chris. I want to come back to you on Ukraine since that's where the conversation has gone and ask you for a sense of prognosis. We heard from Jonathan that really this is Europe can do this, we've got this, but the question is what this is and right now it looks to me very difficult to see any pathway forward for Ukraine to regain the initiative on



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the ground through another offensive. So how do you look at this conflict going forward and see its possibilities over 2025?

General Christopher Cavoli:

Well obviously Josh, that's, it's a war. It's a little hard to predict. Wars are hard to predict in general, but as they go on they become harder and harder to predict. So one of the challenges we see and one of the biggest lessons I think we can draw from the war in Ukraine is that in modern wars you either win fast and upfront or you're in for a long slog full of unpredictable twists and turns. And that's where we are right now. A lot of it's going to come down to force generation capability, which side can generate force, quality force fastest and take advantage of that while they have a window of opportunity and that advantage can go back and forth. The Ukrainians right now for this past few months have been focused on defending what they have in the east denying Russia, the free use of Crimea and Southern Ukraine to attack Ukraine, preserving their access to the Black Sea and generating force. So I think they've got a great strategy, it's just a matter of prosecuting it. The key part is that forced generation, that forced generation as of now still depends on us. As you pointed out in your earlier question to me, that forced generation depends on us and that's going to require us to generate and produce more equipment than we were contemplating perhaps two years ago.

Shashank Joshi:

The one bit that doesn't depend on us is mobilization of manpower in Ukraine, which has turned out to be an incredibly important challenge in the last six months. So whilst we have our bit to do, and we've heard a lot about defense industrial capacity and the importance of this, the manpower bid is on them. How do you think they are doing on that right now?

General Christopher Cavoli:

So yeah, fourth generation consists of three big components. You have to have people, you have to have equipment, you have to train them together in the equipment. That depends largely on us. I think that's been going well. We've talked about the contributions that are forthcoming over the coming years and the way we've secured funding into the future for that. So I think that proceeds, well Ukraine has challenges in how it uses its manpower, right? So there's a pool of people who need to work in factories, need to work in fields and need to work in the military fighting. And it's the job of the Ukrainian government to figure out what that balance is. They've recently as extended the age of conscription, two years lower. They're bringing people in at a pretty good clip right now. And that's raising the third factor, which is training capacity.

So the European Union through the eu, MAM, military assistance mission as well as the US through a coalition and soon nato as NATO are devoted to helping the Ukrainians train large numbers of people. So that will be the third part to come into place. So that manpower question is being addressed. I think it's going much better right now, but it is the strategic question. I would point out that for the alliance as well, once we figure out the industrial

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production question, we have a looming manpower question as well. Our human resources are not infinite and we have to increase the propensity of especially young people to serve their nations inside their military forces as we go into the future.

Shashank Joshi:

Absolutely. And just we're coming to the end, but one of the themes of this has been I think Europe that's woken up as one of you put it right? I think you put it Chris. And one manifestation of that to me came in the last week, the summit when I saw the news that the US in 2026 or from 2026 would be deploying long range intermediate range missiles in Germany. And if we had been discussing this panel five years ago, we would've been consumed with discussion of the INF treaty, the implications of this, the sensitivity of these sorts of missiles, the danger posed by Russian SSC, eight intermediate range missiles to European capitals. Now that's one sign of this European awakening is that we're putting these in and this isn't even front page news. And I'm just really curious, Jen, and perhaps if we have time, Chris, on what has driven this decision. I know you're not in charge of German defense, but it has huge foreign policy security, strategic implications. How do you think about this move?

Jens Plötner:

So we've been working on this move for quite a while and I think it was an appropriate to go public with it last week.

Shashank Joshi:

Maybe you could just summarize which missiles will be deployed. This is public in the deck of summit, so I'm not asking you to reveal secrets.

Jens Plötner:

So I'll leave that the military part to Chris, but I prefer doing so. I just want to thank also Chris and his team and Jake Sullivan, my colleague in the NSC for the work they did to make this possible. And I want to correct you, it was front page news in Germany for one day, but except a few extremes, no criticism. So I think

Shashank Joshi:

Compared to the eighties

Jens Plötner:

Exactly

Shashank Joshi:

Euro missile

Jens Plötner:

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Process for many, it's ironic and I think it's just an emblematic sign of how much we are living in this what we call site and vendors sea change moment and where we have been observing Russia building up capacities in the kalin enclave, which have the capacity to reach our capitals in minutes without having anything to counter that and without having an own deterrent in the sub strategic domain. And this is something we need to fix. We need to fix it fast. That's why it's good that our American friends are stepping in and are beefing up their respective presence. But we also want to contribute as Europeans. And that is why we initially together with France and Germany and others are welcome to join, have launched an initiative to develop deep precision strike capacities of our own of the next generation so that we will be able to have an own European pillar of deterrence in the sub strategic non-nuclear domain.

General Christopher Cavoli:

So Shang, I'm sorry. Yeah, please applaud. Actually this is fantastic. It's really emblematic of Europe awakening. This is a different Europe than the Europe we complained about for years. This is real and it's happening. This is a Europe that recognizes what the burden is and that it's got to be shared and it's got organizations that are preparing the sharing. It's got nations that individually are picking up the load. And this is exactly the partner we've been looking for three decades. It's exactly the time when a US contribution will produce the most value, the most value will come from US participation. Now because we have counterparties who are ready to do the same work that we're ready to do. This is exactly the moment when American interest will be advanced most by American continued participation.

Shashank Joshi:

Somebody was live streaming that to the RNC because that was a very potent message. Thank you Chris, and thank you for summarizing. We only have a minute and a half left, so I'm not going to go back to the panel, but I'll just sort of say this has been a really fascinating discussion. We spent a lot of time looking at the sort of, I think the theme really has been Europe stepping up, Europe waking up to these threats, new partnerships, particularly the eus, really intensive involvement in defense and security. The sense of risk. Jens, I think you put it very well in terms of identifying that we're in a long drawn out campaign. This is not something that's going to end in a few months or a year. You have to stand up and tell Publix that and explain that to them. And many of the moves in defense in security, whether that's weapon deployments are really beginning to be taken. Now, perhaps we didn't drill down as deep as we ought to have done or might have done on the question of if there is radical change in American policy in November, which might upset some of these assumptions and challenge even the sense of urgency that you've outlined on the stage. But I hope we continue to take up those themes in the margins just after this. So please join me in thanking this excellent panel.