

↓ RECOMMENDATIONS

14

1 Close the gaps in European defense capabilities

Furthering the political consolidation and strengthening the capabilities of European defense is paramount. Defense procurement must be Europeanized and defense strategies modernized.

2 Deepen European defense integration

One vital step that would help strengthen Europe's defense capabilities would be for a designated group of member states to lead the way wherever necessary, with the ultimate goal of embedding this structure into the institutional framework of the EU.

3 Use arms control to prevent spirals of escalation

Strengthening Europe's defense must go hand in hand with diplomatic initiatives to mitigate the risk of escalation. This includes renouncing first-use¹ options, limiting the number of weapons systems, and establishing reliable communication channels.

4 Increase our commitment to the rules-based order

Europe is not an island, but part of a global community with partners across all regions of the world who can play a vital role in preserving the rules-based order. However, these partners must be able to rely on Europe to demonstrate a stronger commitment to this cause and greater willingness to drive the necessary reforms.

5 Respect international courts

In a rules-based international order, Germany, too, must uphold the principle that international law takes precedence over *raison d'état* or *Staatsräson* (reason of state). This means that, for the foreseeable future, Germany must refrain from endorsing or permitting an official visit from Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

6 Ban the export of weapons that might be used to violate international humanitarian law

Germany must enforce a ban on exports to Israel of any weapons and armaments—such as small arms, light weapons, ammunition, and tank transmission systems—that could be used in Gaza or the West Bank.

7 Develop a refugee policy guided by humanity and fair burden-sharing

The German government must advocate an EU immigration and dispersal policy based on solidarity, ensuring that first asylum countries are not left to shoulder the burden alone. The individual right to protection from persecution and threat to life must be upheld.

8 Do not lose sight of the “forgotten conflicts”

Purely geopolitical strategic thinking fosters global instability and contradicts the principles of humanity and universality. Germany's and Europe's commitment to crisis regions, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa or South and Southeast Asia, must not be scaled back.

9 Continue to enhance the effectiveness of civilian tools

The global peace order requires effective development cooperation and substantial resources for crisis prevention and stabilization. Existing impact measurement tools need to be further developed to enhance their effectiveness.

STATEMENT /

The struggle to save peace /

15

Peace today is in a precarious state. As a political concept, it seems to have been pushed to its limits, if not shattered by Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine. Trust in the fundamental security institutions that have maintained the European peace order has been severely undermined. The United Nations, once a beacon of hope for peace and security, has been eroded, becoming an arena for great power politics rife with cynicism. From every corner of the globe, there are calls for greater security, deterrence and arms. But this alone cannot save peace—so what, or who will?

The war that Russia is currently waging extends far beyond Ukraine. Russia has long been issuing threats to its Baltic neighbors, destabilizing the Caucasus, and conducting hybrid attacks on the territory of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Hardly a day passes without reports of attempted sabotage of critical infrastructure, disinformation campaigns, or cyberattacks.

↘ NEO-IMPERIAL WORLDVIEW

In this time of increasing global instability, marked by competition and conflict, another pillar of stabilization is crumbling: with Donald Trump at the helm for the second time, the US has long ceased to be a stabilizing force. Not only is the new administration rapidly transforming American democracy into autocracy, but when it comes to foreign policy, nothing is left standing → **F**. The punitive tariffs imposed on friend and foe during Trump's first term are being applied even more drastically and arbitrarily in his second term.

Military plans to seize the Panama Canal, the brazen threat to acquire Greenland "one way or the other", and the attempt to extract economic gains from the invasion of Ukraine by pressuring the country to sign a raw materials agreement, have taken things to a new level. These actions make it quite clear that Donald Trump holds a neo-imperialist view of the world, one driven by narrow self-interest and short-term gains rather than trust and cooperation. This understanding of politics has much in common with Vladimir Putin's worldview. The world according to these two leaders is a place in which powerful countries take what they want—while the smaller ones have no choice but to endure this.

This marks the end of the transatlantic partnership, the central pillar of the post-WWII, rules-based world order. Time and again, Trump and his administration have made their views on Europe clear—and they are far from favorable. It has long been uncertain whether the US is still committed to fulfilling its NATO obligations regarding military protection.

The end of the transatlantic partnership has come

16

One thing that is certain, however, is that they have little inclination to involve Europe in negotiations when it comes to securing a deal with Russia over the ongoing war against Ukraine. Trump's affinity for the Russian dictator, his contempt for Ukraine's elected president, and the disparaging remarks from vice president JD Vance about Europe all point to the same conclusion: the continent is facing a growing military threat from Russia, with Russia and the US trapping Europe in a pincer movement designed to bend it to their will.

→ **EUROPEAN DEFENSE: MORE THAN JUST WEAPONS**

The signs are clear: the increasingly confrontational global security situation, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the political upheaval in the US → F all signal the urgent need to further the political consolidation and strengthen the operational capabilities of European defense. Europe must swiftly close its capability gaps by enhancing arms cooperation and modernizing its defense strategies. And this has to be done in a way that allows the continent to defend itself without—or even against—the US.

Europe must close its capability gaps and strengthen arms cooperation—but this does not mean a carte blanche for arms exports

This new arms policy cannot be seen as granting countries free rein to export arms indiscriminately across the globe, however. The new German government's coalition agreement outlines an arms export policy that, going forward, will also factor in economic interests. Weapons should “in principle” not be exported to countries where “they are used for internal repression or to violate international law”. This leaves room for interpretation and signifies a departure from the policy pursued by previous governments. Opinions within our editorial team are divided on this matter. Some argue for a return to a more restrictive arms export policy which is unequivocally, and as a matter of priority, committed to protecting human rights and preventing the use of weapons against civilians. From this perspective, there are no compelling economic reasons to export arms to countries outside the European Union (EU) or NATO, particularly since the arms purchases of the German armed forces and allied nations will utilize the full capacity of the arms industry in the coming years. Other editors, in contrast, stress the urgent need to foster European arms cooperation, something which may in fact require Germany to relax its arms export policy. That being said, even in this case, foreign, security, and economic policy considerations must still be carefully weighed against humanitarian concerns.

The challenges European countries face in shaping a common defense policy are neither new, nor insurmountable. The EU's shortcomings are common knowledge: a lack of political unity in foreign and security policy, decision-making mechanisms that can be blocked by individual veto players, and an inability to implement decisions swiftly. The development of European defense integration has been and will continue to be a story of muddling through: crisis-driven policymaking, marked by repeated policy failures, incomplete institutional development, and incremental reforms.

The EU's foreign and security policy lacks cohesion and the ability to implement decisions swiftly

The EU's civilian and military capabilities for defending the European peace project urgently need strengthening and greater integration, and while the new White Paper for European Defence (2024) and the EU Preparedness Union Strategy (2025) are positive steps in the right direction, they fall short of what is needed. Europe needs to do more than just acquire more weapons. Increasing national defense expenditures alone will not be enough to pave the way for a comprehensive and effective European defense strategy. And the proposed creation of more ad hoc arrangements for financing military procurement will not strengthen the EU's political center in the long term. As the experience with the EU battle groups has demonstrated, the EU should refrain from creating additional military capabilities that cannot be deployed later due to political obstacles.

17

Our recommendation to the German government, therefore, is to take an active role in fostering the development of a transparent, step-by-step plan for the expansion and integration of European defense structures. In the short term—building on the Lisbon Treaty—existing structures can be enhanced. This would include strengthening the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions. The latter should not only focus on out-of-area operations but also take on tasks related to territorial defense, protecting critical infrastructure, and securing the EU's immediate neighborhood.

The EU's civilian forces also need to be strengthened in order to sustainably promote stability and freedom in the European neighborhood. This must be paired with efforts to reform the EU's outdated decision-making structures. Ideally, these changes should be made through a reform of the European treaties. Where necessary, a group of member states can actively drive European defense integration, initially outside the European treaties, the ultimate goal being to incorporate this structure into the institutional framework of the EU. There is broad public support for such a policy of defense integration within Europe—this presents an opportunity we must seize now.

The decision by the previous Bundestag to allow unprecedented levels of debt for investment in defense and infrastructure demonstrates Germany's political will to address this challenge. In principle, this was the right decision. However, the new funds can only be used efficiently and effectively if there is a fundamental reform of procurement at the European level. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, defense spending has substantially increased both in Germany and other European NATO states. The fact that, an entire decade later, there are still major capability gaps raises serious questions about how these funds are being used—both in terms of strategic allocation and cost-effectiveness.

European procurement
needs urgent reform

→ **TOWARDS A FUTURE EUROPEAN PEACE ORDER**

Amid the current crisis, it is tempting to prioritize increasing defense capabilities—and there is no doubt that this is urgently needed. But to lose sight of the goal of a European peace order and neglect the need to preserve the rules-based international order would be a mistake. After all, lasting security cannot be achieved without peace. The idea that security can be attained through military deterrence alone is short-sighted and will result in a dangerous world of increasing mutual armament, where even small mistakes could have catastrophic consequences. This is one of the key lessons of the Cold War. The arms race between the blocs repeatedly brought the world to the brink of nuclear disaster—and the fact that this was averted was often only down to sheer luck. It was only through the recognition that coexistence was essential for survival, and balance rather than dominance was the path forward, that the first arms control treaties and cautious co-operation agreements were established to stabilize the situation. It remains to be seen what long-term strategy will shape Germany's defense capabilities and what diplomatic initiatives will help preserve the rules-based order. Indeed, there is little discussion about this challenge, whether within Germany or at the European level—and any discussions that do take place often prove counterproductive, involving steps such as scaling back development cooperation or cutting funds for crisis prevention and stabilization.

Germany's defense capabilities must be incorporated into a long-term strategy for preserving the rules-based order

In light of these experiences, European security policy must pave the way for—not obstruct—a future European peace order. Security strategies must outline a gradual process that combines deterrence with decreasing violence and increasing cooperation. In the medium term, they must ensure a fair balance of interests within a lasting European peace order. The first phase of this process should focus on defending against current—and preventing future—threats of violence and military threats. This will involve “antagonistic peace-keeping” through deterrence, military buildup, and alliance formation. However, even in this phase, the strategy must be geared towards phase two—peaceful coexistence. Here, armament and alliance-building must go hand in hand with offers to negotiate limitations on those very things. This includes forgoing first-use options¹, reducing the number of weapons systems, and establishing reliable communication channels to prevent escalation. Ideally, this strategy would, in the medium term, lead to a situation where all sides prioritize stability over dominance. If this is successful, and if all parties commit to recognizing each other's security interests and the fundamental legitimacy of said interests, peaceful coexistence can be institutionally stabilized and contractually guaranteed → 3.

However, this process should also pave the way for a third phase—one which seeks to construct a cooperative peace order. Besides arms limitations and disarmament efforts, this requires the establishment of institutions for political dispute resolution and processes for peaceful change in order to coordinate interests and achieve joint action—not only in the defense sector but also in other areas such as economic and environmental policy.

↙ **EUROPE IS NOT AN ISLAND**

Germany, and indeed Europe as a whole, depend on the rules-based international order. They need the big international organizations and their regulatory frameworks to achieve their goals—be that in the field of collective security, free trade, or climate protection. To preserve this order, which is currently under attack from both Putin and Trump, Europe needs partners. While there is interest in maintaining the rules-based order across all regions of the world, this support cannot come at any cost. Potential partners in the Global South rightly expect a willingness to reform existing regulatory frameworks, ensuring greater influence and participation. But both Germany's and Europe's diminishing engagement in global affairs is not really compatible with this message → 4.

Europe needs
new partnerships
to preserve
the rules-based order

19

↙ **GERMANY CAN ONLY MAINTAIN ITS CREDIBILITY BY UPHOLDING THE RULES**

In order not to lose sight of the prospect of cooperative peacekeeping, the achievements of international humanitarian law must be defended more rigorously than ever. Countless violent conflicts worldwide are marked by the dehumanization of warfare: civilians and the civilian infrastructure (hospitals, schools, energy infrastructure) have become direct targets. What is more, countries such as Finland, Poland, and the Baltic states have turned their backs on treaties banning weapons like antipersonnel mines, despite their widespread condemnation due to the devastating impact they have.

International courts play a crucial role in ensuring compliance with the fundamental principles of international law → 2. In today's polarized world, the interventions by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), particularly regarding the Ukraine war and the situation in Israel/Gaza, have made these courts targets of political attack. Germany and the EU must stand firm in defending the independence of international courts against growing hostility.

International courts
must be defended
against hostilities

Preserving the rules-based order also requires Germany to adhere to the rules—and to hold friendly nations to the same standard → 2. When Hamas launched an attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, resulting in indiscriminate mass killings and the seizure over 240 hostages, the German government rightly stood with Israel. Over the course of the Gaza war, however, Israel has repeatedly flagrantly violated international humanitarian law and crossed the lines of legitimate self-defense—prompting proceedings against Israel at the ICJ to investigate allegations of genocide, while the ICC has issued arrest warrants for Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former defense minister Yoav Gallant on charges of war crimes.

But the Israeli government appears undeterred. In fact, it unilaterally broke the ceasefire in spring 2025 and plans to employ military force to reoccupy the Gaza Strip and “resettle” the Palestinian population (as of April 7, 2025). United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres regards this plan as being tantamount to ethnic cleansing. American president Donald Trump, in contrast, is in favor of the “resettlement” and has even proposed that the

US take ownership of Gaza. In the meantime, the violence perpetrated by Jewish settlers against the Palestinian population in the West Bank has escalated dramatically, often tolerated and indeed supported by the Israeli army. Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have long sought to annex the territory. In the slipstream of the US, which is also making territorial claims abroad while expelling its own alleged "illegals", Netanyahu's government is continuing to pursue its vision of a "Greater Israel".

But, in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, too, there can be no security without peace—neither for the Palestinians, nor for Israel. If the Palestinians are not offered political prospects through negotiations, the risk of even more instability and violence throughout the region will grow. While Germany and Europe are no match for the power and resources of the US as mediators in the Middle East, now more than ever, they must defend international law and commit to peace. In essence, this means upholding the obligations of the Rome Statute with regard to the ICC. An official visit from Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is, therefore, off the table—international law takes precedence over reason of state. Germany must enforce a ban on exports to Israel of any weapons and armaments—such as small arms, light weapons, ammunition, and tank transmission systems—that could be used in Gaza or the West Bank. Moreover, in the medium term, the German government should formally commit to recognizing the State of Palestine.

Germany must uphold international law:
no state visit from Netanyahu, no weapons for use in Gaza, and recognition of the State of Palestine

↘ PEACE POLICY IN CRISIS AREAS BEYOND EUROPE'S BORDERS

The next German government should also pursue a peace policy that extends beyond Europe and its immediate neighborhood. As we were writing this statement, China launched large-scale military drills around Taiwan, coupled with an explicit threat of invasion. Meanwhile, the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains unstable after the M23 rebel group, backed by the Rwandan government, captured key towns in the east of the DRC. The majority of violent conflicts, however, do not even make the headlines. Sudan is one such a "forgotten war", claiming countless lives → 1. In the first few months of 2025 alone, the people of Myanmar, Yemen, and the western Sahel have all endured immense suffering due to wars and disasters.

In light of these "forgotten wars", Germany and the EU must avoid falling into the trap of geopolitical strategic thinking aimed solely at acquiring military power, economic influence, and access to resources. Not only does such thinking contradict the principles of humanity and universal human rights, it also neglects the fact that seemingly peripheral conflict regions are in fact deeply embedded in a complex, interdependent global structure. Their instability affects Germany and the EU, both directly and indirectly, particularly through refugee movements and displacement, which transcend continents.

→ A REFUGEE POLICY GUIDED BY HUMANITY AND FAIR BURDEN-SHARING

Refugees are victims of violence and displacement, rather than the perpetrators they are all too often portrayed to be in today's public debate. In fact, over 90 percent of all refugees seek protection in the countries of the Global South, with only a fraction of them reaching Europe's borders or ending up in Germany. Unless there is direct intervention in the conflicts driving refugee movements, crisis prevention and sustainable solutions to displacement must be urgently strengthened within the regions themselves. By adopting this approach, we can improve the prospects for a better life on the ground. An important lesson from the 2014/2015 refugee crisis is that countries of first asylum—especially those outside Europe—must not be left to deal with mass refugee movements alone. This Peace Report thus calls for these countries to be supported with humanitarian aid, development co-operation, and peacekeeping efforts. In addition, the German government must—contrary to what is set out in the coalition agreement—ensure the humanitarian admission of particularly vulnerable groups from conflict regions (including women and children) through resettlement quotas. This approach must not, however, replace the individual right to protection from persecution and threat to life as defined in the Geneva Refugee Convention, German Basic Law, and European law.

The German government must advocate an EU immigration and dispersal policy based on solidarity. It must work to ensure that, during the reform of the Common European Asylum System, human rights standards are upheld and that the rights of refugees as well as the conditions of their integration and social cohesion are improved—not only in Germany but in other European countries as well → 5.

First countries
of asylum need support
in assisting the refugees
they admit

CONCLUSION

As painful as it is to acknowledge, peace in Europe can only be preserved if military capability gaps are closed and partial rearmament carried out. This requires deeper defense policy integration, a process which Germany must actively participate in.

22

But arms buildup alone leads to a dangerous impasse, which is why it is essential that this process go hand in hand with arms control measures and diplomatic initiatives.

Efforts to strengthen military capabilities do not negate the importance of a rules-based order, which must also be strengthened—both in Europe and globally. International courts play a key role in upholding this order. History imposes a special responsibility on Germany to respect international law, and invoking reason of state would undermine this commitment.

Lastly, developing or maintaining the capacity to create, sustain, and promote peace also involves German and European domestic politics. Of particular importance here is the development of a refugee policy which truly upholds humanitarian standards and promotes fair burden-sharing across Europe, without overextending the countries on the EU's external borders.

¹ In an earlier version, we used the incorrect term "first-strike" instead of "first-use". We apologize for the mistake.

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