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PRE-PUBLICATION

Europe and NATO: Together strong against Multipolar Threats

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EDITORIAL

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

welcome to the 2026 Berlin Security Conference – the highlight of the Behörden Spiegel events. This year, we are celebrating an anniversary as we are conducting the BSC for the 25th time. For this special event, we are happy to have Lithuania as our partner nation at our side, a nation with close ties to Germany and the first country to permanently host a German military unit, the Armoured Brigade 45, on its territory. Thanks to the Lithuanian Ambassador, H. E. Giedrius Puodžiūnas, for the extraordinary and invaluable support we received in the preparation phase of this event from the embassy and from the Lithuanian government, represented at the BSC by the President Gitanas Nausėda, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Kęstutis Budrys and the Minister of National Defence Robertas Kaunas who will be accompanied by the Chief of Defence, General Raimundas Vaikšnoras.



The 25th anniversary of the BSC is overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, a war that lasts now almost exactly as long as the Second World War, and a war that is still ongoing. This war reveals the extremely brutal side of a conflict waged with full military force, but in reality, a large part of free Europe is already embroiled in a conflict waged by more subtle means.

Almost every day, we see and read news reports of acts of sabotage targeting power stations and transport infrastructure, drone flights over Bundeswehr premises and other critical infrastructure, and even attempted acts of sabotage using drones laden with explosives against a civilian cargo aircraft. Added to this are cyber-attacks as well as targeted manipulations and disinformation campaigns aiming at unsettling our population and destroying the cohesion of our societies as well as the solidarity between allied partners.

Hence, security is not something that can be taken for granted anymore. And it is no one-dimensional military task, either. Security has become a task for all of us, a whole-of-society engagement that aims at enhancing our resilience across the full range of the currently existing weaknesses. Security and defence capabilities therefore do not begin with the armed forces alone. The planning guidelines developed at NATO describe the areas that require particular attention by the national authorities with respect to maintaining the capacity for political and social action in the face of hybrid threats: managing large-scale population movements and mass incidents, improving the resilience of national and cross-border energy networks and transport infrastructure, developing priority arrangements for civil telecommunications, and mitigating identified risks and vulnerabilities in the food and water sectors. Therefore, resilience is not merely a security issue, but also a factor in business location and competitiveness.

Managing these challenges for our societies can hardly be successful without strong partners, strong cohesion between the partners and coordinated action. Against this background, we have chosen the overarching theme of “Together strong against Multipolar Threats” for this year’s conference. And once again, we have been able to secure high-profile speakers and panellists for our anniversary event. I hope you’ll join me in looking forward to two exciting days featuring a varied programme and interesting discussions.

I would not want to finish without thanking Major General (ret) Reinhard Wolski and Colonel (ret) Thomas Greggersen for their excellent performance as Conference Chair and Coordinator as well as for their tireless efforts to further develop the BSC’s position as a unique platform for high-calibre exchange on relevant security policy issues.

Dr Eva-Charlotte Proll,
Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, Behörden Spiegel Group

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Editorial Dr Eva-Charlotte Proll, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, Behörden Spiegel Group	22	The Luftwaffe – Shaping our Future Lieutenant General Holger Neumann, Chief of the German Air and Space Force
6	Aims and Outcomes of the 25th Berlin Security Conference Major General (ret) Reinhard Wolski, Chairman of the Berlin Security Conference	26	Civil-military cooperation as backbone for resilience in the Cyber- and Information Domain Vice Admiral Dr Thomas Daum, Chief of the German Cyber and Information Domain Service
8	Lithuania and Germany: From Reassurance to Forward Defence H.E. Giedrius Puodžiūnas, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary	28	Startups as a Strategic Factor: What Europe's Security Community Can Gain from New Partnerships Dr Tobias Lindner, Member of the BSC Advisory Board and former Minister of State at the German Foreign Office
10	Already Here Kęstutis Budrys, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania		
14	Europe and NATO: Together strong against Multipolar Threats Florian Hahn, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office and member of the BSC Advisory Board	30	Strong Together: Operational Readiness in an Era of Multipolar Threats Lieutenant General Alexander Sollfrank, Commander of the Bundeswehr Joint Force Command
16	A Violent Peace – Europe's moment to turn decisions into delivery Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, Chair of the NATO Military Committee	32	Military support as a strategic pillar of Europe's capacity for action Lieutenant General Gerald Funke, Chief of the Chief of the Bundeswehr Joint Support Command Headquarters
18	Not at War, No Longer at Peace: Defending Europe in the Grey Zone Michael Gahler, Member of the European Parliament and the BSC Advisory Board	34	Europe's Silent Reserve: Why volunteering is part of our collective strength against multipolar threats Martin Schelleis, President of Malteser Hilfsdienst e.V.
20	Together strong against multipolar threats: How the German Army is reorganising itself for national and Alliance Defence. Lieutenant General Dr Christian Freuding, Chief of the German Army	36	BSC Startup Challenge 2026 Anna Lena Hohmann, Senior Manager at PwC

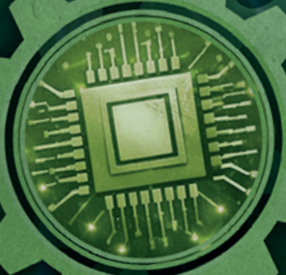
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MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATIONS





The Chairman of the BSC, Major General (ret) Reinhard Wolski announces the National Anthems, performed by the Stabsmusikkorps der Bundeswehr.

AIMS AND OUTCOMES OF THE 25TH BERLIN SECURITY CONFERENCE

■ Major General (ret) Reinhard Wolski, Chairman of the Berlin Security Conference

In 2026, the security and defence of the values-based international order continue to face significant and complex challenges. The war in Ukraine, ongoing since 2022, remains a central test of international law, sovereignty, and collective security. Any sustainable peace can only be achieved through diplomacy and negotiation grounded in strength and unity and must fully respect Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity. While hostilities may have ceased at the time of the Conference, the risk of renewed escalation cannot be excluded.

Russia's evolving approach, including the use of hybrid and increasingly overt and kinetic hostile measures against Western societies and infrastructure, underlines the importance of unity, vigilance and resilience among NATO and EU members. Close coordination within and between both organisations is essential to protect democratic societies, deter further aggression, and uphold international norms.

Beyond Europe's immediate neighbourhood, the Indo-Pacific region remains of growing strategic importance for global stability, freedom of navigation, and international trade. Rising tensions, particularly those linked to China's expanding military posture, reinforce the need for dialogue, partnerships, and a rules-based international order.

PURPOSE OF THE BERLIN SECURITY CONFERENCE 2026

The Berlin Security Conference aims to provide a high-level political forum bringing together senior decision-makers from Europe, the United States, Canada, and other transatlantic partners. The Conference will facilitate open dialogue on current geopolitical developments, emerging risks, and the political choices required to safeguard peace, security, and democratic values.

Key objectives include:

- Promoting a shared understanding of the increasingly interconnected and multidirectional security challenges facing NATO and the EU;
- Strengthening political cohesion and strategic alignment within the Euro-Atlantic community;
- Identifying coordinated, credible, and proportionate policy responses to challenges within NATO's and the EU's respective areas of interest;
- Demonstrating political resolve, solidarity, and commitment to collective security;
- Introducing the field of security and defence to students, young leaders and officer candidates.

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

- Partner nations play a key role in shaping the Conference, contributing to its agenda, participating with senior-level delegations, and hosting the traditional pre-conference reception. In 2026, the Berlin Security Conference is highly honoured to welcome the Republic of Lithuania as its partner nation.
- The Conference is further supported by partners from industry and business, whose engagement reflects the growing importance of public-private cooperation in addressing modern security challenges.

STRATEGIC-LEVEL DISCUSSIONS

Recognising the extensive scope of strategic issues, the conference will address the following priority areas:

- Containment or fight-back of the Russian constant political intrusion into free Europe;

- The progress of a credible defence build-up in the Central Region;
- The Southern neighbourhood, with particular attention to the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions as spaces of strategic competition and cooperation, as well as military mobility;
- The essential synergetic synchronisation of effort between EU and NATO in deterrence and defence;
- The progress of the EU “ReArm Europe” initiative and further capability development;
- The “Reach-out”-perspective to the Indo-Pacific area as a lifeline for Europe.

OPERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Discussions will also address the operational dimensions of implementation, including:

- Enhancing coordination and interoperability across domains – land, air, maritime, cyberspace, and space – drawing on lessons identified from the war in Ukraine and NATO high-level exercises,
- Introducing the Alliance’s new maritime strategy,
- Advancing comprehensive approaches to resilience and “Total Defence,” integrating civil preparedness with security policy,
- Strengthening frameworks for host-nation support, military mobility, and civil-military cooperation, including healthcare and crisis response,
- Improving defence procurement processes, fostering innovation, and deepening cooperation with industry,

- Assessing the opportunities and governance challenges associated with artificial intelligence and software-defined defence and UxS.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- A strengthened political consensus on a coherent, sustainable, and credible European security and defence policy, anchored in a strong transatlantic partnership and increased European responsibility.
- Policy-oriented recommendations to support accelerated and coordinated capability development and force planning, aligned with NATO’s Strategic Concept, the EU’s Strategic Compass and follow-on documents, and national comprehensive security approaches;
- Enhanced public communication and media engagement to convey the Conference’s key messages and reinforce public support for democratic security and international cooperation.

“Any sustainable peace can only be achieved through diplomacy and negotiation grounded in strength and unity.”

Major General (ret) Reinhard Wolski,
Chairman of the Berlin Security Conference



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At the conclusion of BSC 2025, the BSC flag is handed over from the 2025 partner country Sweden to the 2026 partner country Lithuania.

LITHUANIA AND GERMANY: FROM REASSURANCE TO FORWARD DEFENCE

■ **H.E. Giedrius Puodžiūnas**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Europe is living through the most profound transformation of its security architecture since the end of the Cold War. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally altered our strategic environment. The era of assuming that peace is permanent is over. The core task before us is no longer simply to react to crises – security threats and challenges – it is to build credible deterrence capable of preventing them and, if necessary, to repel them. This is precisely, why the strategic partnership between Lithuania and Germany matters.

Germany's decision to permanently station Armoured Brigade 45 in Lithuania marks a historic turning point. Never before has Germany permanently deployed an entire combat brigade abroad. Once fully operational by the end of 2027, nearly 5,000 German soldiers and civilian personnel will serve in Lithuania as an integral part of NATO's forward defence. This is far more than a force posture. It represents a new level of Allied solidarity and demonstrates that NATO's defence begins where its borders begin. For Lithuania, this commitment carries an equally important responsibility. Our government has launched one of the largest defence investment programmes in Europe. Lithuania has committed to investing more than 5 percent of GDP in defence, making it one of the Alliance's leading contributors relative to its economic size. We are establishing a Lithuanian military division, expanding military training areas, constructing barracks, headquarters and logistics infrastructure, modernising transport networks and creating the conditions necessary for the permanent deployment of Allied forces. Host Nation Support has become a strategic capability in its own right. But military presence alone is not enough. The future battlefield will increasingly be shaped by technology, industrial capacity and

resilience. Lithuania is investing heavily in air and missile defence, long-range fires, unmanned aerial systems, electronic warfare, cyber defence and resilient command-and-control capabilities. At the same time, together with our Allies and industry partners we are creating an ecosystem that enables rapid testing and integration of new defence technologies.

Germany is an indispensable partner in this transformation. Our cooperation extends well beyond military deployments. Together we are strengthening defence industry cooperation, military mobility, cyber resilience, innovation and the protection of critical infrastructure. These efforts reinforce NATO's deterrence while contributing to a stronger European Defence Technological and Industrial Base.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ALLIANCE

NATO was, is and will remain the cornerstone of our collective defence. It is obvious that we must strengthen the European pillar of the Alliance. Nevertheless, strong transatlantic bond and unity are preconditions for a strong and effective NATO. Lithuania has always been one of the strongest supporters of transatlantic bond and unity, both in NATO and in the European Union, and this has an obvious practical political, military and industrial logic that we can neither bypass nor ignore. Lithuania and Germany are strong advocates of transatlantic unity and good relations with the United States, particularly in the areas of security and defence. This is one of the most important cornerstones of our nations' policies.

The Baltic Sea region has become one of Europe's most strategically significant security areas. The protection of critical infrastructure, energy networks, digital connectivity and freedom

of navigation has become a shared strategic responsibility. Security today is no longer confined to national borders; it requires coordinated action across governments, armed forces, industry and society.

UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

Ukraine remains at the centre of Europe's security. Supporting Ukraine is not an act of solidarity alone – it is an investment in Europe's own peace and stability. With the huge military experience and expanding military industry basis, Ukraine is transforming from a security recipient to a strong security asset in Europe. It is our common interest to have Ukraine on our side – both in NATO and the EU. At the same time, we have to continue increasing pressure on Russia via sanctions with an aim to limit the financial resources which feed its military machine and thus force Russia to sit at the negotiation table.

The outcome of Russia's aggression will shape the future security architecture of our continent for decades to come. The lessons are clear. Deterrence must be credible. Industrial capacity must expand. Innovation must accelerate. Political decisions must be implemented faster.

In 2027, Lithuania will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We see this not only as an institutional responsibility but as an opportunity to strengthen Europe's resilience, competitiveness and defence readiness. Deepening EU-NATO cooperation, reinforcing Europe's defence industrial capacity, improving military mobility and supporting Ukraine will remain among Lithuania's key priorities.

The year 2027 will also mark the "Lithuanian Season in Germany" - a unique opportunity to demonstrate that security partnerships are built not only through military cooperation but also through stronger ties between our societies, economies, scientific communities and cultures. Strategic partnerships are ultimately rooted in mutual understanding and trust.

As Partner Country of the Berlin Security Conference 2026, Lithuania looks forward to working with governments, armed forces, industry and academia to shape the next generation of European security.

Our strategic partnership with Germany demonstrates that Europe's security is strongest when political commitment is matched by military capability, industrial strength, technological innovation and societal resilience.

*"True security is not built alone.
Lithuania and Germany are
proving that Europe's
strength lies in trusted
partnerships and
shared responsibility."*

H.E. Giedrius Puodžiūnas,
Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary



Image: Jurijus Azarovas

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■ **Kęstutis Budrys**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania

On the morning of 20 May, phones across Vilnius buzzed with a message from the Lithuanian Armed Forces: "AIR RAID ALERT – immediately head to a shelter or a safe place. Take care of those around you." Airspace over the capital's airport closed, and people in Vilnius and the districts along the Belarusian border were instructed to seek shelter.

Four months later, a Russian-made Gerbera drone entered Lithuanian airspace from the direction of Belarus and was shot down by Italian Eurofighter jets conducting NATO's air defence mission. In August, an explosives-laden drone was found at Leipzig/Halle Airport near a Ukrainian cargo aircraft. German authorities have since attributed the attempted attack to Russia, identifying it as part of the pattern of Russian hybrid operations in Europe. Each incident was contained. The alert in Vilnius lasted just over an hour; the city returned to normal, and life went on. But for a brief moment, something that would have seemed almost unimaginable only a few years ago became reality: people in an EU and NATO capital were told to seek shelter from an aerial threat. In Lithuania and Germany alike, the disruption was temporary. But the new security reality behind it is not. The geography is changing. What once seemed like a distant threat can now reach an airport in Germany, just as an aerial threat can reach an airport in Lithuania. The distinction between peace and war is becoming harder to draw. Lithuania is not asking Europe to imagine the future of European security. We are inviting Europe to learn from a reality that has already reached us.

THE SPACE BETWEEN PEACE AND WAR

Russia increasingly operates below the threshold of conventional war. The objective is not necessarily to inflict decisive damage, but to test our institutions, exhaust our resources and probe the unity of the Alliance. Lithuania has experienced this pressure firsthand. Since 2021, our border guards have prevented tens of thousands of illegal border crossings from Belarus as part of the regime's deliberate instrumentalisation of migration. In recent months, contraband balloons launched from Belarus have repeatedly disrupted civilian aviation, forcing temporary airport closures and affecting hundreds of flights. Russian military drones have violated our airspace. Satellite navigation interference has become routine across the Baltic region. Critical infrastructure – from undersea cables to digital networks – has become an increasingly attractive target. Taken individually, each incident appears manageable. Together, they reveal a deliberate strategy: to convince Europeans that aggression can remain deniable and therefore tolerable, always below the threshold of collective response. Europe can no longer afford to think about security as either peace or war. Our adversaries certainly do not. Deterrence begins long before the first shot is fired. It depends as much on resilient societies, secure infrastructure and political clarity as it does on military capability. For Lithuania, this understanding is shaped by experience. We know that security cannot be outsourced, nor can resilience be improvised during a crisis. This year Lithuania is investing 5.38 percent of GDP in defence – among the highest levels



The Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kęstutis Budrys (right), outlines his positions during the podium discussion at the BSC 2025.

in NATO – while building a fully operational national division, strengthening civil protection, investing in energy independence and modernising critical infrastructure.

But deterrence is never a national effort alone. Europe's security depends on every Ally strengthening both its own defence and our collective deterrence. Germany's decision to permanently station the Armoured Brigade 45 in Lithuania is one of the clearest expressions of that principle.

WHAT THE GERMAN BRIGADE REPRESENTS

The German brigade's significance cannot be measured simply by numbers. It complements the invaluable rotational presence of Allied forces with something equally important: permanent presence. It says, simply and unmistakably: we are already here. That enduring presence leaves less room for miscalculation. It gives practical expression to Chancellor Friedrich Merz's recent words in Vilnius that "the protection of Vilnius is the protection of Berlin." The brigade also represents something larger than our bilateral relationship. It reflects the evolution of Europe's security architecture itself. For decades, European security rested on declarations. Today, it increasingly rests on permanent presence, integrated logistics, industrial capacity and shared responsibility. The brigade will operate alongside Lithuania's national division, NATO's regional defence plans and Allied forces already present in our country. Each element reinforces the others. Lithuania's responsibility is equally clear: investing in military infrastructure, training areas, transport networks, schools and housing so Allied forces can operate effectively from day one. The same principle applies to defence industry. German investment in Lithuania by companies such as Rheinmetall and KNDS is strengthening Europe's ability to produce what deterrence requires – ammunition, equipment and maintenance capacity – closer to where it is needed most. Europe's challenge

is no longer knowing what must be produced. It is producing enough of it, fast enough.

UKRAINE IS STRENGTHENING EUROPE'S SECURITY

The same logic applies to Ukraine. Ukraine is not only defending its own sovereignty. It is strengthening Europe's security every day. Its armed forces possess unparalleled experience in high-intensity warfare. Its defence industry has become one of the world's most innovative in drones, electronic warfare and battlefield adaptation. Europe has as much to learn from Ukraine as Ukraine continues to gain from Europe's political, military and economic support.

Supporting Ukraine and strengthening NATO's eastern flank are therefore not separate tasks. They are complementary parts of the same strategy. That strategy should also include Ukraine's future membership of the European Union. Enlargement has always been one of Europe's most successful geopolitical instruments. A Ukraine firmly anchored within the European political and economic order would make the continent stronger, more resilient and ultimately more secure.

EUROPE'S SECURITY IS SHARED SECURITY

Europe no longer has a frontline and a rear. It has one shared security space. Hybrid attacks do not stop at national borders. Cyber operations, disinformation, disruption of critical infrastructure and economic coercion affect every member of the European Union. Lithuania's experience offers a clear lesson:

deterrence succeeds when Europe acts before crises escalate, not afterwards. What happens on NATO's eastern flank concerns all of Europe. Germany has recognised this reality. Through military presence, defence-industrial cooperation and sustained political leadership, it is helping to build a stronger European security architecture. Together with Lithuania's own investments and the contributions of many other Allies, these efforts are making NATO's eastern flank stronger, more credible and better prepared.

What happened in Vilnius and Leipzig reminded us that Europe's new security reality is already here. Our response must be just as clear. Lithuania is strengthening its own defence. Germany and our Allies are strengthening Europe's collective deterrence. Ukraine continues to defend not only its own freedom, but Europe's security. The lesson is simple: in today's Europe, security is strongest when we build it together.

"Europe can no longer afford to think about security as either peace or war."

Kęstutis Budrys,
Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Lithuania



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EUROPE AND NATO: TOGETHER STRONG AGAINST MULTIPOLAR THREATS

■ **Florian Hahn**, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office and member of the BSC Advisory Board

The security architecture of the Euro-Atlantic area is currently facing its most significant challenge since the end of the Cold War. At the NATO summit in Ankara the Allies agreed: Russia remains the greatest threat to our Euro-Atlantic security. For more than four years, it has been waging a brutal, unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine. Russia is also increasingly threatening NATO allies directly. In the context of the Russian threat, we must contend not only with conventional risks but also with a broad spectrum of escalating hybrid activities and provocations: Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, GPS signal disruption, systematic disinformation as well as espionage or even acts of sabotage. In this context, the attempted attack involving an explosive-laden drone in Leipzig this summer represents a completely new level of hybrid threats. Russia has long been undermining the principles of the European security and peace order and has spent years preparing for a military confrontation with the West, a trajectory that has now become unmistakably clear.

However, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the threat to the eastern flank are not the only security policy challenges we face. For instance, the support provided by China and North Korea for Russia's war of aggression demonstrates just how closely the security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific is intertwined. Hostilities in the Middle East and their impact on civilian shipping in the Strait of Hormuz have once again highlighted how we, too, are directly affected by wars and conflicts elsewhere, not least in economic terms.

The main task of NATO is clear: we must prevent a war against us and our allies by strengthening our deterrence capabilities. NATO is the world's most important defence alliance and the guarantor of our security. Especially due to Russia's threat the Alliance must remain united, capable of action, and strong in deterrence. We must therefore leave no doubt about our determination and our ability to defend every inch of Alliance territory. Insofar, the NATO summit in Ankara in July has set out clear steps for action.

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

First of all, resolute and unwavering support for Ukraine remains essential. Germany is leading the way and has provided, or earmarked for the coming years, 57.6 billion Euros for military support and 43.3 billion Euros for civilian support since 2022. At this year's NATO Summit, Canada and Ukraine's European Allies pledged 70 billion Euros in military support for this year and reaffirmed their intention to provide support of at least the same amount in 2027 – totalling 140 billion Euros over two years. The aim is not to prolong this brutal war, but to make it clear to Putin that he will not find victory on the battlefield, that we as Europeans will not let ourselves be divided, that we stand together and that we will not waver in our support for Ukraine. It is about making it clear that the only way out of this

war is through negotiations and that Russia must come to the negotiating table in earnest. Ukraine has been ready for such negotiations for a long time.

BURDEN SHARING

Secondly, we need a fair distribution of the burden. This means – as decided at the summit 2025 in The Hague – increasing our defence spending to 5 percent by 2035: 3.5 percent will be invested in military capabilities, and 1.5 percent in other defence – and security-related areas, such as the protection of our critical infrastructure. Germany is leading the way here, too: Since 2014, Germany has more than tripled its defence spending, and has more than doubled it within the four years since 2022. As a result, Germany is expected to reach the 3.5 percent target as already in 2029.

But money is not everything. Germany is already making substantial contributions to NATO defence plans: Currently, approx. 180,000 soldiers serve in the German Armed Forces. The aim is to significantly increase this number to 270,000 by 2035. Almost all of them will be within the NATO Force Model. The flagship of our contribution is the permanent deployment of a combatready brigade to Lithuania, to protect NATO's Eastern Flank. For its part, the European Union has taken far-reaching decisions to support its member states in assuming responsibility and enhancing their defence capabilities. With financing instruments like Security Action for Europe (SAFE) or the possibility to activate the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact the EU provides impetus and means to fulfil the five percent commitment.

While the process of burdenshifting is well under way, let me also emphasize what remains fixed: The United States is our most important partner outside Europe. This applies particularly to safeguarding our security in the Euro-Atlantic area. The nuclear umbrella is crucial for credible and effective deterrence and is therefore vital to NATO. A more European NATO does not mean a NATO without the United States. It means that we are becoming more resilient and capable and therefore better Allies within NATO and to the United States.

DEFENCE AGREEMENTS AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION

Thirdly, we must intensify Euro-Atlantic defence industry and technology cooperation. At the NATO Defence Industry Forum in the framework of the Summit in Ankara, numerous bilateral and multilateral defence agreements were concluded covering areas such as space and air defence. In total, new procurements worth more than 50 billion US dollars were announced.

Canada's decision to designate TKMS as the "preferred supplier" for up to 12 submarines sent a clear signal regarding both transatlantic and European defence cooperation. Furthermore, on the sidelines of the summit, the US approved the

sale of deep precision strike weapons to Germany – another clear affirmation of the partnership with Germany and of the strengthening of deterrence and defence in Europe.

However, these individual procurements must be embedded in a broader strategy to enhance defence industrial cooperation. To increase its resilience, Europe must move beyond fragmented national approaches and prioritise the harmonisation of technical standards and foster cross-border industrial consortia. The goal is to achieve critical economies of scale and ensure seamless interoperability, transforming the European defence landscape from a collection of national silos into a cohesive, integrated industrial base. The EU plays a crucial role, particularly in strengthening the European defence industry. Through the "ReArm Europe" plan, for instance, it will mobilise up to 800 billion Euros in additional funds by 2030. First core parts of the plan – like the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), a 1.5 billion Euros initiative running from 2025 to 2027 to boost joint defence manufacturing and procurement – are already being implemented.

Air defence, drones, and deep precision strike capabilities are priorities for European defence cooperation. But we must also particularly strengthen our capabilities regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The integration of AI is transforming the nature of warfare and defence planning and a technological edge in AI can be a decisive strategic advantage. Therefore, at

the Ankara 2026 Summit, NATO Allies endeavoured to develop an interoperable transatlantic warfighting cloud and to adopt powerful AI Models. As cyber threats to both civilian and military assets increase for the Alliance, AI will increasingly play an essential role in detecting, responding to and recovering from malicious cyberattacks. The first steps towards a more European approach to security have been taken. Now, the priority is to further expand our capabilities – not merely by interconnecting our defence industries, but by ensuring that they lead the way rather than lag behind, particularly in terms of innovation and technological development. This will be crucial if we are to hold our own in the face of multipolar threats.

"We must leave no doubt about our determination and our ability to defend every inch of Alliance territory."

Florian Hahn,
Minister of State at the Federal Foreign
Office and member of the BSC Advisory Board



Image: Cosima Hölt

ADVERTORIAL

SCALING MOBILITY: DELIVERING READINESS FOR MODERN ARMED FORCES

Today's armed forces must be able to deploy rapidly, sustain operations over long distances, and respond to complex threats. Military mobility has therefore become a critical enabler of deterrence, collective defence, and operational effectiveness.

Mobility is more than vehicle performance: In an era where defence procurement cycles accelerate and investments continue to grow, industrial scalability has emerged as a decisive factor. Armed forces require vehicle solutions that can be produced in significant quantities, delivered quickly, and dependable long-term support.

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Conflicts have underscored that military readiness is defined not only by advanced capabilities, but also by the capacity to



Zetros, Arocs, Unimog (from left to right) Image: Daimler Truck AG

rapidly deploy, sustain, and replenish equipment as operational demands evolve. As a result, large-scale manufacturing capabilities as well as resilient supply chains are increasingly emerging as strategic enablers of defence preparedness.

By combining military-grade capability with industrial scale, we at Daimler Truck support armed forces in building resilient, mission-ready mobility fleets.

Tim Seil, Daimler Truck AG, Public Affairs Manager Defence & Security

A VIOLENT PEACE – EUROPE'S MOMENT TO TURN DECISIONS INTO DELIVERY

■ Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, Chair of the NATO Military Committee

On the evening of 4 November 1989, a few kilometres from the hall where the 2026 edition of the Berlin Security Conference opens, half a million people filled Alexanderplatz – the largest demonstration the GDR had ever seen. Five days later, the Wall was open. I begin there because this Conference meets on 3 and 4 November: freedom was not handed over that autumn. It was demanded, then organised, defended and paid for. A generation later, the question is not how to win it, but whether we still mean – seriously and responsibly – to pay to protect it.

I am grateful to the organisers for the invitation to contribute to the magazine of this 25th edition. Since 2001 it has been one of Europe's largest security and defence gatherings, held without governmental affiliation or public budgets – an independence that buys the right to speak plainly. I intend to use it.

ARE WE AT PEACE, OR AT WAR?

We are certainly not at peace.

No Ally has been attacked in the classical sense. And yet, every week, railways are sabotaged, GPS are jammed, drones appear over airports and bases, and the networks running our hospitals, ports and grids are probed by actors careful to stay below the threshold we would call war. Alongside this runs something subtler: cognitive warfare – campaigns designed not to defeat our forces but to exhaust our publics, persuading Europeans that the threat is invented and that one Ally's security is another's problem. The target is our cohesion, the one capability no adversary can buy.

Let me put it plainly: we live in a violent peace. The phrase is an oxymoron, and the most accurate description of our condition. Peace, because our societies are not mobilised. Violent, because we are fought continuously, by means that require no declaration.

THE SHIFT THAT WAS ASKED FOR, AND AWAITED

For decades European Allies were asked to carry more. The request was legitimate, repeated by successive US administrations, and – let us be candid – met slowly. That is now changing, at a pace few predicted. At the Summit of Allied leaders in The Hague in 2025, Allies committed to invest five percent of GDP in defence and defence-related requirements by 2035. One year later, in Ankara, Heads of State and Government noted that European Allies and Canada had already added more than 139 billion dollars in core defence investment – roughly four percent of GDP, one year into a ten-year effort. They announced more than 50 billion dollars in new procurements and committed to expanding collective manufacturing capacity and working with industry to accelerate innovation. And they pledged 70 billion dollars in military equipment, assistance and training for Ukraine and affirm their sovereign commitments to sustaining at least equivalent levels in 2027. From The Hague

to Ankara the trajectory is clear: a rebalancing in which European Allies and Canada assume greater responsibility for the conventional defence of Europe, with the United States the indispensable Ally rather than the default answer to every European question. This is the substance of what we now all call NATO 3.0. It is not a loosening of the transatlantic bond; it is that bond, made fairer and therefore more durable.

But a trajectory is not an arrival, and percentages are not capabilities. European Allies must now step up in the only terms that deter: capability targets met in full and on time; air and missile defence in the quantities the plans require; munitions stocks measured in months, not days; military mobility that moves a brigade without a paperwork queue. That is what stepping up means, and every year we take to deliver it is a year handed to the adversary, for free.

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY: FREEDOM TO, NOT FREEDOM FROM

Allow me to be personal. When strategic autonomy entered European language with the Global Strategy of 2016, I was taking command of Italy's Joint Operations Command, running our missions abroad – so I read it as an operator, not a theorist. When the Strategic Compass was agreed, I was Italy's Chief of Defence. I read it the same way from both chairs, and the same way from this one.

Some heard emancipation: freedom from the United States, freedom from NATO, a second Alliance in parallel. Others, hearing that, rejected the concept altogether. Both were wrong, and the argument cost us years. Strategic autonomy has only ever meant freedom to – the capacity to decide, to move, to sustain, to produce; to reinforce a flank without waiting, and to keep production running for a war measured in years. Understood that way, it is not to be feared. It is to be encouraged.

On one condition, which has two faces. Duplication must be avoided at all costs; synergy and coordination must be pursued at all costs. There is one set of forces, one taxpayer and one set of threats. NATO has the plans, the standards and the command structure; the Union brings instruments the Alliance does not possess – financial, regulatory, industrial. Together they move Europe faster. Apart, we pay twice for half the effect.

And let us be precise about duplication, a word that has become a lazy label for something quite different. Duplicating command structures, planning processes and headquarters wastes money and time. Strategic redundancy does not: a second source for a critical component, a second route into a theatre, a second way to command when the first is jammed. That is antifragility, and in some areas exactly what we should pursue. The discipline is knowing which is which – and NATO's task is to help European Allies step up, not to referee their ambition.

WHAT UKRAINE TAUGHT US, AND WHAT TARANTO SHOWS

In Ukraine we are watching the most instructive conflict of our lifetimes: drones by the thousand, electronic warfare that changes weekly, an industrial base as decisive as any brigade. Ukrainians are teaching us that adaptation is itself a capability, and speed the currency of deterrence.

Nor is this the only front. The East is not quiet; the Southern flank and the enlarged Mediterranean are no secondary theatre; the High North and the Indo-Pacific reach us through cables and sea lanes. A 360-degree posture is no courtesy. It is a necessity, as security challenges and threats today know no borders.

I said something in Taranto, Italy, in September that belongs here too. We are not spending on weapons. We are investing in defence. It sounds like a nuance. It is not. It is the foundation of a meaningful deterrence.

Deterrence is the oldest insurance policy in the world: you invest in it hoping never to collect. The peace we have enjoyed for decades did not fall from the sky. It was produced – and what was produced once can be lost.

THIS IS THE MOMENT

From Ankara to Brussels, and from Brussels to where the work is actually done: decisions taken by Heads of State and Government become, at the Military Committee, military advice, plans and capabilities – and then they become real. On a quayside and on a flight line. On a training area and along a frontier.

In a network operations centre and at a satellite ground station. And in the information space, where what we do is either understood or turned against us. That last conversion is what we are judged on.

This, then, is the moment – not for another declaration, but to deliver on and field the ones we have signed. This Conference exists for exactly that: parliaments, ministries, armed forces and industry in one room, no government owning the microphone. Use it to press the hard questions on timelines, stockpiles and production rates.

Berlin in November is a good place to remember what freedom costs. Those who filled Alexanderplatz did not know the Wall would open five days later. They knew only that standing still was no longer an option.

Neither is it, today, for us.

“Berlin in November is a good place to remember what freedom costs.”

Admiral Giuseppe Cavo Dragone,
Chair of the NATO Military Committee



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GDELS

NOT AT WAR, NO LONGER AT PEACE: DEFENDING EUROPE IN THE GREY ZONE

■ **Michael Gahler**, Member of the European Parliament and the BSC Advisory Board

The events around Leipzig in early August represent perhaps the most serious example of hybrid warfare on German soil since the end of the Second World War. It was only by chance that the attack on the Leipzig/Halle Airport, involving three drones, some of them carrying explosives, did not result in a catastrophe. After two world wars in which Germany plunged Europe and the wider world into disaster, Europe now once again faces serious threats to its stability, peace and security architecture – and, with them, the difficult question of how to respond.

The Leipzig incident was not an isolated one. First and foremost, the European Union's eastern flank is experiencing systematic drone incursions and other cross-border provocations. But the attack is also part of a broader pattern that includes acts of sabotage, disinformation and espionage across Europe. Meanwhile, such hybrid attacks are increasingly crossing the threshold into kinetic impact. Shortly before Leipzig, a Russian cruise missile crashed into an open field in Poland. Just days later, explosions rocked ammunition production sites in Bulgaria and Italy, while an explosive-laden maritime drone was taken out by the Romanian Air Force near a gas field in the Black Sea.

RUPTURE IN THE WORLD ORDER

Europe is being targeted. European countries are increasingly being attacked for exercising their legitimate right to come to the aid of a European nation defending itself against an unprovoked and brutal war of aggression. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, declared this summer: “We will make our own methods much harsher to destroy everything that fuels Kyiv’s military machine from the West – and we are already doing this.” This is the blunt reality we are facing. Right now, the Ukrainian people are paying the highest price for the unbridled and aggressive posture of Russian expansionism. But this imperialist mindset is likely to persist even after Putin is gone or Russia’s war against Ukraine has ended.

Zooming out, this is part of a bigger picture that Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney described as a “rupture in the world order” in his Davos speech. His reference to the uncertainty of an era defined by power politics concluded with a call to act together and forge reliable and predictable alliances to defend what we believe in and what makes us strong. The assessment is clear: the democratic West must adapt and act, and it must do so fast, decisively and collectively. If our capitals fail to understand that fragmentation is our greatest weakness, we will become pawns in the interests of others.

RESPONDING TO HYBRID THREATS

Hybrid attacks are designed to increase this feeling of disruption and uncertainty. For Europe and its allies, this means continuing to invest jointly in the capabilities needed to detect, deter and defend, with the ultimate goal of preventing



MEP Michael Gahler (left) making his point during the high-level discussion on Europe’s role in a multipolar world.

further damage and war. What is also needed is a strategic communications strategy that clearly signals the cost of further malicious foreign action against sovereign European nations. If an adversary is considering a hybrid attack, it must already be aware of the potential consequences, with the aim of deterring such an attack from happening in the first place.

Such a threatened response does not have to be ‘in kind’, but can also be ‘cross-domain’, meaning that different tools are used to retaliate than those employed by the attacker. A drone attack, for example, could be met with new sanctions or increased military aid. The gravity of the response should mirror the severity of the attack, without necessarily copying its form, and must remain within the bounds of international law. While the German government’s response to the recent hybrid attacks on Germany marks an important first step, it should be embedded within a broader strategy of communication, coordination and deterrence.

LEARNING FROM THE UKRAINE

This also involves building on the lessons our Ukrainian partners have learned the hard way. One of these lessons is the political recognition that ‘hybrid’ is not a separate, distinct or even distant entity. In the Russian logic, it is part of the broader toolbox of warfare, employing, in some ways, new means such as drones, artificial intelligence and social media. Wars were never fought only by soldiers in trenches. Nowadays, however, we see an unprecedented convergence of threats from and to different domains. This convergence and the blurring of boundaries make hybrid attacks so difficult to respond to. Hybrid attacks do not necessarily target tanks and bridges; they also aim at our companies, our democratic communities and our social cohesion, attacking us from within.

Therefore, the constantly evolving nature of warfare demands an extended approach to defence, taking into consideration much more than the traditional core of territorial defence. It is in this broad field of ‘total defence’, which integrates the military and civilian spheres, that the European Union plays a vital

and often underestimated role. Dual-use capabilities, cyber and information security, joint development and procurement, the defence technological and industrial base, standardisation, military mobility, infrastructure hardening and civilian protection are just a few areas in which the EU is essential to making us more resilient, coordinated and prepared.

A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK FOR EUROPE

What is of utmost importance now is that the implementation of the European Drone Defence Initiative and the Eastern Flank Watch is accelerated to provide protection and security where it is most needed, close to Russia. In addition to these air and counter-drone defence capabilities on the ground, it is also crucial that the Action Plan on Drone and Counter-Drone Security is fully implemented. This must include the European Commission's foreseen Drone Security Package. The current fragmentation of counter-drone regulation across the Member States is a security risk. A unified framework, including mandatory registration of smaller drones and an extended obligation for remote identification and tracking, would help prevent unauthorised take-offs and simplify threat detection before defensive measures need to be taken. This comprehensive approach is important to adequately reflect the complexity of the problem, which is not an issue that is limited to a single Member State or the eastern flank.

"We are not at war, but no longer at peace either", German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in September 2025. This sad

truth must guide our actions. If we are too hesitant in our measured responses, operational readiness and credible deterrence, malicious actors will continue testing us and might ultimately decide to escalate if they conclude that they would not have to fear a united response. Regardless of who sits in the White House, that means further developing the mutual defence clause anchored in Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, building a credible European Defence Union and strengthening the European pillar of NATO – making it separable but not separate. The recent elections in the German state of Saxony-Anhalt are just the latest reminder of how critical time for reforms is. The political and security landscape in Europe is changing rapidly, and there is less and less room for inaction. Let us use the time we have – now.

"The democratic West must adapt and act, and it must do so fast, decisively and collectively."

Michael Gahler,
Member of the European Parliament
and the BSC Advisory Board



Image: European Union 2026



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TOGETHER STRONG AGAINST MULTIPOLAR THREATS: HOW THE GERMAN ARMY IS REORGANISING ITSELF FOR NATIONAL AND ALLIANCE DEFENCE.

■ Lieutenant General Dr Christian Freuding, Chief of the German Army

This year's Berlin Security Conference focuses on how Europe and NATO can jointly counter multipolar threats. The war with Iran and the resulting realignment of alliances in the Near and Middle East as well as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine are just two examples of conflicts in a world of multipolar threats. Lithuania, as this year's partner nation to the BSC, is particularly affected and the people of Lithuania feel the repercussions of Russia's aggression on a daily basis. But it is not only Lithuania that faces a growing threat. The attempted attack against Halle/Leipzig Airport in August once again clearly demonstrates that Germany, too, finds itself in situation where peace is under fire: we are not at war, but not at peace any longer either.

Each assessment of the security situation has to start with a look at the potential opponent. Russia has switched to a war economy; its armed forces are growing to over 1.5 million active-duty soldiers. Moreover, the Russian Armed Forces have implemented a fast and effective innovation cycle. They are able to adopt quickly with regard to tactics and procedures as well as introduction of new technologies.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GERMAN ARMY

New technologies have led to an unprecedented level of transparency in the theatre of operations, generated by masses of sensors, digitally linked, with automatized data processing. Real-time reconnaissance today means immediate vulnerability, and the time available before engagement shrinks to a matter of minutes or even seconds. The operational tempo is higher than ever before. Additionally, this unprecedented level of transparency is accompanied by improved capabilities to strike deep into an enemy's rear area. There are, in effect, no longer any protected areas of retreat on the modern battlefield; the new operational environment demands dispersal rather

than concentration and massing of forces. At the same time, old traditional elements of warfare still have their relevance.

Thus, next to high-tech AI-drones, rifles with bayonets are used and soldiers operate from far-off highly digitized command posts as well as in trenches. Finally, mass matters again. Quantity is a quality in its own again. The deployment of hundreds of thousands of cost-effective, unmanned systems creates a challenge for armies relying only on expensive high-tech systems. At the end, only the one who is capable to sustain a conflict economically, will succeed. These developments have, of course, implications for the German Army.

Whilst land forces are and will remain the mainstay of military operations on land, the way in which they fulfil their mission in future is changing significantly. Land forces must integrate sensors, digital command and control, and deep precision strike capabilities to become and remain operational in this new form of combat. It is not the performance of individual platforms we must focus on, but the capability and the lethality of the overall system.

FIVE PRIORITISED AREAS OF ACTION FOR CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

In order to effectively address the technological and tactical challenges of modern warfare, the German Army has defined five prioritised capability areas as part of an ambitious "Campaign Plan Heer 2035+", that orchestrates the development of the German Army:

- Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- indirect fire with greater volume and range;
- electromagnetic warfare across all units;
- the deep integration of unmanned systems, and at the core of all these, digital and AI-supported command and control capabilities.

Besides the technological aspect, a fundamental reorganisation of the German Army is required to cope with current and future threats. Based on four key guiding principles, the German Army will transform from a force geared towards international crisis management to a robust, assertive army for deterrence and defence:

1. We are embedding threat-orientated, innovative and adaptive capabilities at all levels of command. The focus is on the five prioritised areas.
2. We are enhancing combat effectiveness and operational value of our larger formations. Brigades must once again become fully functional brigades, and divisions must once again become operational divisions. We are bridging the gap between combat, combat support and combat service support. Artillery, engineers, reconnaissance, air defence, signals, logistics and security units will become organic elements within the structure where they are needed in combat. This also includes the reintroduction of a fourth manoeuvre



The BSC also provided a forum for international exchange between soldiers.

element on every level of command – envisioned to operate unmanned in the future. Deep integration of unmanned systems into our formation is the direct response to the character of war we are witnessing today. It will add mass, depth and resilience to our manoeuvre forces, while enabling us to generate combat power in new ways and scale.

3. We are enabling our formations to ensure force build-up, mobilisation and sustainability. Non-active elements, field replacements and reserves are not mere appendages to the active structure. They are fundamental components of all military units.
4. Therefore, we are implementing a personnel structure in every battalion that brings together career service personnel, the new military service, and both active and non-active elements of the force. This will give us the capacity to train, integrate and sustain the personnel we need – now and in the future.

The Army has a clear plan and is taking action now. With a goal, reaching even beyond 2035, the German Army is executing this radical transformation whilst in the thick of the action, in order to deter and eventually defend every inch of NATO territory against any aggression.

ARMoured BRIGADE 45 IN LITHUANIA

An outstanding example of the practical acceptance of this new reality and the resolute anchoring of the Bundeswehr – and the Army in particular – on NATO’s eastern flank is the

deployment of Armoured Brigade 45 in Lithuania. For the first time, the Federal Republic of Germany is stationing a combat-ready larger formation abroad on a permanent basis and in a state of constant operational readiness. Armoured Brigade 45 is far more than a political signal of alliance solidarity; it is a fundamental component of Germany’s national and Alliance defence. Here, through daily cooperation with the Lithuanian Armed Forces, we see how multinational interoperability, robust logistics and seamless integration into NATO defence plans work in practice. My unequivocal message for this year’s Berlin Security Conference is: Credible deterrence will be achieved through forces that are ready for action, resolute and combat-ready. The enemy is not waiting for our readiness report– which is why implementation must become faster. Every day counts.

“Credible deterrence will be achieved through forces that are ready for action, resolute and combat-ready.”

Lieutenant General Dr Christian Freuding,
Chief of the German Army



Image: Bundeswehr

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Thomas Schnitter, Managing Director

THE LUFTWAFFE – SHAPING OUR FUTURE

■ Lieutenant General Holger Neumann, Chief of the German Air and Space Force

For more than two decades, the Berlin Security Conference has been an important forum for international dialogue and exchange. It brings together political, military and industrial leaders at a time when close cooperation among allies and partners is of crucial importance.

Two years ago, Estonia held the role of the partner nation of the BSC. This year, Lithuania follows. A strong signal: The Baltic States have become a focal point of collective defence and, at the same time, an impressive example of the bond between NATO members beyond military cooperation.

For Germany and for the Luftwaffe, this partnership is anything but abstract. We have been contributing to the protection of the Baltic airspace for more than two decades. Since Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined NATO in 2004, German airmen have repeatedly deployed to the region as part of NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission. As an immediate response to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, we deployed Short-Range Air Defence (SHORAD) systems to Lithuania for six months to reinforce the protection of the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) Battlegroup. Furthermore, in 2023, the German Air and Space Force deployed PATRIOT Fire Units in order to protect the NATO summit in Vilnius against potential air threats. And since 2025, we provide Air Power expertise to the German Armoured Brigade 45 in Lithuania through our Air Force Liaison Element.

The message behind this commitment is as simple as it is important: NATO airspace is indivisible. The security of Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn is directly connected to the security of Berlin. We protect our common skies together.

FROM PARTNERSHIP TO OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION

Our cooperation with Lithuania reaches far beyond Air Policing and our support to the German Army. At the end of last year, our Deployable Control and Reporting Centre (DCRC) "RED HAWK", deployed to Lithuania for several months. From Karmėlava, German airmen operated a mobile command post for air operations, processing the recognised air picture, co-ordinating military air movements and providing command and control capabilities for air surveillance and air defence. In 2026, the Luftwaffe deployed passive sensors to Lithuania in order to support drone detection in the overall context of enhancing air defence at the eastern flank of NATO.

This deployment demonstrated what modern Air Power is all about. Fighter aircraft are essential, but they are only one part of a much larger system. Sensors, radar data, secure communication, command and control, ground-based air defence and flying platforms must be connected to create operational effect.

RED HAWK also demonstrated another essential principle: mobility matters. In a contested environment, command-and-control capabilities must be deployable, resilient and able to operate from different locations. This is exactly what we trained and proved together with our allies in Lithuania.

And most importantly: such deployments connect people. We work side by side, fly wing-to-wing, learn from each other and develop common procedures. Technology creates possibilities – people turn them into combat power and our close relationship will continue to grow.

ENTERING A NEW ERA OF AIR POWER

At the same time, 2026 marks an important year for the future of the German Air and Space Force. The first German F-35 Roll-Out marks our entry into the fifth-generation era.

The F-35 combines low observability, multi-spectral sensors, advanced data fusion and secure connectivity. It is designed to collect, process and share information across a networked operational environment. This will fundamentally influence the way we plan, train and fight.

Germany is becoming part of a large and growing international F-35 community. Operating the same aircraft creates new opportunities for common training, logistics, maintenance and operations. For NATO, this is a major advantage. Common platforms, standards and procedures make it easier to generate combat power quickly when and wherever it is needed.

SEVENTY YEARS – AND LOOKING FORWARD

This year also marks the 70th anniversary of the Luftwaffe. Since its foundation in 1956, one principle has remained constant: the Luftwaffe has always been deeply integrated into NATO – this experience is invaluable.

Our relationship within the Alliance shows what collective defence means in practice: sharing responsibility, training together, connecting our forces and being prepared to stand side by side if deterrence fails.

The trust of our partners in Europe and in the Alliance gives us particular strength and self-confidence. In the Baltic states, people are firmly counting on a modern, powerful Air Force that is capable of strengthening alliances and relations. The Luftwaffe remains firmly committed to the Baltic region. This promise stands. And this is why Lithuania is such an appropriate partner nation for the Berlin Security Conference 2026.

Together, we guarantee the security of our skies and homelands. Together we are stronger. Together we are NATO – shoulder to shoulder, wing to wing.

"The security of Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn is directly connected to the security of Berlin. We protect our common skies together."

Lieutenant General Holger Neumann,
Chief of the German Air and Space Force



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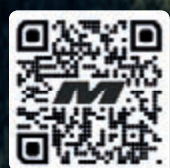
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CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION AS BACKBONE FOR RESILIENCE IN THE CYBER- AND INFORMATION DOMAIN

■ Vice Admiral Dr Thomas Daum, Chief of the German Cyber and Information Domain Service

By the time you spend to read this article, the Bundeswehr's servers will already have been attacked by a foreign actor, several hundred posts spreading disinformation will already have appeared at different social media sites and at least one German company's data will already have been encrypted by ransomware. This is the current, hard reality in the Cyber and Information Domain, a dimension where Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz' words "We are not at war but not at peace either" are proven around the clock.

But if you are reading this article in a war zone on a mobile device, the situation could be worse. The short time to read this article is long enough for an enemy to locate your position and attack you with a drone or missile strike. The war against Ukraine and other current conflicts around the world underline this new reality in warfare:

The modern battlefield is nearly a transparent battlefield. A plethora of sensors – ranging from drones to satellites – give both sides an enormous amount of valuable data and the possibility to strike targets fast and at great distances. An old infantry wisdom in Germany says: "Who decides earlier, shoots faster and hits more precise, wins the firefight." And this idiom is still true. As in the past, future wars will be won by the side with the shortest sensor to shooter cycle, i.e. the time we need from recognising a target to strike it – or as we call it in the military, the shortest Kill Chain.

RELIABLE COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS ARE KEY

To be as fast as possible with our Kill Chain, we need reliable communication systems from the front line to the headquarters, from the edge to the core. This requires a data lake where data from different sources and with different classifications can be merged, correlated and assessed with the help of AI tools – generative for the time being, agentic in near future. C4ISR form the nervous system of modern forces. This approach of Multi Domain Operations will be the benchmark for modern militaries in the next years. Another important aspect of modern warfare, which can be seen daily in the war against Ukraine, is, how fast both sides adapt to changes on the battlefield. These adaptations include not only tactics but also modern weapon systems. For example, drones get a software update at least every other week, as communication frequencies need to change often for not being jammed. In a war, where every tank is not only a weapon system but also a communication node, the paradigm has to be Software Defined Defence. We need to be able to update all our weapons systems in much faster cycles than now – and updates must be possible to be carried out at the front with combat conditions.

THE NEW REALITY IS NOT CONFINED TO THE BATTLEFIELD

The new realities on the battlefield, but also the constant hybrid attacks have an impact not only on the Bundeswehr, but also on the defence industry and our whole society.



The Deputy Chief of the German Army, the Chief of the Cyber and Information Domain Service and the Commanding General of the Air Force Forces Command participated in the Future Forces Forum. One of the key points during the discussion was that data should no longer be seen merely as a precursor, but as an essential part of the battlefield.

More than ever, secure and resilient communication systems as well as data storage are a question of national sovereignty. The Bundeswehr works in close cooperation with science and industry to develop the required systems and software to enable Multi Domain Operations. But in this task, we need to consider some basic principles, for war and peace alike:

Every nation needs the authority about their own data – but as allies we need to be able to communicate and share data as fast as possible. We need interfaces and standards in our national systems to share information. An example for this is Federated Mission Networking, a NATO initiative to define standards and to enable reliable data sharing between partners.

Data security is an important aspect, and we need to be able to decide who gets our data and who not. As described, we have a lot of attempted cyber-attacks and hacks right now, this will escalate in war for sure. Therefore, every military and civilian communication system must be designed with this reality in mind along principles like Zero Trust and Security by Design. Furthermore, we need to make sure, that we do not get dependent on one vendor for our systems. We will not allow vendors to dictate us prices and processes for our digital infrastructure.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE NEED TO RETAIN CONTROL OVER DATA

The same principles as for our C2 systems apply for the use of AI for data processing. We need AI-tools from companies for data analysis and assessment, but we need to make sure that we still have sovereignty about our data. We will not use AI as a black box, where we do not understand on which code the results are based and cannot guarantee that the provider does not share our data with other customers. As we live in a time of permanent hybrid attacks, all these aspects have to be

considered not only by militaries for warfare but by the whole society. Therefore, cybersecurity with all its aspects is not only a topic for the military but needs a whole-of-society approach. Our nations need to build resilience against outside attacks and their consequences.

The Cyber and Information Domain Services works closely together with different security agencies, like the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) or the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI) to share information and work together. A good example for this cooperation is the National Cyber Defence Centre (Cyber-AZ). With a whole-of-society approach, the defence against hybrid threats must not fail due to debates over jurisdiction but include a joint effort.

This joint effort for resilient cybersecurity is not only a task for government agencies. We need a common understanding of hybrid threats in the whole society. This includes especially cybersecurity: Not only government agencies but also research institutions and industries need to be aware of cyber-attacks and how to protect against them. They also need to share information about threats and attacks with the security agencies for a combined Threat Intelligence. Another good example for civil-military cooperation is our Cyber Reserve where members of the public can share their experience with the Cyber and Information Domain Service. Another aspect to consider is the international level.

All Western nations face the same threats, in war and in peace and these threats can only be tackled together. We need to share information and need common platforms to do so. This may be in the NATO command structure or in the new EU Cyber Defence Coordination Centre, the EU CDCC. We have to strengthen our efforts in this regard and exercises like CWIX and Locked Shields are good examples for cooperation in cyberspace.

Deterrence in the 21st century needs vigilance and resilience. Both can only be achieved by a deep cooperation at all levels – between nations, militaries, industry and the society. We need to integrate all our expertise to tackle threats against our way of living. And we need to develop the preconditions that this cooperation can succeed.

“We need a common understanding of hybrid threats in the whole society.”

Vice Admiral Dr Thomas Daum,
Chief of the German Cyber and
Information Domain Service

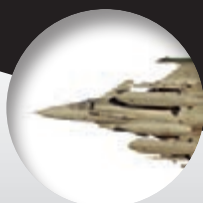


Image: Bundeswehr/J

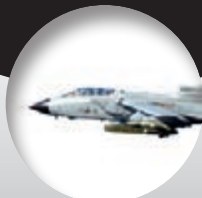
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Chair: **Dr Tobias Lindner**, BSC Advisory Board
Ejup Maqedonci, Minister of Defence, Kosovo
Dr Gudrun Persson, Senior Analyst, Swedish Armed Forces
Arseniy Yatsenyuk, former Prime Minister, Ukraine (2014-2015)



Chaired by Dr Lindner, the BSC participants were able to follow a highly interesting debate on authoritarianism, in which Dr Gudrun Persson shared her knowledge and expertise on Russian foreign policy.

STARTUPS AS A STRATEGIC FACTOR: WHAT EUROPE'S SECURITY COMMUNITY CAN GAIN FROM NEW PARTNERSHIPS

■ **Dr Tobias Lindner**, Member of the BSC Advisory Board and former Minister of State at the German Foreign Office

The Russian war of aggression in Ukraine shows us every day that the question of who sustains in a war depends not only on combat power, the amount of material and personnel, and morale. No, at least to a similar extent, two other factors are crucial: how innovative is a country in its defence industry? And how quickly do these innovations reach the troops in relevant numbers. Start-ups have a central role to play here.

Established as an integral part of the Berlin Security Conference, the Startup Challenge once again addresses key priorities this year and showcases innovative solutions. Ten start-ups, two days, two focus areas and a jury representing the entire innovation ecosystem.

The fact that German and Lithuanian startups share the stage this year is no coincidence. It reflects a format that thinks beyond national borders and does not merely assert the value of different perspectives but makes it tangible. The collaboration with Lithuania offers far more than diplomatic symbolism. Our Baltic partner demonstrates impressively how innovation and security policy can work hand in hand. The threat there is no abstract concept, the proximity to Russia and Belarus shapes a society that does not take security for granted. The result: decisions are made faster. Following Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, processes were radically accelerated, capabilities prioritised, innovations integrated, in months, not years. Military

Mobility is already lived practice there, Host Nation Support everyday reality rather than a planning exercise. Civilian and military innovation go hand in hand, resilience is understood as a shared responsibility.

The Challenge aims to bring together actors who still do not meet often enough in their daily work: founders with speed and conviction. Decision-makers from the armed forces and government agencies with concrete needs. Industry representatives with scaling power. Investors with capital and networks. Scientists with an eye for what is technically possible. Two days focused on tangible innovations and a space for dialogue on equal footing.

SECURE ACCESS TO SPACE AND MILITARY MOBILITY ARE FUNDAMENTAL PREREQUISITES FOR CREDIBLE DETERRENCE

This year's focus areas strike at the heart of European security policy. Space has long been an operational reality. Communication, navigation, reconnaissance, early warning, all of this depends on capabilities in and from space. At the same time, the orbital domain is increasingly contested: jamming, cyberattacks, anti-satellite weapons, but also the reliability of access to partner nations' systems are putting the need for sovereignty into sharp focus. Europe must secure sovereign access in or-

der to respond quickly when capacities fail. The start-up scene is generating new approaches precisely here: from innovative satellite architectures to AI-powered data analysis to alternative navigation systems.

Military Mobility may sound like logistics, yet it is a fundamental prerequisite for credible deterrence. The ability to move forces and materiel rapidly across European territory determines responsiveness in a crisis and thus effective deterrence. Reality reveals bottlenecks: bridges that cannot carry heavy vehicles. Approvals that take weeks. Data that stops at borders. Here too, startups are stepping in with agile and readily available solutions for real-time logistics, autonomous transport systems and rapid infrastructure assessment.

Both focus areas share a common insight: long development cycles, established suppliers and national solo efforts are reaching their limits. New impulses are needed, as are formats that make them visible.

ENABLEMENT THROUGH START-UPS

The value of the Start-up Challenge lies not in the competition itself, but in what it enables. Start-ups with relevant solutions gain access to decision-makers they would otherwise not reach. Decision-makers experience first-hand what the market has to offer in terms of innovation.

As the crowning finale, the two winners present their innovations on the main stage on the afternoon of the second day of the conference, placing innovation at the very heart of the

BSC. For such a format to succeed, it requires partners willing to contribute their perspectives and insights. The Behörden Spiegel as organiser of the conference and bridge to public administration, PwC with its strategic advisory expertise, Palladion as Defence Accelerator of the Universität der Bundeswehr in Munich and the Lithuanian think tank GSSC, a knowledge hub for Lithuania's innovation ecosystem. This constellation is itself an expression of what the Challenge seeks to achieve: building bridges, stimulating exchange, initiating collaboration and moving innovation from the margins of the discussion to its centre.

Ultimately, it comes down to a clear conviction: recognising startups as a strategic factor. Finding faster ways to turn good ideas into application and learning from partners.

“Europe must secure sovereign access to space in order to respond quickly when capacities fail.”

Dr Tobias Lindner,
Member of the BSC Advisory Board
and former Minister of State at
the German Foreign Office



Image: Dr. Tobias Lindner

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STRONG TOGETHER: OPERATIONAL READINESS IN AN ERA OF MULTIPOLAR THREATS

■ Lieutenant General Alexander Sollfrank, Commander of the Bundeswehr Joint Force Command

Europe's security environment has become more dangerous, more complex and less predictable. Conventional military threats increasingly overlap with cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, disinformation, sabotage, GPS spoofing and the use of unmanned systems to monitor military and civilian facilities. These activities generate uncertainty, test the resilience of states and expose vulnerabilities – often without clear attribution and below the threshold of open conflict. Europe and NATO therefore require a response that is politically coherent, militarily credible and operationally ready.

ONE THEATRE, MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

Russia remains the most significant and immediate threat to Germany and its Allies. Its war of aggression against Ukraine continues with unabated intensity, while Moscow is simultaneously expanding its hybrid activities against NATO. This challenge must remain at the centre of our defence planning, but it is not the only one.

Developments in the Middle East demonstrate how rapidly armed conflicts can escalate and affect the wider international security architecture, global trade and energy routes, as well as German and European interests. For Germany, this creates additional responsibilities: protecting citizens, supporting diplomatic missions, preparing for crises and contributing to international organisations and alliances.

The Bundeswehr Joint Force Command has already had to plan for such demands in parallel – for example, the redeployment of German forces from NATO Mission Iraq, the deployment of PATRIOT units to reinforce air defence in Turkey and preparations for a possible naval mine-countermeasures deployment to the Strait of Hormuz. These cases underline a central point: while collective defence is the Bundeswehr's core mission, international crisis management remains an indispensable part of Germany's security responsibilities.

Instability in Europe's wider neighbourhood continues to affect us directly. These regions must not be viewed as isolated areas on a map, but as parts of a single strategic environment. Signals sent in one region are observed in another; commitments made in one theatre affect the forces available elsewhere. We must therefore be able to manage several contingencies simultaneously, prioritise a finite pool of forces across services and domains, and retain sufficient flexibility to respond to the unexpected.

OPERATIONAL READINESS AS THE FOUNDATION OF CREDIBLE DETERRENCE

This is particularly important in deterring Russia. Our preparations for national and collective defence ultimately serve one overriding purpose: preventing war through credible deterrence. Deterrence is effective only when a potential aggressor concludes that the costs and risks of an attack outweigh any conceivable benefit. Political resolve must therefore be underpinned by forces that are ready, plans that can be executed,

command structures that remain effective under pressure and the ability to sustain operations over time.

At the same time, the character of warfare is changing rapidly. Unmanned systems are now employed at scale across all domains, increasingly supported by artificial intelligence and automation. Engagement ranges are expanding, operational tempo is accelerating and the boundaries between land, air, sea, space, cyberspace and the information environment are becoming increasingly blurred.

Armed forces that cannot effectively employ and counter unmanned systems, process information at speed and synchronise effects across domains will struggle to prevail. Operational readiness therefore means more than force availability. It also requires continuous adaptation, resilient command and control, and the rapid integration of emerging technologies.

A NATIONAL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Germany has established a coherent strategic framework for this transformation. The Bundeswehr's first Military Strategy and the new Capability Profile define how the armed forces must deter, defend and, if necessary, fight – and which capabilities they require to do so. The resulting force posture translates these requirements into forces, structures and readiness, linking threat assessment, capability development and operational employment.

As Germany's national headquarters at the operational level, the Bundeswehr Joint Force Command translates strategic direction into operational planning and military action. National defence planning and Germany's contributions to NATO planning must therefore be fully aligned with the new strategic framework. At the same time, we must ensure a seamless transition from peacetime posture to defence posture, with designated forces able to deploy rapidly and remain effective, resilient and sustainable throughout an operation. Multi-Domain Operations are central to this task. Military and non-military activities must be planned across all domains and their effects synchronised in time and space. This includes long-range precision effects and a national ability to shape an adversary in depth. Such a deep-effects capability must not be understood as an isolated weapons programme. It depends on intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, targeting, command and control, force protection, logistics and political decision-making functioning as a single interoperable system alongside our Allies.

GERMANY AS THE HUB OF COLLECTIVE DEFENCE

Germany's geographic position gives it a particular responsibility within NATO. The Operations Plan Germany defines the military contribution to whole-of-government defence and prepares our country to serve as a staging, transit and sustainment hub for German and Allied forces.

Resilient cross-border corridors, protected critical infrastructure and reliable civilian support – from energy and water supply

to transport, IT and communications – are indispensable. These capabilities must be established, exercised and strengthened in peacetime through close cooperation between the federal government, the federal states, municipalities, industry, emergency services and the Bundeswehr.

The same principle applies to hybrid threats. In peacetime, Germany's civilian security authorities retain primary legal responsibility for responding to hostile activities below the threshold of armed conflict. The Bundeswehr contributes within the applicable legal framework, including through situational awareness that can support a comprehensive whole-of-government picture. Clear responsibilities, trusted information-sharing and rehearsed procedures are essential. Resilience is not the product of a single institution; it is the result of a functioning network.

STRONG TOGETHER

Established in October 2024, the Bundeswehr Joint Force Command is Germany's organisational response to this strategic reality. For the first time, a single operational-level command provides a holistic military recommendation based on political and strategic direction across all Bundeswehr operations, prioritises tasks and forces, and coordinates support.

This unity of command improves efficiency and coherence, strengthens deterrence, and provides Allies and civilian partners with a central operational point of contact.

Structures, however, are only as effective as the decisions taken within them. Multipolar threats demand a shared situational

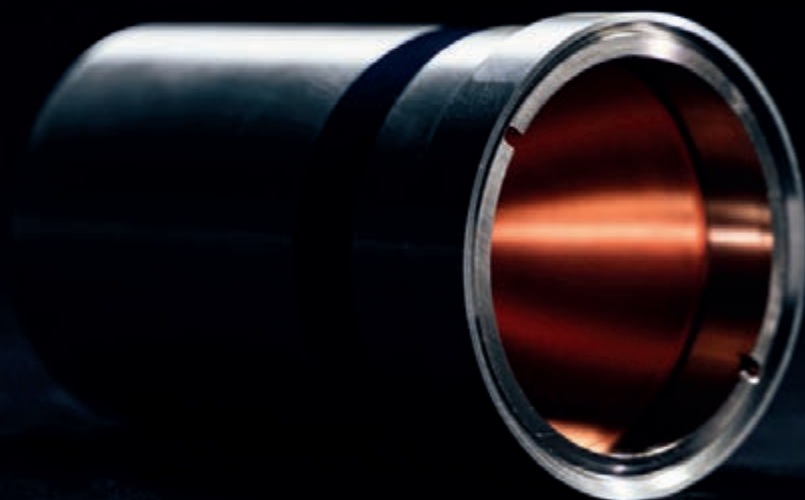
picture, rigorous assessment, comprehensive military advice and decisive action. Above all, Allies and partners must act together. NATO's strength lies not simply in the sum of national capabilities, but in the ability to integrate them into timely, coordinated and sustained effects. Europe must assume greater responsibility within the Alliance – not as an alternative to North America, but together with it. By aligning strategies, connecting command structures, strengthening resilience and translating political commitments into genuine readiness, Europe and NATO will remain strong together: capable of deterring aggression and prepared to defend our shared security.

“Armed forces that cannot effectively employ and counter unmanned systems, process information at speed and synchronise effects across domains will struggle to prevail.”

Lieutenant General Alexander Sollfrank,
Commander of the Bundeswehr
Joint Force Command



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MILITARY SUPPORT AS A STRATEGIC PILLAR OF EUROPE'S CAPACITY FOR ACTION

■ Lieutenant General Gerald Funke, Chief of the Chief of the Bundeswehr Joint Support Command Headquarters

The security situation in Europe is characterised by its increasingly dynamic nature, complexity and multipolarity. Shifts of power, strategic competition, hybrid interference and the return of conventional military threats confront Germany, Europe and NATO with the challenge of no longer being able to view security from the perspective of individual conflict scenarios alone. Rather, a comprehensive understanding of defence capability, resilience and mutual support is required. Under the guiding principle of “Europe and NATO – Standing Strong Together Against Multipolar Threats”, military support plays a key role in this.

Military support means more than just the provision of personnel, materiel or infrastructure. Indeed, it creates the conditions required in the first place for making military capabilities available, deployable and sustainable for their effective and timely employment. In multinational alliances in particular, appropriate and, wherever possible, coordinated support is an important factor in the joint capacity for promising action. Due to Germany's geographic location and infrastructure as well as its importance and role within NATO, the Bundeswehr exercises special responsibility in this regard.

COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC RESILIENCE

In addition to challenges of a purely military nature, cyber attacks, disinformation, attacks on critical infrastructure or the disruption of supply chains can have a massive impact on the military and civilian support capabilities that are essential for the sustainable employment of armed forces. Military support must thus be seen as part of comprehensive strategic resilience.

An effective Bundeswehr Joint Support Command that is appropriately staffed and equipped permits the centralised and more efficient integration of scarce national resources into multinational structures as well as the pooling of different capabilities of European partners. Common standards, interoperable processes and coordinated planning can contribute to making better use of existing resources and reducing dependencies, for one thing is clear: appropriate support is a prerequisite for credible deterrence and, where necessary, successful warfare.

At the same time, all operational planning must be geared to what is feasible. And what is feasible is determined not only by the quality and quantity of the “combatants”, but also by the quality and quantity of the available support capabilities, for example in the areas of logistics and medical services. The provision of medical services in particular is something we owe our servicemen and -women.

For Germany and Europe, this means taking a long-term view of support capabilities as a strategic investment in our common security. In a multipolar world, strength is determined not only by the quantity or quality of individual weapon systems, but also by the ability to jointly, rapidly and sustainably achieve – and maintain – the required capacity for action of armed forces. Military support is not a complementary element of defence; it is one of its essential foundations. Only if Europe and NATO jointly strengthen this capability will it be possible to actually develop a credible and resilient common defence capability from national contributions.

RESILIENCE AS A COMMON TASK

NATO explicitly regards resilience as a combination of military capabilities and civilian support. The interdependence between military and civilian structures in particular clearly shows that defence capability extends beyond the barracks gates. Hence, the road towards a resilient and crisis-resistant support capability is the right road – but also the road that we must consistently follow.

Resilience not only develops during crises; it also develops through preparation and practice, through robust structures, and through the ability to remain capable of taking action under pressure. In much the same way as the multi-domain operations (MDO) approach, resilience must always be conceived with its effect in mind, with the term “multi-domain enablement” taking on a completely different meaning in this context.

RESILIENCE IS NOT INTENDED AS A RESERVE FOR CRISES BUT AS A PROVISION FOR THE FUTURE

For the Bundeswehr Joint Support Command, this means thinking beyond traditional military tasks. Transport, energy supply, communication, infrastructure, health care and industrial capability, to name but a few, are equally part of a crisis-resistant security architecture.

In emergencies, military capabilities can only have a sustainable effect if civilian structures are resilient and, conversely, military support is available where civilian capacities reach their limits. Civil-military cooperation is therefore not a complementary element but an essential part of modern national and collective defence. Well-functioning civil-military cooperation is actually a strategic advantage!

THOSE WHO ARE CAPABLE OF ENSURING SUPPORT ARE ALSO CAPABLE OF ACTING UNDER PRESSURE

Europe and NATO must continue to pursue the same approach, showing strategic consistency, a long-term willingness to make investments, and an understanding of security that does not distinguish between military and civilian resilience. Indeed, an alliance's strength manifests itself not only in how the alliance responds to crises, but also in how well it can prepare in advance by means of a comprehensive approach that is supported by the vast majority of people at all levels of state and society.

“Civil-military cooperation is not a complementary element but an essential part of modern national and collective defence.”

Lieutenant General Gerald Funke,
Chief of the Chief of the Bundeswehr
Joint Support Command Headquarters



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EUROPE'S SILENT RESERVE: WHY VOLUNTEERING IS PART OF OUR COLLECTIVE STRENGTH AGAINST MULTIPOLAR THREATS

■ **Martin Schelleis**, President of Malteser Hilfsdienst e.V.

For the 25th time, the Berlin Security Conference is bringing together decision-makers from politics, the armed forces and civil society under the title “Europe and NATO – Together Strong Against Multipolar Threats.” The guiding theme rightly describes a task for the Alliance as a whole. In the face of hybrid, multipolar threats, security today means more than military deterrence. It raises the question of whether a society can withstand a power outage, a cyber-attack on critical infrastructure, or an escalation on NATO’s eastern flank without falling apart. This is precisely where a German particularity comes in – one too rarely noted in European and transatlantic comparison: our broadly based, volunteer-driven system of civil protection. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers serve in volunteer fire brigades, the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) and relief organisations such as Malteser, responding to floods, power outages, pandemics and external threats. They are more than a component of civil defence. They are its foundation – and a contribution that Germany brings to the European and transatlantic security architecture.

WITHOUT VOLUNTEERS, THE STATE CAN BARELY ACT

The current Malteser Volunteering Monitor (July 2026) shows that the public is well aware of this. Two-thirds of respondents believe the state would be barely or not at all capable of acting in major crises without volunteers in civil protection. By contrast, only 28 percent believe the state would be fully or largely capable of acting in major crises without the support of volunteer relief organisations. The people of Germany have long understood what is at stake. The political debate on civil defence, however, still lags behind.

At the same time, the Volunteering Monitor reveals a clear set of expectations. When it comes to disaster relief and civil

protection, a majority of respondents see the state as primarily responsible. Volunteering is meant to complement professional and public structures and make them more effective. It should not, and cannot, replace them. We at Malteser share this view without reservation. At the same time, volunteering is a cornerstone of societal resilience in its own right.

THE PRESSURE ON VOLUNTEERS

One other finding is cause for concern. 81 percent of respondents agree that, as state services become scarcer, the pressure on volunteers to take on tasks is increasing.

57 percent expect public welfare services to be scaled back rather than expanded over the next two years. This increases the risk that state responsibility will be shifted onto volunteer shoulders – shoulders that are not built to bear it and should not be expected to. Civil defence that relies on volunteering primarily as a means of cutting costs is not a viable model.

THE WILLINGNESS IS THERE, BUT THE FRAMEWORK MUST BE RIGHT

There is no shortage of willingness to help. The Volunteering Monitor shows that, given better conditions, 41 percent of respondents would take up volunteering for the first time, resume it, or expand their commitment. What matters most to people in this regard is reimbursement of expenses incurred, flexibility in time commitment, pension benefits, good training and less bureaucracy. The potential for a strong civil defence system therefore exists – it simply needs to be tapped.

GERMANY'S SPECIAL ROLE IN EUROPE AND NATO

No other NATO or EU member state has such a strong network of volunteer civil protection organisations as Germany. Where other states organise civil protection chiefly as a state or purely military task, Germany traditionally relies on the combined efforts of the state, professional services and civic engagement. The decentralised structure, rooted in municipalities and regions, is not a by-product but a strategic advantage. It enables responsiveness across the entire country – precisely where military forces are tied up in a defence scenario and state agencies are stretched to their limits.

For NATO, this capability is becoming increasingly important against the backdrop of multipolar threats. The resilience of civil society has long been part of the alliance’s understanding of defence – from securing critical infrastructure and host nation support to the ability to manage large population movements, casualty care or supply shortages in an emergency. As a hub for troop movements and one of the Alliance’s key logistics junctions, Germany sits at the centre of these demands. A strong civilian volunteer sector is therefore not only a matter of national preparedness, but a contribution to the defence capability of Europe as a whole – a resource that other member



The debate on Total Defence, chaired by Lieutenant General (ret) Martin Schelleis, revealed that security cannot be guaranteed by military means alone, nor within the remit of individual authorities, but must be approached as a task for society as a whole.

states are, in some cases, only beginning to build, while Germany can already draw on it.

This special role comes with an obligation. Anyone speaking at the Berlin Security Conference about common strength against multipolar threats must not treat the volunteer backbone of that strength as something that simply takes care of itself, or as a side issue. It requires policymakers to recognise this capability as a strategic asset and to give it the same strategic priority as investments in equipment and armed forces.

OUR DEMANDS TO POLICYMAKERS

As one of the major relief organisations involved, working on behalf of the federal government, the states and municipalities, in civil and disaster protection, we at Malteser have clear expectations for a future-proof civil defence.

- Reliable funding instead of cuts. Necessary state services for civil protection must be financed permanently and adequately – volunteering must not become a balancing item for tight budgets.
- Secure release from work and continued pay. Volunteer emergency responders must be able to leave their workplace immediately when called out; their employers need a straightforward, reliable system for reimbursing wage costs.
- Fund equipment and training. The quality and operational readiness of volunteer civil protection depend on good

equipment and training – this requires adequate, plannable funding rather than project-based financing.

- Cut red tape. Expense allowances and reimbursements should be handled quickly and with minimal bureaucracy, rather than discouraging volunteers with unnecessary administrative hurdles.
- Clear division of roles and responsibilities. To prevent volunteers from becoming overburdened, roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined between the state, professional services and volunteer organisations.

Volunteering and the state are not opposites, but partners. Anyone who takes civil defence seriously must strengthen this partnership with a reliable framework, genuine appreciation, and a clear stance: voluntary engagement complements what the state itself must deliver – it can never permanently substitute for it.

“The potential for a strong German civil defence system exists – it simply needs to be tapped.”

Martin Schelleis,
President of Malteser Hilfsdienst e.V.



Image: Malteser Hilfsdienst e.V.

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Graphmatec won the first prize in the ‘Resilience’ category of the Start-up Challenge. Olivia Nestius (centre), CEO of Graphmatec, accepted the prize on behalf of all the staff. The award jury included, amongst others, Major General Dr Volker Pötzsch (4th from the left) and Anna Lena Hohmann (right), who moderated the competition.

BSC STARTUP CHALLENGE 2026

■ **Anna Lena Hohmann**, Senior Manager at PwC

Ten startups, two days, two focus areas and a jury representing the entire innovation ecosystem. Together with Be-
hörden Spiegel, Palladion and the Lithuanian think tank GSSC, PwC hosts the Startup Challenge – where founders gain critical feedback from experienced practitioners, where established actors encounter fresh perspectives, and where both sides explore what collaboration might look like. European security requires more than established approaches can deliver alone. Threat landscapes shift faster than traditional cycles can respond. The capacity to identify, integrate and scale innovation has become a strategic capability. Not to replace existing structures, but to complement them with the agility that startups deliver. The Startup Challenge makes this potential visible and accessible to those shaping Europe’s defence posture.

The ambition extends beyond showcasing technology. The Challenge seeks to catalyse a shift in mindset. Development timelines that no longer match the pace of emerging threats deserve scrutiny. Silos that impede collaboration need to be dismantled. And it requires courage to pursue new approaches when established paths appear safer. Startups operate by these principles. They iterate, fail, learn, deliver. The Challenge makes this tangible and invites participants to consider what it could mean for their own context.

FOCUS AREAS 2026

This year’s focus areas address two domains critical to European strategic autonomy. Space sovereignty stands at the centre of the first challenge: securing independent access to space-based capabilities for observation, communication, navigation and early warning. These assets underpin modern defence and face growing threats. The second challenge addresses Military Mobility: moving forces and materiel rapidly across European territory remains fundamental to credible deterrence, yet infrastructure gaps, fragmented data systems and lengthy approval

processes continue to slow us down. Both areas demand solutions that can be deployed at pace. The Challenge reflects the international character of the Berlin Security Conference. German and Lithuanian startups participate together, contributing perspectives shaped by different strategic realities, united by a shared objective: strengthening the defence capabilities of Europe and NATO.

The Startup Challenge extends beyond the pitch sessions. All ten startups showcase their solutions at the Startup Area on the first floor. Innovation becomes tangible, conversations turn into connections, seeds of future collaboration are planted. The pitch sessions take place on Stage A in the Lobby, offering the opportunity to experience innovation firsthand and engage with founders and jury members directly. The two winners, one from each focus area, earn the main stage. On the afternoon of the second conference day, they present their innovation to the full BSC audience. Innovation in the spotlight, exactly where it belongs. A format built on partnership and shared commitment to European defence innovation. For startups working on solutions in Space or Military Mobility: applications are open. This is your opportunity to gain visibility, receive expert feedback and connect with key players across the European defence ecosystem.

“European security requires more than established approaches can deliver alone.”

Anna Lena Hohmann,
Senior Manager at PwC



Image: PwC

C4ISR MADE IN EUROPE

Systematic is the software company behind SitaWare, the world's most widely fielded C4ISR suite. For four decades the company has built the command-and-control software that armed forces use to plan, decide and act. Today more than 50 nations, over 20 NATO Allies, and NATO itself rely on it, from the strategic headquarters to the dismounted soldier at the front. Systematic is a European company, developing in Europe, for forces that need to stay in control of their own capability.

WHAT SYSTEMATIC STANDS FOR

Modern coalition command is decided by data: by the ability to bring together what many nations see and act on it faster than the adversary. Sensors, feeds and reports arrive in abundance, more than any staff can reconcile by hand. The difficulty is no longer collecting information but making sense of it together, across the forces of different Allies, each bringing its own systems, formats and procedures that are incompatible by default. A commander who cannot see a partner's reconnaissance or air picture is working with only part of the situation.

This is the problem Systematic addresses. It has developed the SitaWare Suite on one conviction: no nation, and no alliance, should depend on a single supplier for its command capability. That is why the suite is open by architecture, letting national platforms, legacy systems and new sensors connect to one common operational picture without lock-in, and keep adding new capabilities over time. Sovereignty and interoperability are treated as one, not traded against each other: each nation's data stays under its own authority, while the Alliance still sees and acts as one.

DATA AND AI AT THE CORE

AI belongs inside the architecture, not bolted alongside it. Within the suite, SitaWare Insight is the intelligence layer, where the operational picture becomes understanding. It manages the full intelligence cycle and provides AI-supported decision support, working on the same data the force already uses to command. The commander stays in the loop throughout, because accountability and explainability are not negotiable.

Agentic AI is the next step, built on what SitaWare Insight does today. Asked to build an assessment from terrain, weather, logistics and enemy data, agents work out which sources to draw on and how to combine them, following the same planning procedures staff would. The point is not to automate command, but to compress the time between data and decision, which is where the advantage now lies.

IN SERVICE

These are not positions asserted but ones delivered. Interoperability is the clearest test, and it is passed in the field, not the laboratory. Within the German Armed Forces, SitaWare is embedded across major modernisation programmes, and



SitaWare Insight: AI-powered decision-making for Multi-Domain Operations

Image: Systematic

as part of the Mission Enabling Service Bundeswehr (MES-Bw) it provides a unified, multi-domain software ecosystem designed to support command and control at all levels. The individual products of the SitaWare Suite are seamlessly integrated into the existing system landscape. In the coalition context, SitaWare is also the selected C2 solution for NATO's land forces – a core enabler of multinational operations and part of the Alliance's digital transformation. Much of this capability is in daily operational use, some of it in active operations today, under conditions no demonstration can replicate. This is the difference between a system that works in a briefing and one that holds together when many nations, many sensors and a contested network meet at once.

Any provider can promise a data platform. Few are already in service, carrying many nations through real operations, with AI built-in and each nation in control of its own data. These are the capabilities Systematic has built over four decades. C4ISR made in Europe.

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