The Hague Centre
for Strategic Studies

Wars to come, Europeans to act

A multimethod foresight study into Europe's military future

Lotje Boswinkel and Tim Sweijs

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Authors:
Lotje Boswinkel and Tim Sweijs

Contributors:
Collin Meisel, Saskia Heyster, Daan Sanders and Stella Kim

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Executive Summary

Russia's war against Ukraine was for many European leaders a – cynics would say *another* – strategic wake-up call. The war has led to significant boosts to defence budgets across Europe to rebuild dilapidated military capabilities around the continent. It has prompted Finland and Sweden to find shelter under the collective defence umbrella provided by the transatlantic Alliance after close to seventy-five years of non-alignment. And in addition to NATO strengthening its defence and deterrence posture – increasing the number of high readiness forces to 300,000 – the war is also providing further impetus to ongoing efforts within the European Union to step up its role in this realm.

If one thing is clear, Europe will need to assume a greater role in maintaining peace and stability in its own region and neighbourhood. Its security is directly affected by conflict risks in Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa including the Sahel, the Middle East, South Asia, the Caribbean (where France, the UK, and the Netherlands have constituent countries and special municipalities), and, in the coming years, the Arctic and Outer Space. Crucially, even if recent events and commitments suggest differently, a sustained US interest in Europe is far from certain. In the long run, the US is expected to prioritise other geographic theatres at the expense of Europe and nearby regions – whether by necessity or choice.

Future-proof choices need to be made that address the principal security challenges and pinpoint necessary policy responses

Even with the current reinforcements of military postures across Europe, material and political constraints will not disappear. Therefore future-proof choices need to be made that address the principal security challenges and pinpoint necessary policy responses. There is an urgent need to think about necessary investments and capability portfolios in the long term, including but also beyond the current war in Ukraine. Decisions need to be future-proof. That is where this foresight study comes in.

The study reflects on the implications of the changes in our strategic environment and the resultant shift in priorities for European militaries. Using a multi-method approach, it explores where Europe is most likely to intervene militarily over the next ten years. To address this question, it anticipates where armed conflict and instability are most likely to occur in the decade to come and how European interests will be affected. Conflict- and instability-related risks that require some form of military response include but are not limited to large-scale war between states, persistent low-level conflict between warring groups, violent attacks by transnational groups, and one-sided violence by governments against minorities within their borders. And this is not mere speculation or doom say: these different forms of violence are already present in contemporary conflict theatres in Europe and its immediately adjacent regions today.

On foresight & methods

Because (good) policymaking is inherently about the future, foresight is useful if not indispensable. Even if it is extremely hard to predict the future, foresight (which is not the same as prediction) helps us better understand dynamics of change, generate new ideas and policy options, focus our attention on the long-term, and facilitate the adoption of future-oriented policymaking tools. Crucially, it helps policymakers overcome systemic biases and deal with the inherent uncertainty that comes with anticipating the future as it lays out policy options based on the uncertainties identified through foresight methods.

To that purpose, the study combines various quantitative and qualitative methods. Through a multi-method approach in which both quantitative and qualitative methods are combined, the credibility and validity of research increase as biases are countered; the scope or breadth of a study widened; and the understanding of a phenomenon enriched as a multiplicity of methods brings complementary insights. In foresight exercises like this one, such advantages associated with a multi-method approach are invaluable if not indispensable: with a subject as complex as the future, tunnel visions loom and biases creep in. Concretely, this study combines: 1) desk research and literature review of systemic trends; 2) predictive models for intrastate conflict; 3) a quantitative analysis of theory-based risk factors for interstate conflict; 4) a case study of systemic war outbreak; 5) a review of official documents; and 6) an expert survey.

Because (good) policymaking is inherently about the future, foresight is useful if not indispensable

Setting the scene: four global trends

The next ten years of conflict are roughly to be shaped by four global trends: interstate strategic competition, especially between the major powers, intensifies; weapon technologies emerge, advance and proliferate; political and social volatility rock the stability of societies; and the effects of climate change take hold. The implications for insecurity are manifold, and so are the policy needs for European militaries (for an overview, see Table 1).

Great power competition

As great powers are increasingly competing in the political, economic, and increasingly military domains, direct confrontation looms and great power war becomes once again thinkable. As they vie for influence, proxy conflicts spike and intrastate cleavages intensify, increasing the potential for civil war. Yet also smaller states may act increasingly brazenly, playing one great power against another as they seek to maximise their strategic benefits. Competition between major powers, whether direct or indirect, means that access to the global commons, including sealines of communication and space, is no longer a given. Territorial integrity is increasingly at risk, while intrastate conflicts are prone to becoming internationalised. Liberal democracy is contested as the superior model of governance and should continue to see subversive threats as the battle for narratives continues. The use of so-called hybrid conflict strategies will continue if not intensify, entailing the weaponisation of energy, food, refugees, information and more. For Europe, this means that its activities in Africa are contested, its access to resources disrupted, and its borders challenged. In Latin America, the Netherlands may see the other three countries within the Kingdom as well as the special municipalities located in the Caribbean Sea threatened by regional instabilities exacerbated by great power

competition playing out in this region. Europe's political cohesion will come under pressure as their populations' minds are fought over, their welfare systems strained when taking in refugees, and their budgets squeezed by sanctions, declining international trade and the slowdown of globalisation.

New technologies

Against this backdrop of a more competitive global environment, technologies are advancing rapidly. Improvements in speed, range and precision beef up advanced militaries' striking power while more modest systems are available to a growing number of state and non-state actors. Weapon proliferation and advancements are paralleled by an erosion of international norms and treaties: today, fewer treaties regulate the development and deployment of systems, while appetite for transparency and confidence-building is at a new low. The risks and implications for conflict are evident: with more actors emboldened by military clout, capabilities improving and diversifying, and rules and norms eroding, the potential for miscalculation rises, the threshold for use lowers, while deterrence and escalation become harder to manage. Rapid changes in technological capabilities may incentivise risky bids to change the status quo, while those at (perceived) risk of losing military prowess may feel compelled to strike pre-emptively. What is more, the democratisation of violence enabled by the proliferation of weapon technology adds to an ever more volatile and diffuse military landscape. At the extreme, technological trends increase the risk of interstate war, but with ever more actors capable of acquiring or developing modest missiles, off-the-shelf drones or digital capabilities, the potential of intrastate conflict to break out can also be expected to increase.

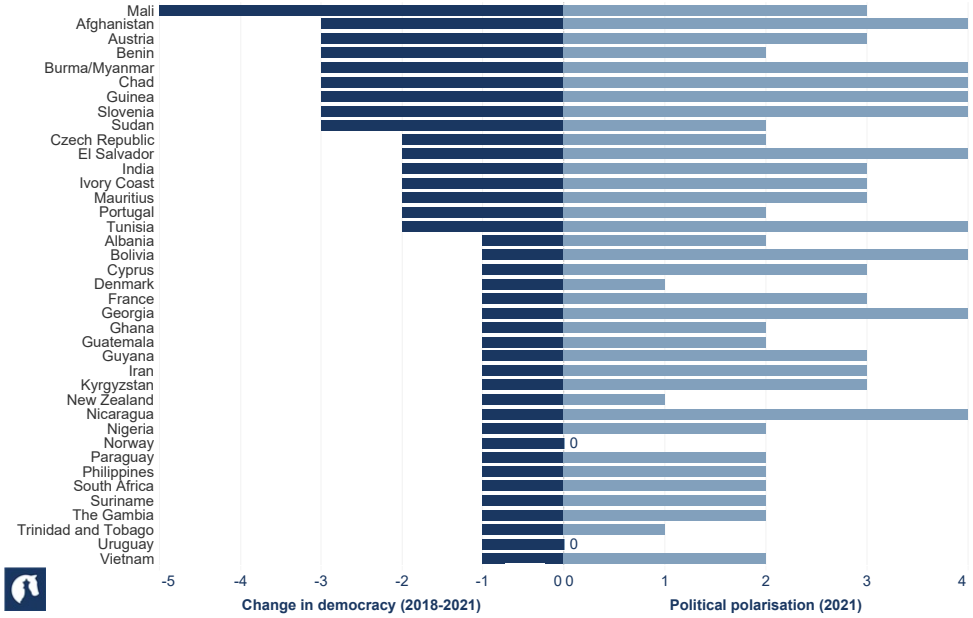
Rapid changes in technological capabilities may incentivise risky bids to change the status quo,

Political and social volatility

Even with attention shifting towards strategic competition and related technological developments, more traditional post-Cold War security challenges remain. With economic, demographic and environmental pressures mounting, political and social volatility is likely to persist if not exacerbate as governments find it increasingly difficult to meet their populations' demands. Polarisation along ethnic, religious, and ideological lines is rising, with digitalisation acting as an important accelerator, while freedom falters across the globe. This does not bode well for stability: especially the combination can be toxic, with civil war the most extreme outcome. For Europe, it means that its neighbourhood in the east and south continues to be volatile and potentially war-prone. A plot of countries that experienced democratic decline between 2018 and 2021 as well as high levels of political polarisation (see Figure 1) suggests that Mali, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad and Guinea are at the highest risk today. At the extreme, internal stability may be threatened to a level where also within the EU, such missions may be needed. Indeed, also a number of EU member states experience a both negative change in democracy score and high levels of political polarisation, most notably Austria, Cyprus and France.

Figure 1. Countries experiencing both democratic decline and political polarisation

Political polarisation is a measure of antagonism between political groups, ranging from 'not at all' to 'large extent' (0-4) taken for 2021. Filtered for countries experiencing negative change in democracy score (0-9) between 2018-2021.



Source: VDem

Political polarisation has been reverse coded from its original representation by VDem so that the highest value level indicates the highest level of polarisation

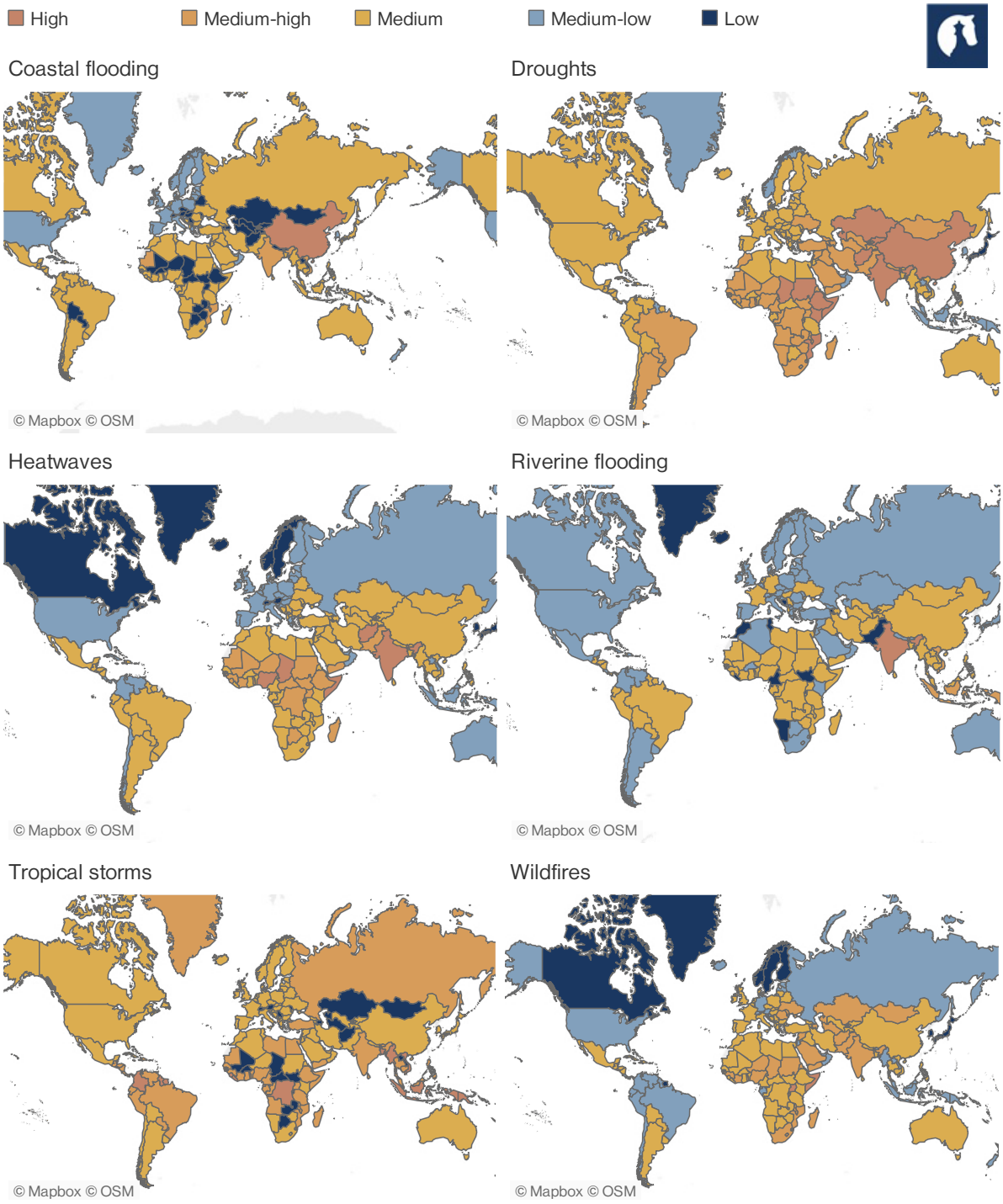
Climate change can fuel interstate conflict as melting ice opens a potential conflict frontier in the Arctic

Climate change

Finally, climate change is heightening the risk of conflict. When converging with existing socio-political and environmental factors, climate change-induced scarcity of water, food and land resources may stoke intrastate conflict, especially when mitigation measures add to marginalisation and inequality. The risk of interstate scarcity-related war also heightens, for instance when a country's water management negatively affects a downstream neighbour. Migration and the resulting urbanisation caused by slow-onset climate change or rapid-onset hazards also add to social tensions as they exacerbate scarcity, feelings of relative deprivation and ethnic tensions. In places where climate change-induced livelihood insecurity coincides with state fragility, non-state armed groups may proliferate, stoking terrorism, guerrilla warfare and potentially civil war. Finally, climate change can fuel interstate conflict as melting ice opens a potential conflict frontier in the Arctic, and as tensions may rise over climate mitigation measures such as geoengineering. As Figure 2 shows, climate-induced vulnerability exists across all continents but the likelihood of hazards to occur and the prospective adverse consequences on natural and human systems vary. Heatwave-induced vulnerability is highest in the Sahel, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India; droughts affect most of South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and China. Coastal flooding poses particular challenges to China, India, Vietnam as well as parts of Africa, most notably Mauritania and Mozambique. Meanwhile India, Indonesia and Vietnam are above-average vulnerable to riverine flooding, while tropical storms may affect most of the globe (with the wealthier countries less vulnerable).

Figure 2. Climate hazard likelihood and potential insecurity risk

The relative risk to national security following the advent of a climate hazard (0-100)



Source: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS)
For more information on how climate related insecurity risks are calculated, please see: https://hcss.nl/report/climate-security-assessment-a-methodology-and-assessment-of-the-nexus-between-climate-hazards-and-security-of-nations-and-regions/

Table 1. Trends, security implications, geographical manifestation, policy implications

	Sub-trends	Security implications	Regions	Policy implications
Strategic competition	Great power rivalry; China's politico-military rise; Russian aggression and revisionism	Competition over spheres of influence, territory and resources; access to sealines of communication and space; hybrid conflicts	Eastern Europe (non-NATO/EU territory); EU/NATO territory; the Indo-Pacific; the Arctic; Africa	Deterrence and assurance; counter-hybrid; sanctions and law enforcement; freedom of navigation and overflight; countering threats in space; high-intensity warfare
Technological advancements and proliferation	Proliferation and qualitative improvements in weapon technologies; introduction of non-kinetic and non-traditional technologies such as drones, cyber and AI; erosion if international norms and treaties	Lowering threshold for use of weapons; pre-emptive strikes; hybrid conflicts	EU/NATO territory; the Middle East; the Indo-Pacific; Central Asia; the Americas	Deterrence and assurance; sanctions and law enforcement; counter-hybrid; arms control and non-proliferation efforts; countering threats in space
Political and social volatility	Polarisation along ethnic, religious and ideological lines; erosion of democracy; state fragility; violent extremism; digitalisation; economic, demographic and environmental pressures	Civil war; polarisation; hybrid conflicts	The Middle East; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Eastern Europe (non-NATO/EU territory); EU/NATO territory	Peace enforcement and stabilisation; counterinsurgency and counterterrorism; military cooperation with non-NATO (or EU) partners
Climate change	Human-induced global warming causing rising temperatures, sea-level increases, extreme weather events; food, water, energy and health insecurity	Intergroup violence; conflict over resources; polarisation; migration; interstate competition in the Arctic	The Middle East; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; the Arctic	Peace enforcement and stabilisation; disaster relief and humanitarian crisis management; counterinsurgency and counterterrorism (and potentially freedom of navigation; deterrence and assurance)

A closer look: intrastate conflict

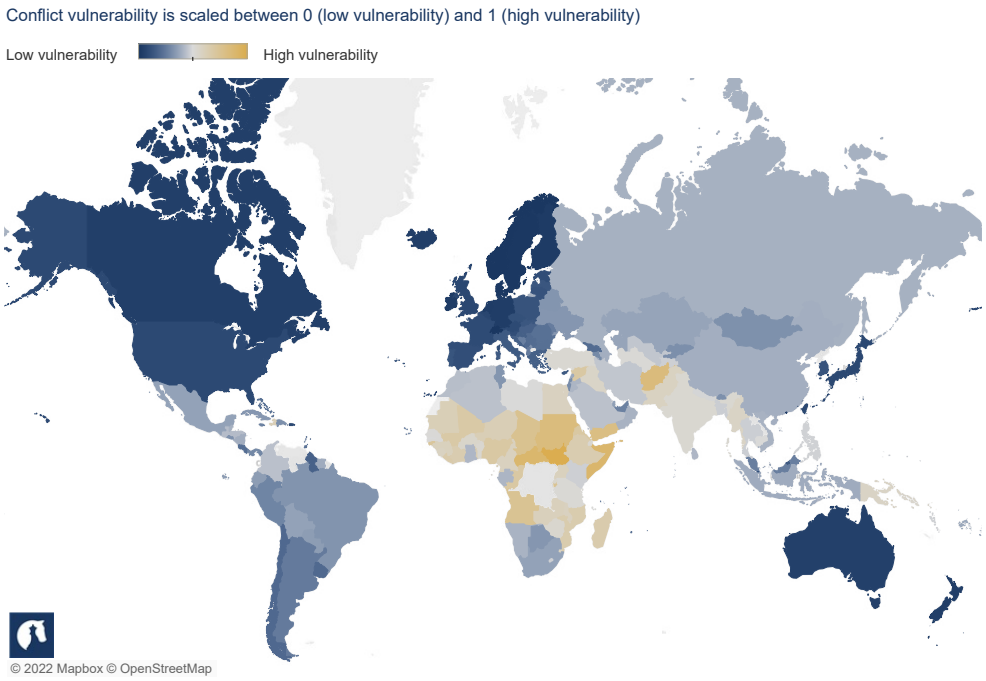
When it comes to intrastate conflict, the world can be divided roughly into zones of peace and zones of violence. Continuing a trend that emerged after the end of the Cold War, civil wars have become concentrated in a few regions of the world around hotspots of violence, including parts of Latin America, the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Northern Africa, and South and South East Asia. According to short- and medium-term conflict risk forecasts (see Figure 3), this trend is set to continue. Strikingly, a declining share of conflicts remains confined within state borders as spill-over of conflict is only becoming ever more prevalent, in line with a longer-term trend.

In Latin America, the toxic mix of political instability, social unrest and drug-related criminality continues to cause conflict while cross-border spill-over effects run high. Drug-related violence inflicted by the state as well as between cartels in Mexico and other parts of the region continues unabated with spiking homicide rates as a result. Venezuela, a safe haven for Colombian guerrilla groups involved in drug trafficking, is torn by strong political instability caused by years of economic mismanagement and corruption, while plummeting oil prices in 2014 and fierce US sanctions have further ravaged the country. Dutch constituent countries and special municipalities in the Caribbean Sea are at risk here. Brazil meanwhile continues

to grapple with criminality and structural social violence caused by economic deprivation and inequality as well as rapid industrialisation and related urbanisation. Resource-related conflicts including over land use and water management, especially surrounding the Amazon river, add to the continuation of violence. In the Sahel, but also in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, war appears ever more contagious, with countries such as Chad, Mali and Sudan at highest risk of conflict in the years to come. In the region, poor governance, democratic backsliding, foreign influencing, insecurity, extreme poverty and the worsening effects of climate change indeed prove fertile ground for terrorism and other forms of violence. Governments appear simply unable to get a grip over their societies. In the Middle East, a continuation of or relapse into conflict in Iraq, Syria and Yemen is to be expected as state fragility, violent extremism, sectarian politics and climate change-induced scarcity remain unresolved. Further eastward, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh grapple with government and development issues. India's heightening polarisation resulting from divisive political leadership and competitive caste politics, paired with unstable economic development, may prove a dangerous catalyst of violence. In Myanmar, a failed democratisation process and the violent reining in of civilian rule by its military apparatus, has plunged the country back into civil war. In the Philippines, conflict and violence are continuing as the state-pursued war on drugs rages on, Islamic militarism remains unresolved and grievances in the newly autonomous Bangsamoro region linger. Table 2 summarises the key sub-trends, resultant conflicts, regions of manifestation, and military mission needs.

A declining share of conflicts remains confined within state borders

Figure 3. Five-year intrastate conflict forecast (2027)



Source: Pardee Institute's International Futures.
Country-year forecasts for vulnerability to intrastate conflict are calculated based on the GOVRISK variable. For the methodology, see: https://pardeewiki.du.edu/index.php?title=Governance#Security.

Table 2. Sub-trends, conflicts, regions, policy implications

	Sub-trends	Security implications	Regions	Policy implications
Intrastate conflict	Structural fragility Internationalisation and spill-over of conflict Resource scarcity	Violent extremism Organised (transnational) crime Democratic backsliding and internal polarisation Climate change-induced security threats and/or resource scarcity	The Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa Latin America The Middle East Central-Asia	Peace enforcement and stabilisation Counterinsurgency and counterterrorism Military cooperation with non-NATO (or EU) partners Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response

Zooming in on interstate war

Over the last two centuries, the majority of interstate wars occurred between so-called rivals: states that view one another as strategic competitors for whatever reason and typically have an unresolved conflict of interest. A total of thirty dangerous dyads appear – for which the outbreak of war will be especially consequential from a European perspective are assessed based on seven risk factors that are both theoretically and empirically related to the outbreak of interstate war: balance of power, power transition, nuclear deterrence, arms races, alliances, regime type similarity, and trade dependence (for an overview of the assessments, see Table 3). Their presence within a dyad either increases or decreases the risk that conflict breaks out. In a nutshell:

Balance of power: According to the balance-of-power logic, the relative military power parity between two states should ceteris paribus produce a certain degree of peace and stability. Higher power differentials instead lead to the heightened risk of escalation. Only three dangerous dyads are roughly, or close to, equal in military power: the US and China, Romania and Hungary, and Israel and Iran in 2032, according to projections. The share of highly unequal dyads is large.

Power transition: Following the power transition logic, a relative decline or increase in one state's power may entice it to initiate war as it either seeks to protect its ascent or prevent further decline. A 2032 forecast of power transitions relative to the balance of power suggests –unsurprisingly perhaps– that the US and China, Ethiopia and Sudan, China and Japan, Egypt and Ethiopia and finally Iran and Saudi Arabia, are at increased risk of conflict escalation.

Nuclear deterrence: Deterrence is particularly strong when *both* states in a dyad possess nuclear weapons. From this perspective, four dyads should therefore be relatively stable: Russia and the US; Russia and NATO; the United States and China; and China and India. All the other dyads are imbalanced and therefore potentially more risk-prone.

Arms build-up: The action-reaction dynamic inherent to arms build-ups may result in either a deliberate or inadvertent escalation to war. Dyads in which both countries are investing heavily in military capabilities are therefore at increased risk of war. Slightly over one-third of all dyads are projected to experience a two-sided arms build-up over the next three years, including Russia and Ukraine, Russia and NATO, Russia and Moldova, Turkey and Greece, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Egypt and Ethiopia, and Japan and North Korea. Dyads experiencing a one-sided build-up are also, yet at a somewhat more limited, risk of war escalation. This is the case for India and China, Vietnam and China, Egypt and Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda, and Sudan and Ethiopia.

Alliances: When a state has meaningful defence commitments from third states, potential attackers may be discouraged – and the dangerous dyad therefore less war-prone. The only dyads in which neither state has official meaningful defence commitments include Kosovo and Serbia; China and India; China and Vietnam; Israel and Iran; and Israel and Palestine. Dyads in which only one state has such commitments include Russia and Georgia; Russia and Ukraine; Russia and Moldova; the US and Venezuela; China and the US: China and Japan; China and Taiwan; Israel and Lebanon; Syria and the US; Iran and Saudi Arabia; and Afghanistan and Pakistan. In these dyads, only the state with meaningful defensive alliance commitments is at a lower risk of being attacked.

One-third of all dyads are projected to experience a two-sided arms build-up over the next three years

Regime similarity: Similarity in regime type has a stabilising influence on the relation between states. Only a handful of dyads share their regime type, including all five African dyads, China and Vietnam, Turkey and Syria, and Iran and Saudi Arabia. According to this logic, for these dyads, the risk of conflict outbreak is therefore lower. Conversely, dyads with different regime types are risky. They include more than half of all assessed dyads, including Russia and the US, NATO, Moldova and Georgia; China and the US, India, Japan, and Taiwan; Israel and Iran, Lebanon and Palestine; and Azerbaijan and Armenia. When states are neither very similar nor very different in their regime type, the effect on conflict risk is either mixed or neutral.

Trade dependence: Greater dependence in terms of trade discourages a potential attacker as the economic loss or so-called exit costs may be too large to sustain. Therefore, for dyads in which a mutual trade dependence exists, the risk of conflict may be lower. Conversely, for dyads with a one-sided trade dependence, the relatively independent state has less to lose as well as more to gain from initiating a conflict; imbalanced dyads in terms of trade dependency are thus at greater risk of conflict escalation. According to this logic, dyads at risk include China and Vietnam, China and Taiwan, Russia and Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Georgia, and finally Turkey and Syria. Slightly imbalanced dyads include China and Japan, Russia and Hungary, and China and India. For all other dyads, both countries are relatively independent in terms of trade, and therefore the effect of their trade relation on conflict outbreak is neutral.

Table 3. Risk factor assessment for 30 dangerous dyads

		Balance of power	Power transition	Nuclear deterrence	Armament build-up	Defensive alliances	Regime similarity	Trade dependence
Russia	Georgia	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
Russia	United States	Not balanced	No power transition	Nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Russia	Ukraine	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Imbalanced
Russia	NATO	Not balanced	No power transition	Nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	N/A
Russia	Moldova	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
Russia	Hungary	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Somewhat imbalanced
Kosovo	Serbia	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	No alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Mutually independent
Turkey	Greece	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Romania	Hungary	Balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Mutually dependent
Armenia	Azerbaijan	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
United States	Venezuela	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
Egypt	Ethiopia	Not balanced	Power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Egypt	Sudan	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Burundi	Rwanda	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Ethiopia	Sudan	Not balanced	Power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Rwanda	Uganda	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Somewhat imbalanced
China	United States	Balanced	Power transition	Nuclear	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Mutually dependent
China	India	Not balanced	No power transition	Nuclear	One-sided build-up	No alliances	Different	Somewhat imbalanced
China	Vietnam	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	No alliances	Similar	Imbalanced
China	Japan	Not balanced	Power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Somewhat imbalanced
China	Taiwan	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
South Korea	North Korea	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Japan	North Korea	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Syria	Turkey	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Similar	Imbalanced
Israel	Iran	Balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	No alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Israel	Lebanon	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Israel	Palestine	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	N/A	No alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Syria	United States	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Iran	Saudi Arabia	Not balanced	Power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Afghanistan	Pakistan	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Somewhat imbalanced

Thinking the unthinkable: systemic war

Unfortunately, not all intrastate wars remain confined within borders, and neither do all interstate wars remain contained between two states. At the most extreme, war contagion and spill-over of war lead to the collapse of an entire international or regional system. Even though systemic wars are rather rare (with a historical track record of eight), they have all-encompassing effects. As policymakers and military planners need to anticipate both wars that are most likely and wars that would be most impactful, systemic war needs to be included in a comprehensive study of future conflict.

The First World War shows that when escalation is badly managed and certain conditions are met, major power tensions may culminate into an all-out, systemic war. More generally, this is more likely when six structural features are present in the international system: when there is a disbalance between raw power and international standing among rising or declining great powers; when great powers vie for regional influence and territories; when a rigid alliance system is in place that allows for major power entrapment into conflict; when nationalist sentiments are on the rise in multiple countries, feeding war proneness among both the elite and population; and finally when smaller powers behave recklessly, feeding tensions between the great powers. Worryingly, in today's international system, four of the structural features are present, one is partially present, and only one is absent (for an overview and comparison with the period preceding the outbreak of the First World War, see Table 4). In short, there is a disbalance between raw material power and international standing, causing revisionist behaviour by China and Russia while the US seeks to maintain the status quo. States increasingly vie for influence and over territory, with the invasion of Ukraine as a key example but weapon transfers from the West to Ukraine also being part of this trend. Foreign policy is clearly becoming militarised, as is demonstrated by that same war and the increasingly belligerent naval presence of China in the South China Sea. Finally, domestic nationalist discourses are becoming more dominant across the world. When it comes to tighter alliance structures, today's track record is mixed, with some countries (Finland and Sweden in NATO and Australia in AUKUS) seeking alliance protection while others (India, South Africa) choosing to hedge at this point. Finally, reckless behaviour by smaller and middle powers remains relatively limited, even if some states, including those in the Gulf, are diversifying their military partnerships in a quest to reap the benefits from the transition into a multipolar world.

Policymakers and military planners need to anticipate both wars that are most likely and wars that would be most impactful

Table 4. System features, comparison 1880-1914 and 2022

System feature	1880-1914: power(s) involved	1880-1914: example(s)	Assessment present situation:	2022: example(s)
Disbalance between raw power and international standing	Germany	Exclusion of Germany from colonial agreements	+	China seeks to recoup its role as the Middle Kingdom; the US pushes back Russia seeks to reclaim its old role as self-perceived empire
Competition over regional influence and territory	All major powers	Alsace-Lorraine; Balkan Wars	+	Russia's invasion of Ukraine; Western weapon transfers to Ukraine; Chinese belligerence on Taiwan; influence campaigns in Africa
Rigid alliance system	All major powers	Triple Entente; Dual alliance	+/-	Tighter alliance structures and increased polarisation; Finland and Sweden joining NATO But also: non-alignment movement (India, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, the UAE, Vietnam)
Militarisation of foreign policy	Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia	Austrian military threats against Serbia	+	Chinese maritime claims and aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea A global increase in threats of use of force
Domestic nationalism	All major powers		+	China's official discourse on ethics, morality and kindship in the relation to Taiwan
Reckless or opportunistic small power behaviour	All major powers, Austria-Hungary and Russia in particular	Serbia pitting Russia and France against Austria-Hungary	-	Within NATO, small and middle powers such as Poland, the Baltics and Slovakia thus far thread carefully. Yet traditional US partners such as the UAE are strengthening their (military) ties with China.

The official views

To anticipate where European militaries will be acting, it is wise to take into account official perceptions of threats and related policy responses as they indeed may shape realities. Official thinking is captured in strategic documents such as NATO's Strategic Concept, the EU's Strategic Compass and national security strategies. In a nutshell, strategic competition features as number one threat especially in US and NATO thinking, with the US' emphasis more on China and NATO's emphasis more on Russia. Meanwhile the EU, even if making significant steps towards aligning the Russian threat perception, also continues to place emphasis on the threats to European security emerging from instability in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Strait of Hormuz. See Table 5 for a summary of the key components of the official threat perceptions.

Table 5. Official security perceptions: threats, missions, regions

	Threats	Missions	Focus regions
The US	Changing distribution of power Disruptive technologies	Deterrence and assurance Military partnerships	Indo-Pacific and Europe
NATO	Russian aggression and revisionism Democratic backsliding Terrorism, conflict, fragility and instability	Deterrence and assurance Military cooperation and training-type missions	Eastern Europe (non-NATO/EU territory)
The EU	Russian aggression and major geopolitical shifts Hybrid threats Climate change	Crisis management Counter-hybrid Military cooperation Freedom of navigation and overflight	Europe The Sahel, Horn of Africa and Strait of Hormuz Indo-Pacific

The expert views

80 European experts have shared their insights on future threats and military missions

Finally, and in addition to official views captured in strategy documents, a total of 80 European experts have shared their insights on future threats and military missions. Carried out in spring 2022, Russia unsurprisingly comes out as the most important security risk (see Figure 4), followed by China's political-military rise, while deterrence and assurance missions are seen as the most important mission types (see Figure 5) for European security forces, with Eastern Europe and EU/NATO territory as the most vital regions. Experts foresee a clear (preferred) division of labour between NATO and the EU, with the former focusing on deterrence, assurance, and high-intensity warfare and the latter taking on disaster relief, humanitarian crisis response, counter hybrid and security cooperation (see Figure 6). Meanwhile ad-hoc coalitions are considered the preferred format for counterterrorism and -insurgency operations. Such a division of labour is not as clearly anticipated in strategic documents by said organisations. Table 6 below offers a summary.

Figure 4. Which are, in your opinion, the most important threats to European security over the next 10 years? Overview of threats that were listed as first, second or third choice.

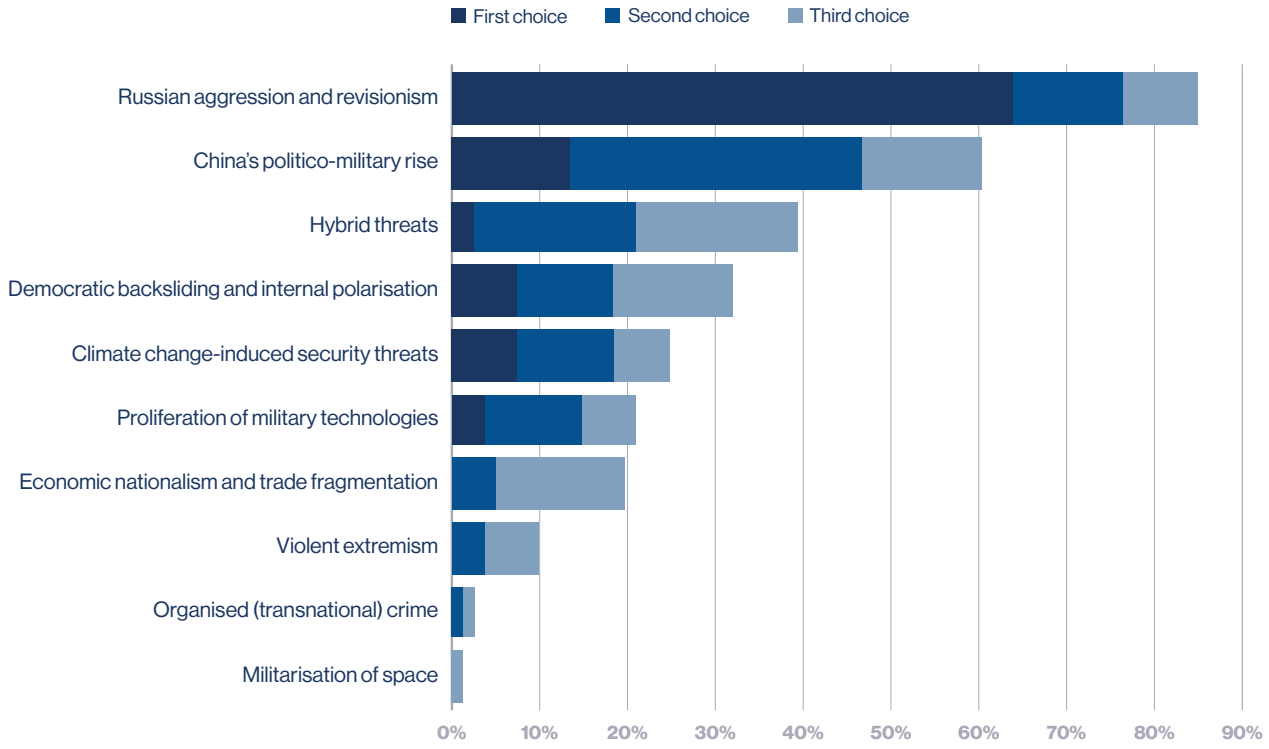


Figure 5. Please rank the military mission types that European armed forces will be carrying out most frequently, either collectively or individually, over the next 10 years, from most likely to least likely. Overview of mission types that were listed as first, second or third choice.

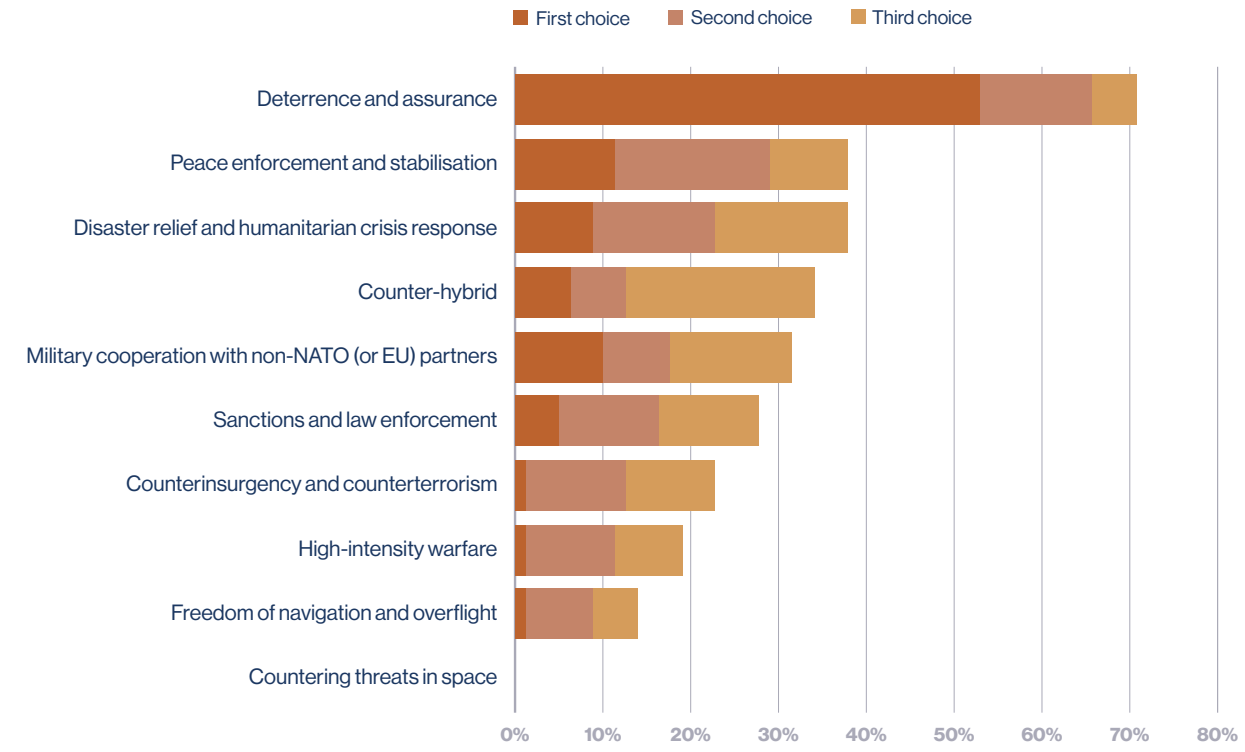


Figure 6. From your perspective, what would be the preferred format to carry out each of the military mission types? Please choose the most preferred format per mission type.

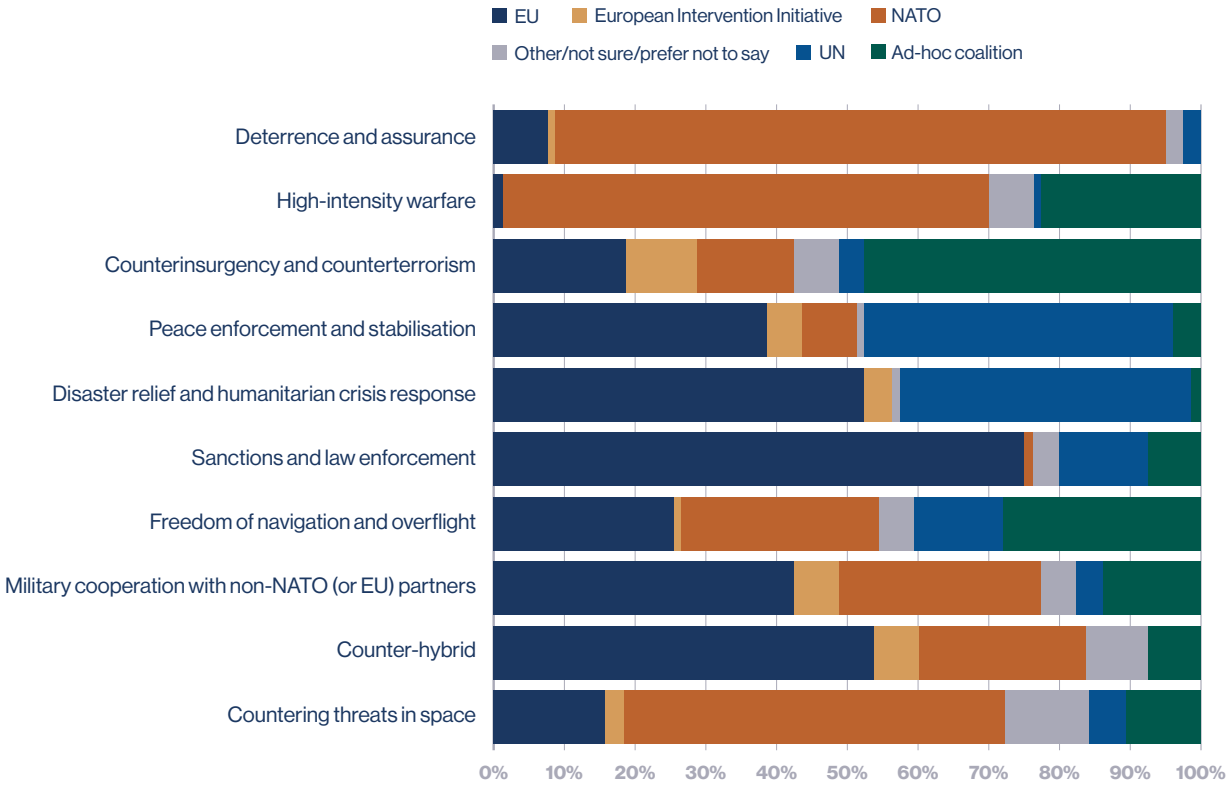


Table 6. Expert survey: threats, missions, regions, task division

	Future threats	Future missions	Most salient future regions	Task division
Expert survey	Great power competition Hybrid threats Democratic backsliding Technological competition	Deterrence and assurance Peace enforcement and stabilisation Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response Counter-hybrid Military cooperation with non-EU/NATO partners	Eastern Europe EU/NATO territory North and Sub-Saharan Africa	NATO: deterrence and assurance; high-intensity warfare; countering threats in space EU: Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response; sanctions and law enforcement; counter-hybrid; military cooperation with non-EU/NATO partners Ad-hoc: counter-terrorism/insurgency

Conclusions and recommendations

Synthesising the main insights on future war and instability from chapter 3 to 8, a total of five of higher level policy imperatives for European militaries emerge. Together, they set out the broader parameters within for more concrete policy steps – which follow in the second part of this conclusion.

Watch out for War with a capital W. The picture that emerges is by all means grim. Conflict between the major military powers is a defining feature of the current era, spurring a radical shift back to the traditional defence tasks of deterrence and assurance. For Europeans, this means a renewed focus on its backyard: Eastern Europe. But the challenges stemming from renewed strategic competition extend well beyond the European continent: as existing rules and norms are being challenged, the protection of sea lines of communication in the Indo-Pacific, the Strait of Hormuz, the Arctic and elsewhere will require attention, resources and capabilities. In addition, the return of great power competition intersects with and adds to regional rivalries such as in the Middle East, emboldening middle powers to advance their strategic interests and compete with one another – either just below or above the threshold of war.

Conflict between the major military powers is a defining feature of the current era

Escape entrapment. If strategic competition is left unchecked and escalation management fails, a full-blown, systemic war may loom. Most of the structural features that have caused the international system to break down before are present today. The risk of systemic collapse is small yet cannot be underestimated given its impact. In this context, risky dyads are those in which great powers are involved on both sides, either directly or through defence commitments. Relevant dyads include Russia-US, Russia-NATO, China-US, China-Japan, China-Taiwan, North Korea-South Korea, and Japan-North Korea. The risk could be higher when the dyad involves a power transition: this is the case for China-US and China-Japan. Non-military means to counter systemic breakdown deserve rigorous examination and preventative measures need to be taken to avoid entrapment and alleviate pressures. So the increases in military budgets and strengthening of military postures need to be combined with sustained diplomatic efforts to keep the channels of communication open. Confidence-building efforts through bilateral and multilateral arrangements need to be pursued while room for manoeuvre for de-escalation is preserved.

Prevent and contain interstate conflict. Even if great powers manage to avert a systemic war, interstate conflict risk is nonetheless projected to increase given a confluence of global trends. Dangerous dyads in Europe and Europe's immediate neighbourhood are, in addition to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, Russia-Moldova, Turkey-Greece, and Armenia-Azerbaijan. In Africa, Egypt-Ethiopia and Ethiopia-Sudan stand out, while in the Middle East the Iranian-Saudi relationship is projected to be unstable. Here too deterrent efforts need to be coupled with preventive measures aimed at preventing war outbreak and containing its spill over effects.

Continue to address global instability factors. Security challenges that occupied policy-makers and militaries in the post-Cold War era have not disappeared. The risks that come with state fragility, including polarisation, violent extremism and intergroup violence, are unlikely to abate. Indeed, new trends and developments further exacerbate such risks. In traditional societies, digitalisation and rapid modernisation can be highly destabilising, while the democratisation of military technology renders such risks increasingly violent. If anything, the reach and scale of these security challenges are expected to rise as the result of increased strategic

competition over zones of influence, and the continuing transnationalisation of violent extremism, and digitalisation. Political and social volatility can be manipulated more effectively by outside actors while advances in communication technologies make discontent, radicalism and polarisation spread further and further. New technologies and battle-tested playbooks will enable hybrid conflict on steroids in the decade to come. A fierce battle of narratives is being fought and 'the West' is by no means on a winning streak. Importantly, such challenges are not constrained to foreign lands; European societies are by no means immune to radicalisation, polarisation and democratic decline.

Even if strategic and interstate competition has become policymakers' main worry, intrastate wars and other forms of political and social volatility will thus demand attention and resources. Efforts to tackle the structural drivers of vulnerability, escape conflict traps and make pillars of progress advance and not undermine societies need to be revamped. European militaries are thus expected to be stretched across domains, regions and mission types. Stabilisation, peace enforcement, disaster-relief, counter-hybrid, and military cooperation all feature high. The Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa, but also the Middle East and Eastern Europe demand attention.

An ever-larger variety of military capacities will be required and expected from European states in a growing number of regions

Address the climate-security nexus. Last, global warming leads to increasing insecurity over food, water, energy and health, causing people to flee and pitting communities, countries and regions against one another. The Middle East, North-Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arctic are the regions where the conflict risks will be most severe. Given their proximity and relevance to Europe, Europeans cannot look the other way. Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis management, peace enforcement and stabilisation, but also counterterrorism activities will therefore occupy their militaries.

1.1 Policy recommendations

Even if strategic alignment among European (and NATO) countries is taking place, allowing for better prioritisation, the challenges ahead are manifold and the implications for policy responses diffuse. As the world is growing increasingly complex and belligerent, an ever-larger variety of military capacities will be required and expected from European states in a growing number of regions. Even with deterrence and assurance missions becoming Europe's most important military activity, more typical post-Cold War security challenges are not necessarily going away, therewith sustaining the need for security force assistance, and counterinsurgency and peacekeeping missions in its neighbourhood. The rapidly crystalising effects of climate change add additional layers of fragility, while new technologies already spur a demand for counter-hybrid activities and soon/already also the need for counter-space threats capacity. Freedom of navigation and overflight are likely to be challenged by major, small and non-state powers alike, yet access to the global commons will remain fundamental to European security and prosperity. Finally, should deterrence missions fail, Europe may find itself dragged into high-intensity warfare, either in its direct neighbourhood or elsewhere. In such a scenario, alliance commitments may force Europe to act, also beyond its own region.

European militaries – currently racing to catch up in terms of capabilities, planning and strategy – will thus be stretched. Even with well-thought-through prioritisations, reality can catch up, and states will not always have the freedom to choose where to get involved. Policy recommendations therefore are:

1. Deter and assure. Russia's belligerence pushes European militaries to focus on revamping their deterrence and assurance postures and capabilities. Europe should:

1.1 Move forward and intensify efforts to implement NATO's New Force Model. This includes enhancing NATO's presence on the eastern flank through replacing current battlegroups by brigade-sized units with prepositioned stocks for heavily armoured vehicles and as such complement the deterrence-by-punishment component of the Alliance's deterrence posture with a more robust deterrence-by-denial component. NATO needs to ensure the readiness of 100,000 troops in less than 10 days, 200,000 troops within 30 days and at least 500,000 troops in 1-6 months; with an Allied Reaction Force of 40,000 troops (replacing the NATO Response Force) to be deployable before a crisis occurs; Europeans should contribute equally to achieve set goals.

1.2 Increase investments in defensive and offensive capabilities. The new strategic environment requires increased European investments in its defence posture and as such bolster the European NATO pillar. European states should invest in deep strike as well as A2/AD capabilities, yet also rapidly fill current deficiencies such as in command-and-control capacity, combat service support, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). In addition, Europe needs to overcome ammunition as well as personnel shortages.

The new strategic environment requires increased European investments in its defence posture

1.3 Ensure alliance and EU cohesion. Throughout the first months of the Russo-Ukrainian war, NATO has shown remarkable cohesion. Allies should not take it as a given that this will inevitably continue as the war continues, or when other security challenges arise. Therefore, allies should coordinate closely, fulfil their alliance commitments, and reaffirm and ensure the fulfilment of democratic principles on which NATO is founded. Concretely, this means that the rule of law needs defending across the alliance and within the EU, including in countries such as Hungary, Poland and Turkey .

1.4 Increase the ability of NATO partners to fend for themselves. Invest in military cooperation programmes such as the NATO Partnership for Peace or the European Peace Facility to bolster military capabilities of partner states and therewith discourage potentially revisionist behaviour by third states (a so-called porcupine strategy). Georgia, Moldova and naturally Ukraine should take priority.

1.5 Re-examine the arms control-deterrence nexus. Even if current times are barely optimal for arms control, deterrence ultimately depends on it. Increased time, efforts and resources need to be dedicated also to arms control, non-proliferation and confidence-building measures, including dialogues on doctrines and postures, information exchanges, hotlines, and pre-notifications. In particular, increased attention should be paid to how such measures relate to deterrence.

1.6 Dedicate effort and resources to nuclear security and safety. With nuclear deterrence once again taking a prominent position in NATO's revamped deterrence and assurance strategy, ensuring the safety and security of nuclear forces and arrangement is extremely important, to ensure the safety of civilians and set an example to nuclear powers elsewhere.

1.7 Hold explorative discussions on European nuclear burden sharing. Today's changing security landscape and perception thereof as well as the uncertainty with regard to a sustained US interest in European security spur the need to reinvigorate initial discussions on the role of French and British nuclear forces in Europe's collective security.

Such discussions were first brought up by French president Emmanuel Macron in 2020 and could be carried forward.

2. Get serious about European specialisation. To efficiently deploy European capabilities and overcome current deficiencies such as in command-and-control capacity, combat service support, airlift, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, multinational defence cooperation should be advanced. Ultimately, European militaries should be able to carry out Libya-type operations independently from the United States. Concretely, Europe should:

2.1 Further invest in and expand structured capability groups for collective defence purposes. This can be done per region. For instance, the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force could be developed into a structured capability group for Northern Europe with participating countries contributing different capabilities.

A European intervention group with the flexibility for the UK to participate in could be established to bring together specialised capabilities for higher-end operations

2.2 Establish *functional* structured capability groups, for instance to allow for European crisis management autonomy. In addition to the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5000 troops, a European intervention group with rapid decision-making procedures and the flexibility for the UK to participate in could be established to bring together specialised capabilities for higher-end operations; while stabilisation groups could pool sources for lower-end post-conflict operations.

2.3 Advance integration between national armed forces. For example, further integration of the Dutch and the German armies will be necessary to ensure availability and readiness of troops as the battlegroup in Lithuania is being transformed into a heavy brigade.

3. Invest in a strong European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB). Across Europe, military budgets have increased by roughly 40%. Dealing with time pressure to fill capability gaps rapidly, Europeans however will be inclined to spend uncoordinatedly and buy off-the-shelf products from non-European defence industries. This would increase Europe's capability fragmentation, erode its defence sector and undermine European defence integration writ large. Instead, Europeans should:

3.1 Coordinate capability priorities through existing frameworks to identify and plug capability gaps. Examples include the EU's Capability Development Plan (CDP) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) as well as NATO's Defence Planning Capability Review (DPCR) and related Capability Targets. National defence funding plans have often been insufficient for the implementation of these capability priorities, in part because NATO defence planning priorities have been misaligned with national ones. Given the complexity and severity of today's threat environment, cautious alignment between national and NATO/EU capability priorities is necessary.

3.2 Coordinate procurement. As Europeans are rushing to replenish their stocks and increase the quantity of their defence equipment, they should work together to avoid fragmentation, ensure interoperability, and increase their leverage vis-à-vis sellers. Collective procurement of additional PAC-3 missiles among European Patriot users is an example. The recently proposed a *Short Term Instrument for increasing collaboration of the Member States in the defence procurement phase* should be established. That said, coordinated procurement of complex systems and platforms is only feasible among close strategic partners (e.g. the Netherlands and Germany) as it depends on the synchronisation of development and procurement cycles.

3.3 Create European Champions capable of carrying out large scale defence projects along the production and procurement cycle, including research and development, production, after-sales services and upkeep/upgrade programmes. A strong industrial policy at the European (not national) level is key to avoid fragmentation and allow for European industries to deliver both quantitatively and qualitatively, for instance in the domain of aerospace, naval platforms, missile technology and missile defence. At the same time, ensure that small and medium size defence players – who are crucial to innovation – have access to funding programmes and the supply chains of the large system integrators. For instance, it could be wise to fund the development of capabilities by small coalitions consisting of one large producer supported by a limited set of smaller ones based on excellence – instead of very large coalitions of providers based on geographical spread.

3.4 Strike a balance between renovation and innovation. Industrial efforts should be carefully balanced to ensure that the military needs of both today and the future are met. To ensure the continuing existence of a European defence industry, the need to innovate cannot be overlooked. Increased government support for education and R&D is necessary. Concretely, European states should increase their R&D investment to at least 2% of military expenditures as recommended by the European Defence Agency.

Concretely, European states should increase their R&D investment to at least 2% of military expenditures

4. Share responsibilities and capabilities with allies and partners. In an increasingly complex and dangerous world, Europe cannot do everything, everywhere. For example, deterring Russia in the Baltics and Eastern Europe requires different capabilities than deterring China in the Indo-Pacific. Choices need to be made, in consultation with allies and partners outside of Europe, and a division of labour is inevitable. European NATO partners should:

4.1 Consult with non-European NATO partners on effective burden-sharing, designating different tasks among alliance members to avoid a duplication of efforts or militaries being stretched too thin. In the short term, the balance between US and European boots on the ground in the east should be carefully considered. A permanent presence of (European) NATO countries in the Baltic States and Poland – which as of now NATO countries deployed there cannot furnish simply because of troop shortages – can help rebalance the European contribution to NATO's collective defence.

4.2 Closely cooperate and coordinate with partners in the Indo-Pacific; share and pool resources and infrastructure already present in the region; and designate zones of responsibility to secure sealines of communication, whereby Europe could focus on waters closer to Europe such as the Western Indian Ocean.

4.3 Think beyond 2024. In their strategic planning, Europeans should think ahead and carefully consider the potential that alliance commitments will not always be as robust as they appear today. The potential of a future US administration revising its defence posture in and commitment to Europe forced Europeans to take more responsibility for their own security. European states should strike a careful if not precarious balance between transatlanticism and Europeanism, showing their commitment to the alliance yet also building towards a future in which its existence may be jeopardised.

5. Prepare for a future in which access to resources, technology and space is not necessarily a given. Concretely, European militaries should:

5.1 Prepare to take a more active role in securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs) by ensuring the appropriate naval capabilities. Further analysis of future resources and supply chain vulnerabilities is needed to allow for an effective anticipation of future military capability needs. The Arctic is one such focus region, with the Joint Expeditionary Force as a potential structured capability group to assume responsibility here. For the securing of SLOCs further away from Europe (e.g. the Indo-Pacific), blue water naval capabilities should be pooled and shared – potentially within the EU given its collective interest – and potentially integrated into permanent structured capability groups.

5.2 Step up efforts to secure access to space-based communication and increase resilience of its space capabilities. Efforts within the EU to ensure space-based secure connectivity are slowly picking up and should be intensified: they include Galileo, Copernicus and the recently proposed Security Connectivity Initiative.

6. Continue developing capabilities to engage in hybrid conflict and hybrid war. Given the enormous humanitarian, economic, and military costs associated with interstate war, states are likely to continue competing under the threshold of large-scale violence, including in cyberspace or through the use of proxies.

European states should strike a careful if not precarious balance between transatlanticism and Europeanism

6.1 Enhance the resilience of vital infrastructure. For instance, the coast guard and navy could assume a more active role in surveilling and protecting underseas communication cables in for instance the North Sea.

6.2 Strengthen defensive and offensive cyber capabilities to allow for in-band (within domain) responses -and therewith strengthen the potential for smaller states to deploy an "asymmetric deterrence" capability vis-à-vis larger states. It also requires enhanced abilities to detect and defend against cyberattacks to reduce vulnerability. For cyber deterrence to succeed, coordination among government agencies; state and private actors; and international partners is necessary.

6.3 Bolster societal resilience within Europe and elsewhere, to decrease vulnerability against foreign influencing and counter polarisation. Outside of the EU, the focus should be with NATO Europe's eastern and southern flanks, especially Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Dutch constituent countries and special municipalities in the Caribbean Sea. Engage with the private sector and leverage legal instruments to reduce opportunities for meddling via social media and other online platforms. Invest in education on democratic principles. A role for the military could be to strengthen awareness of security risks across all domains.

7. Prepare for a hot and unstable world. Global warming is rapidly creating myriad security risks, and militaries – known for their vast carbon footprints – cannot stay behind in preparing for such challenges and work towards a cleaner organisation themselves.

7.1 Invest in climate-related contingency preparedness through incorporating climate risk scenarios in war games and exercises. Prepare for an increased role in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and other types of defence support to civil authorities.

7.2 Incentivise research and development to decrease militaries' carbon footprint. This entails moving towards carbon-free electricity for and net zero emissions from army installations as well as developing and investing in electrified vehicles fleets and more.

7.3 Help address third countries deal with the impact of climate change, even if the direct impact costs are not directly affecting Europe, to help mitigate potential conflict instigators. Additional funding for countries most at risk of climate-change-induced conflict can prove cost-effective in the future. Continue embedding climate security risks within development cooperation policy programmes, for instance by ensuring fair access to water and food resources through equitable governance arrangements.

8. Lastly: it should be clear that meeting security threats requires more than kinetic capabilities. Instead, leverage all instruments of influence. The effective implementation of a comprehensive toolbox and holistic approach to security is therefore essential and diplomatic and political instruments need to be brought to bear alongside robust defence capabilities. Note that defence organisations have a key role to play here too especially by taking early warning, conflict prevention, and military diplomacy seriously. Europeans should:

Invest in climate-related contingency preparedness through incorporating climate risk scenarios in war games and exercises

8.1 Invest in the military, diplomatic and political capabilities to mitigate interstate and intrastate conflict risk. Strengthen early warning capabilities and create a link with early action within ministries of defence and foreign affairs. Target Security Force Assistance accordingly. Develop the human capital (cadres of trained diplomats, military attaches, and conflict resolution professionals), the knowledge and expertise, the institutional infrastructure, and the networks with NGOs, to facilitate conflict prevention, mediation and conflict resolution.

1. Introduction

1.1. A world in transition

The global order is experiencing its largest shift since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, carrying profound implications for Europe. A brief period of post-Cold War US hegemony has eroded as its principal contesters China and Russia have embraced norm-setting and rule-breaking roles. Smaller and middle powers are pushing the boundaries in a world order in flux. After three decades of conducting expeditionary operations, European states are once again preparing for high-intensity warfare. Meanwhile, the nature of the transatlantic relationship is changing. The United States has pivoted to the Indo-Pacific region as its competition with China accelerates. Even if recent events and commitments suggest differently,[1] a sustained US interest in Europe is far from certain. In the long run, the US is expected to prioritise other geographic theatres at the expense of Europe and nearby regions – whether by necessity or by choice. Russia's war against Ukraine was for many European leaders a – cynics would say *another* – strategic wake-up call. The war has led to significant boosts to defence budgets across Europe to rebuild dilapidated military capabilities across the continent. It has prompted Finland and Sweden to find shelter under the collective defence umbrella provided by the transatlantic Alliance after close to seventy-five years of non-alignment. And in addition to NATO strengthening its defence and deterrence posture – increasing the number of high readiness forces to 300,000 at the Madrid Summit – the war is also providing further impetus to ongoing efforts within the European Union to step up its role in this realm.

Future-proof choices need to be made that address the principal security challenges and pinpoint necessary policy responses

If one thing is clear, Europe will need to assume a greater role in maintaining peace and stability in its own region and neighbourhood. Its security is directly affected by conflict risks in Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa including the Sahel, the Middle East, South Asia, the Caribbean (where France, the UK, and the Netherlands have constituent countries and special municipalities), and, in the coming years, the Arctic and outer space. Even with the current reinforcements of military postures across Europe, material and political constraints will not disappear. Therefore future-proof choices need to be made that address the principal security challenges and pinpoint necessary policy responses. There is an urgent need to think about necessary investments and capability portfolios in the long term, including but also beyond the current war in Ukraine. For fundamental decisions to be future-proof, a reflection on the future security landscape and operating environment is required. That is where the present foresight study comes in.

This study reflects on the implications of the changes in our strategic environment and the resultant shift in priorities for European militaries. Using a multi-method approach, it explores

1 Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the US deployed 20,000 additional troops to Europe. At the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, the US additionally committed a V Corps Headquarters Forward Command Post in Poland, an additional rotational Brigade Combat Team in Europe, enhanced rotational deployments in the Baltic region, two additional destroyers stationed in Rota, Spain, and two squadrons of F-35 aircraft to the UK, as well as additional air defence and other enablers to Germany and Italy. The White House, "FACT SHEET: The 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid," The White House, June 29, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/29/fact-sheet-the-2022-nato-summit-in-madrid/.

where Europe is most likely to intervene militarily over the next ten years. To address this question, it anticipates where armed conflict and instability are most likely to occur and how European interests will be affected. Conflict- and instability-related risks that require some form of military response include but are not limited to large-scale war between states, persistent low-level conflict between warring groups, violent attacks by transnational groups, and one-sided violence by governments against minorities within their borders. And this is not mere speculation or doom say: these different forms of violence are already present in contemporary conflict theatres in Europe and its immediately adjacent regions today.[2] This study, therefore, considers conflict and instability-related risks from multiple angles and at different levels of analysis. It examines four global trends[3] and their broader security implications for Europe. It looks at the likelihood of the onset of armed conflict within states and between states in regions relevant to Europe, and evaluates the likelihood of war contagion and escalation. And it takes stock of current official and expert strategic thinking in Europe and the US about the future of military interventions. Each section describes conflict- and instability-related security risks and considers their consequences for European interventions. The conclusion canvasses the insights gained and synthesises the main lessons.

The study is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 offers a concise description of the methods employed;
- Chapter 3 summarises global trends and reviews their security implications;
- Chapter 4 assesses the onset of intrastate political violence;
- Chapter 5 examines a breakdown of the most dangerous dyads to identify risks of interstate war;
- Chapter 6 looks at the risk of war onset and escalation leading to systemic war;
- Chapter 7 analyses official and expert discourse in Europe and the US on future interventions;
- Chapter 8 synthesises the insights and concludes.

2 Shawn Davies, Therése Pettersson, and Magnus Öberg, "Organized Violence 1989–2021 and Drone Warfare," *Journal of Peace Research* 59, no. 4 (July 1, 2022): 593–610.

3 Trends in general are "discernable patterns of change". Macro-trends are "major shifts in the demographic, environmental, economic, technological, political and cultural landscapes that can be foreseen with a relatively high degree of certainty, though their implications are often more uncertain or ambiguous". Finally, *mega-trends* are "those developments already underway and nearly impossible to change over the coming decade", therewith inevitably shaping "all the subsequent possible futures". Climate change is a key example. The United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence, "Global Strategic Trends - Out to 2040" (Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), 2010), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654717/GST4_v9_Feb10_archived.pdf; Florence Gaub, "Global Trends to 2030: Challenges and Choices for Europe" (European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), 2019); "Macrotrends and Disruptions Shaping 2020-2030" (World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)), accessed July 26, 2022, https://docs.wbcsd.org/2020/05/WBCSD_V2050IB_Macrotrends_Disruptions_20202030.pdf.

2. A word on method

Because (good) policymaking is inherently about the future, foresight is useful if not indispensable

Because (good) policymaking is inherently about the future, foresight is useful if not indispensable. Even if it continues to be extremely hard to predict the future, foresight (which is not the same as prediction) helps us better understand dynamics of change, generate new ideas and policy options, focus our attention on the long-term, and facilitate the adoption of future-oriented policymaking tools. Crucially, it helps policymakers be aware of and deal with uncertainty. In a quest for research to be policy-relevant, studies typically end with policy consequences or recommendations that are essentially extrapolated from an analysis of the presence and assumptions about the future. In doing so, studies not only come to rely on systemic biases but also typically ignore the inherent uncertainty that comes with anticipating the future.[4] Foresight studies help policymakers refocus on these uncertainties and lay out policy options based on the uncertainties identified through foresight methods.[5] Thus, contrary to assumption-driven policy recommendations, foresight studies' policy prescriptions are truly future-oriented, whether erroneous or not.

To that purpose, the study combines various methods, theories and observers to identify potential conflicts and their implications for European military deployments, including system analysis, predictive modelling and expert judgement. Through a multi-method approach in which both quantitative and qualitative methods are combined, the credibility and validity of research increase as biases are countered – indeed known as triangulation; the scope or breadth of a study widened; and the understanding of a phenomenon enriched as a multiplicity of methods brings complementary insights. Additionally, results from earlier methods can inform the development of later ones. Finally, seemingly contradictory findings that emerge from different methods can generate new perspectives.[6] In foresight exercises like this one, such advantages associated with a multi-method approach are invaluable if not indispensable: with a subject as complex as the future, tunnel visions loom and biases creep in.[7] Therefore, this study combines a number of methods: desk research and literature review of systemic trends; predictive models for intrastate conflict; a quantitative analysis of theory-based risk factors for interstate conflict; a case study of systemic war outbreak; a review of official documents; and finally an expert survey.

4 Charles F. Manski, *Public Policy in an Uncertain World: Analysis and Decisions* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

5 Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "One without the Other? Prediction and Policy in International Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (July 18, 2022): sqac036.

6 Cathie Hammond, "The Wider Benefits of Adult Learning: An Illustration of the Advantages of Multi- method Research," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 3 (July 2005): 239–55; Jennifer C. Greene, Valerie J. Caracelli, and Wendy F. Graham, "Toward a Conceptual Framework for Mixed-Method Evaluation Designs," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 11, no. 3 (September 1989): 255–74.

7 Andrea Bonaccorsi, Riccardo Apreda, and Gualtiero Fantoni, "Expert Biases in Technology Foresight. Why They Are a Problem and How to Mitigate Them," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 151 (February 2020): 119855; Elna Schirrmeister, Anne- Louise Göhring, and Philine Warnke, "Psychological Biases and Heuristics in the Context of Foresight and Scenario Processes," *FUTURES & FORESIGHT SCIENCE* 2, no. 2 (June 2020).

2.1. Overview of methods

2.1.1. Desk research and literature review of global trends

A literature review of existing similar exercises complemented by and refined with expert judgment brings forth four systemic trends that bear implications for the future of conflict. Each trend constitutes a higher level aggregation and clustering of smaller trends that combined point to major shifts with significant ramifications for both international and domestic order. The four trends identified include interstate strategic competition, technological advancements and proliferation, political and social volatility, and climate change. For each trend, the implications for international security and the resultant demands on European defence capabilities are identified.

2.1.2. Predictive models for intrastate conflict

Using predictive models created by HCSS and the Pardee Centre for International Futures, 1-, 5- and 10-year intrastate conflict projections are generated to identify countries that are most likely to experience intrastate conflict using a combination of econometric conflict modelling and machine learning techniques. Thanks to the growth of big data and introduction of new forecasting methods, conflict models have reached predictive accuracy levels as high as 80%.[8] Even so, challenges remain.[9] Models are most successful at predicting the continuation of instability, while forecasting war onset in countries without a conflict history has proven more difficult.[10] Models focused on binary outcomes still dominate (will conflict occur, yes or no) but models accounting for the levels of violence or conflict duration are still few and far between.[11] Some studies of predictive accuracy have shown that model performance varies across different time periods, highlighting the versatility of conflict drivers.[12] While such caveats are to be taken into account when using conflict prediction data, they should not lead to a dismissal of the use of these models altogether for two reasons. First, for conflict forecasting to be policy-relevant, predictions need to be explicitly made in the first place, even with the risk of being wrong.[13] Second, while these models are by no means a crystal bowl, insights derived from them are best in class in the realm of contemporary conflict prediction.[14]

8 Tate Ryan-Mosley, "We Are Finally Getting Better at Predicting Organized Conflict," MIT Technology Review, accessed June 20, 2022, https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/10/24/238426/predicting-organized-conflict-ensemble-modeling-ethiopia-ahmed/. Håvard Hegre, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, and Peder Landsverk, "Can We Predict Armed Conflict? How the First 9 Years of Published Forecasts Stand Up to Reality," *International Studies Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (September 7, 2021): 660–68. For a review of different models that include an older version of the HCSS predictive model, see also Matina Halkia et al., "The Global Conflict Risk Index: A Quantitative Tool for Policy Support on Conflict Prevention," *Progress in Disaster Science* 6 (April 2020): 100069.

9 Thomas Chadefaux, "Conflict Forecasting and Its Limits," ed. Tobias Kuhn, *Data Science* 1, no. 1–2 (December 8, 2017): 7–17.

10 Samuel Bazzi et al., "The Promise and Pitfalls of Conflict Prediction: Evidence from Colombia and Indonesia," *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, May 9, 2022, 1–16.

11 Exceptions exist, see for instance Stijn van Weezel, "Food Imports, International Prices, and Violence in Africa," *Oxford Economic Papers* 68, no. 3 (2016): 758–81; Ursula Daxecker and Brandon Prins, "Financing Rebellion: Using Piracy to Explain and Predict Conflict Intensity in Africa and Southeast Asia," *Journal of Peace Research* 54 (March 1, 2017): 002234331668343.

12 Drew Bowlsby et al., "The Future Is a Moving Target: Predicting Political Instability," *British Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (October 2020): 1405–17.

13 Michael D Ward, Brian D Greenhill, and Kristin M Bakke, "The Perils of Policy by P-Value: Predicting Civil Conflicts," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 4 (July 2010): 363–75.

14 Micheal Ward, "Can We Predict Politics? Toward What End?," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2016): 80–91.

2.1.3. **Dangerous dyads: correlates of war**

Interstate conflicts occur most often within the context of rivalries that feature a history of conflict as well as unresolved disputes especially over territory.[15] On that basis, a list of 30 dangerous dyads with particular relevance to Europe is drawn up and assessed based on seven key risk factors: balance of power, power transition, nuclear deterrence, arms build-ups, alliances, regime type similarity, and trade dependence (see Annex A). These characteristics of the dyads should not be read as point predictions of future war onset but should be considered as heightened risk factors. This approach is taken rather than a predictive model approach such as for the onset of intrastate conflict because the unpredictability of interstate wars remains high. Historical data to draw from is scarce,[16] and the phenomenon itself highly idiosyncratic,[17] complicating the development of predictive models. Even if structural conditions can be successfully identified, catalysts are much harder to point down and generalise.[18] Despite such difficulties, efforts to anticipate the future of interstate war are necessary. They help us study the future of conflict in a systematic way, help disentangle the structural correlates of war onset, and force policymakers to shift attention accordingly.[19] So rather than using a full-fledged predictive model we consider the correlates of war onset or, using a medical analogy, risk factors that are recognised in the conflict literature increase the risk of war onset.[20]

Interstate conflicts occur most often within the context of rivalries that feature a history of conflict

2.1.4. **Case study: steps to systemic war**

War contagion and spill-over are extremely difficult to capture in quantitative predictive models.[21] Yet, systemic wars,[22] which lead to a breakdown of the existing international or regional system, result from war contagion,[23] have the highest impact and are the most destructive. Prudent policymakers therefore consider the risks associated with systemic war onset and war contagion. A case study is used to capture the dynamic step-by-step process through which a systemic war may break out in the contemporary system. The period leading up to the First World War was selected to describe how international frictions throughout 1880-1914 eventually cumulated into a world war.

15 John Vasquez and Christopher S. Leskiw, "The Origins and War Proneness of Interstate Rivalries," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (June 2001): 295–316.

16 The N of interstate war is low: since 1816, 97 interstate wars were fought. See "COW War Data, 1816 - 2007 (v4.0) — Correlates of War," Folder, accessed July 19, 2022, https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/COW-war. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war were added manually.

17 Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Michael D Ward, "Forecasting Is Difficult, Especially about the Future: Using Contentious Issues to Forecast Interstate Disputes," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 1 (January 2013): 17–31.

18 Gleditsch and Ward.

19 In line with the goal of the initiator of the Correlates of War project. See David J. Singer, "The 'Correlates of War' Project: Interim Report and Rationale" 24, no. 2 (1972): 243–70.

20 Daniel S. Geller and J. David Singer, *Nations at War: A Scientific Study of International Conflict*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

21 Håvard Hegre, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, and Peder Landsverk, "Can We Predict Armed Conflict? How the First 9 Years of Published Forecasts Stand Up to Reality," *International Studies Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (September 7, 2021): 660–68.

22 Systemic wars are defined as "entailing the breakdown of the international [or regional] system as it existed prior to the outbreak of war", leading to the rise of new great powers and the decline of older ones, as well as "to later extensive efforts to restructure the system in ways that presumably will prevent the emergence of another widespread conflict of this type (e.g., Westphalia, Vienna, Versailles, or San Francisco". To yield a systemic breakdown, a large number of participating countries and civilian-military participation is required. Manus I. Midlarsky, "A Hierarchical Equilibrium Theory of Systemic War," *International Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (March 1986): 77–78.

23 War contagion entails "an imitation of violent behavior which has become possible because the larger ongoing war has provided an opportunity for violence, which in peacetime the existing order had prevented." John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 266.

2.1.5. Official discourse: desk research

To capture current strategic thinking in both Europe and the US (the latter being important given the Transatlantic division of labour), both national, NATO and EU strategy documents are reviewed and synthesised for their main outlook on threats and priorities.

2.1.6. Expert discourse: survey

Expert judgement can be useful to capture current trends in strategic thinking, and help anticipate what prioritisations and policy choices will be made

An expert survey is conducted with European experts to take stock of current strategic thinking on security and defence. Expert judgement can be useful to capture current trends in strategic thinking, and help anticipate what prioritisations and policy choices will be made. It should be noted that this method is not without criticism. Studies have shown that risk assessments between experts and lay people do not differ as greatly in quality as it was previously assumed.[24] In fact, simple algorithms typically beat experts at prediction.[25] Still, even if experts may find it challenging to predict the future, they do exert influence over threat prioritisation and policy responses as they typically advise policymakers.

Table 7. Report structure and method overview

Section	Method	Description
1. Introduction		
2. A word on methods		
3. Global trends and security risks	Desk research and literature review of global trends	A higher level aggregation and clustering of smaller trends that combined point to major shifts with significant ramifications for both international and domestic order
4. The future of intrastate conflict	Predictive modelling	Using a combination of econometric conflict modelling and machine learning techniques, 1-, 5- and 10-year intrastate conflict projections identify countries that are most likely to experience intrastate conflict
5. Dangerous dyads	Risk factor assessment	A risk factor assessment of 30 dangerous dyads points to potentially escalatory interstate conflict dynamics
6. Systemic collapse	Case study	A case study of the period 1880-1914 highlights the dynamic step-by-step process through which systemic wars may break out
7. Perceptions shaping realities: the official views	Review strategic documents	National, NATO and EU strategy documents capture the official outlooks on threats and priorities
8. Perceptions shaping realities: the unofficial views	Expert survey	An expert survey with European experts takes stock of current strategic thinking on security and defence

24 George Wright, Fergus Bolger, and Gene Rowe, "Expert Judgement of Probability and Risk," in *Making Essential Choices with Scant Information: Front-End Decision Making in Major Projects*, ed. T. M. Williams, Knut Samset, and Kjell J. Sunnevåg (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 213–29.

25 Kesten C. Green and J. Scott Armstrong, "The Ombudsman: Value of Expertise for Forecasting Decisions in Conflicts," *Interfaces* 37, no. 3 (June 2007): 287–99; Philip E. Tetlock and Dan Gardner, *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*, Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction (New York, NY, US: Crown Publishers/Random House, 2015); Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment*, 2017.

3. Global trends and security risks

The next ten years of conflict are likely to be shaped by four global trends: interstate strategic competition, especially between the major powers, intensifies; weapon technologies emerge, advance and proliferate; political and social volatility rock the stability of societies; and the effects of climate change take hold.

3.1. Strategic competition

Also at the regional level, great powers and medium powers alike move to exploit this order in flux

Competition between states has been rising and is bound to further intensify. Set to reverse its "century of humiliation", China envisions an international system that accommodates the Chinese Communist Party's ambitions for unchallenged power and rejects democratic ideals and universal values.[26] Russia meanwhile has come out as a determined disruptor, intervening in the post-Soviet sphere, Africa and the Middle East while undermining democratic systems in Europe and the US. The invasion of Ukraine is the most recent and the most excessive demonstration of the extent to which Moscow is willing to go to overturn the status quo and reshape the European security order. The increasingly antagonistic strategic environment in Europe is matched by heating tensions in the Indo-Pacific which is becoming the dominant if not sole focus of US attention and resource allocation. Indeed, strategic competition with China and other nations was explicitly mentioned during the withdrawal from Afghanistan – a move that additionally signals a decreasing appetite (or ability) to play the world's policeman.[27]

Competition does not just intensify among the great powers. Great power rivalries are intersecting with existing regional rifts such as in the Middle East, reinforcing regional competition and adding to instability.[28] With the post-Cold War order eroding, also at the regional level, great powers and medium powers alike move to exploit this order in flux. While the US, China and Russia are leveraging their ties with regional powers like Turkey, Iran, the UAE or Saudi Arabia to advance their strategic objectives, these states too are emboldened. Regional powers indeed increasingly seek to exploit and manipulate great power competition to advance their own influence and compete with other regional powers – with a further erosion of regional instability as the result.[29]

The return of strategic competition has far-reaching political, economic and increasingly military implications. It may lead to direct confrontation between the great powers and major regional

26 Nadège Rolland, "China's Vision for a New World Order," NBR Special Report (Seattle and Washington D.C.: The National Bureau of Asian Research, January 2020), https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr83_chinasvision_jan2020.pdf.

27 The White House, "Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan," The White House, July 8, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/08/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-drawdown-of-u-s-forces-in-afghanistan/.

28 Wojciech Michnik, "Great Power Rivalry in the Middle East," Expert Comment, 2021.

29 Jonathan Hoffman, "The Return of Great- Power Competition to the Middle East: A Two- Level Game," *Middle East Policy* 28, no. 1 (March 2021): 87–104.

powers, but smaller yet strategically vital powers – so-called pivot states – have a role to play as well.[30] Great powers may encroach on such states as they try and pull them into their spheres of influence. Russia's push into the post-Soviet sphere, China's expanded presence in Central Asia, and the US' increased focus on the Asia-Pacific all constitute such efforts. But pivot states themselves may act brazenly, playing one great power against another as they seek to maximise their strategic benefits,[31] or behave recklessly against one counting on the opposing power to come to their rescue. Some, including India, seek to reap the benefits of having multiple great power friends; others, such as Iran, are dangerously gambling on newfound partners; and others, such as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, are actively meddling in conflicts far beyond their borders to increase their influence. Finally, when multiple great powers vie for influence, proxy conflicts spike and intrastate cleavages intensify, increasing the potential for civil war.[32] Strategic competition between the great powers is accelerating across a number of continents, including and most recently in Latin America, where Russia and China are increasingly meddling in Washington's backyard.[33] Rising instability could be a result.

With great power threats mounting, potential aggressors need to be deterred and allies and partners reassured

Competition between major powers, whether direct or indirect, means that access to the global commons, including sealines of communication and space, is no longer a given.[34] Territorial integrity is increasingly at risk, while intrastate conflicts are prone to becoming internationalised: between 2001 and 2021, the share of internationalised intrastate conflicts of all intrastate conflicts increased from 13% to 48% (see Figure 8). Liberal democracy is contested as the superior model of governance and should continue to see subversive threats as the battle for narratives continues. The use of so-called hybrid conflict strategies will continue if not intensify, entailing the weaponisation of energy, food, refugees, information and more.[35] For Europe, this means that its activities in Africa are contested, its access to resources disrupted, and its borders challenged. In Latin America, the Netherlands may see the other three countries within the Kingdom as well as the special municipalities located in the Caribbean Sea threatened by regional instabilities exacerbated by great power competition playing out in this region. Europe's political cohesion will come under pressure as their populations' minds are fought over, their welfare systems strained when taking in refugees, and their budgets squeezed by sanctions, declining international trade and the slowdown of globalisation.

3.1.1. What this means for European militaries

Strategic competition is to weigh heavily on European resources and capabilities. With great power threats mounting, potential aggressors need to be deterred and allies and partners reassured. As competition in space intensifies, the need to counter threats outside the

30 Tim Sweijs et al., "Why Are Pivot States so Pivotal?: The Role of Pivot States in Regional and Global Security," HCSS Security (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, January 1, 2014).

31 Michael I. Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, 1st ed. (London and Portland: F. Cass, 1991), 46.

32 Sweijs et al., "Why Are Pivot States so Pivotal?: The Role of Pivot States in Regional and Global Security."

33 Raphael Camargo Lima, "Strategic Communications as a Tool for Great Power Politics in Venezuela," *Defence Strategic Communications* 6, no. 1 (June 10, 2019): 89–122; Douglas Farah and Caitlyn Yates, "Great Power Competition in Latin America: A New Normal," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 44, no. 2 (2020): 45–64; Adam Isacson, "Great-Power Competition Comes for Latin America," War on the Rocks, February 24, 2022, https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/great-power-competition-comes-for-latin-america/.

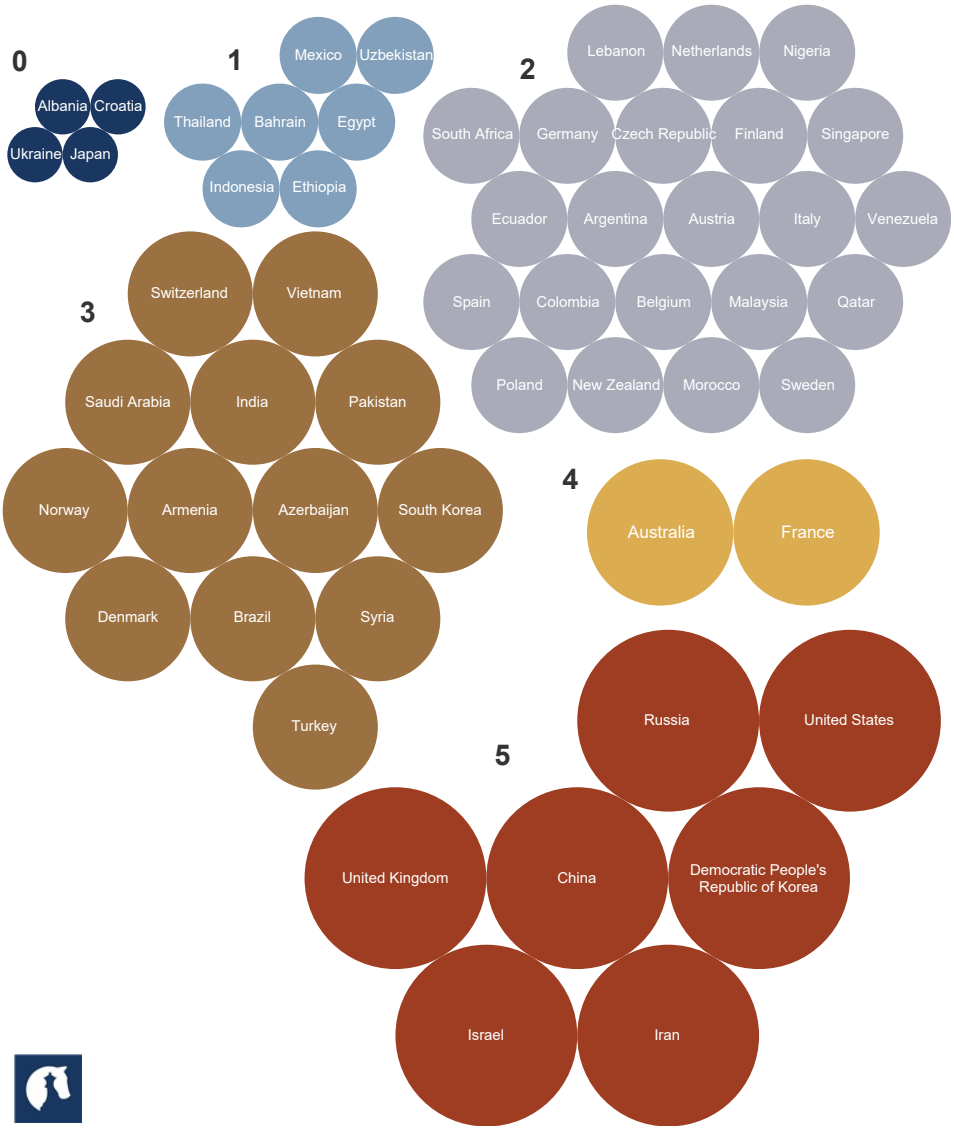
34 Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security* 41, no. 1 (July 2016): 7–48; Sameer Lalwani and Joshua Shifrinson, "Whither Command of the Commons? Choosing Security over Control," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2013; Barry Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security* 28, no. 1 (2003): 5–46.

35 Daniel S. Hamilton, "NATO After Madrid: Preparing for an Age of Confrontation and Disruption," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (August 2022), http://turkishpolicy.com/article/1143/nato-after-madrid-preparing-for-an-age-of-confrontation-and-disruption.

atmosphere will rise. Counter-hybrid missions will demand more resources. An examination of today's cyber capabilities (see Figure 7) points to the great powers, but also European, Central Asian and Middle Eastern states as key cyber powers. Freedom of navigation and overflight is being increasingly challenged, and Europeans will likely need to step up efforts to contribute to missions that enforce access to the global commons. In the most unfortunate scenario, high-intensity warfare breaks out, and Europe will be affected either directly (in case of a Russia-NATO confrontation) or indirectly (in case of a US-China conflict).

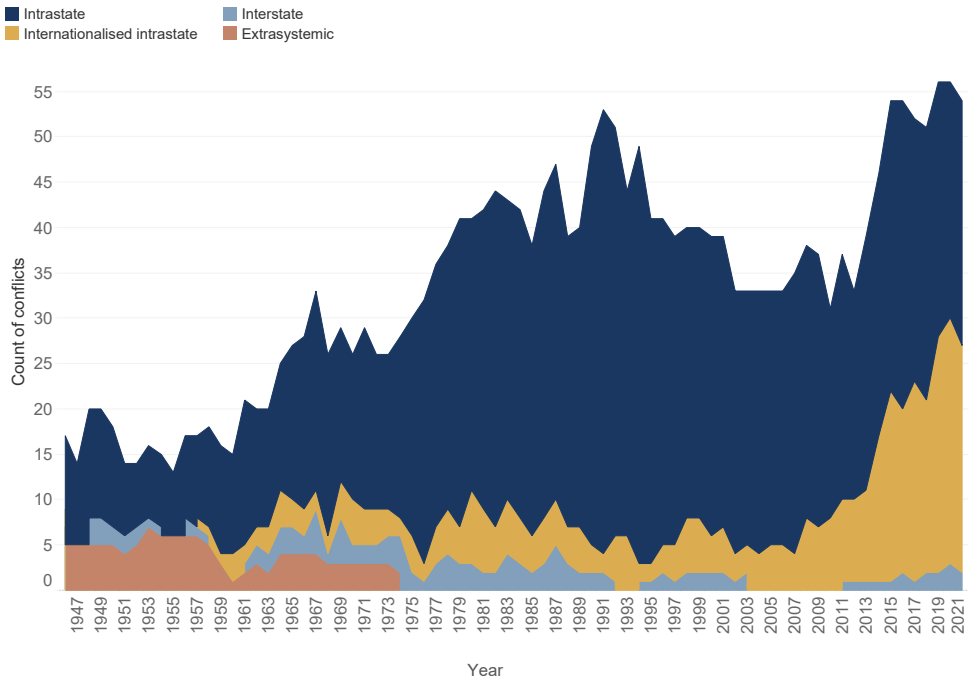
Figure 7. Perceived cyber capabilities, scored 0-5.

The Perceived Capabilities Rating (PCR) indicates the offensive cyber capabilities of a state as observed by outsiders using open-source information. States are categorised using a six-level labelling system (0-5)



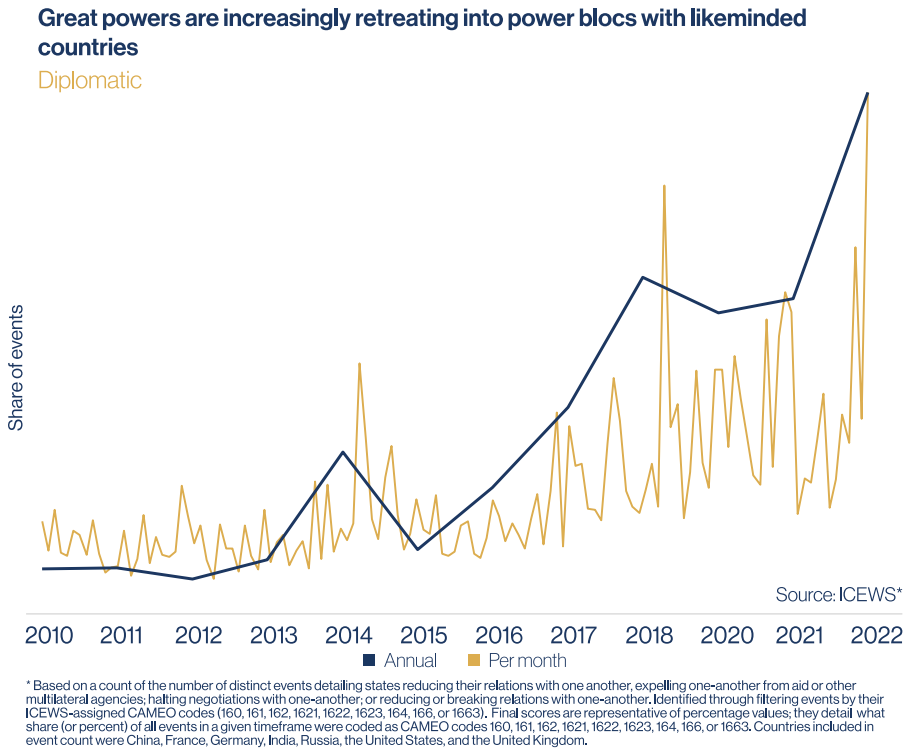
Source: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS)
See https://hcss.nl/cyber-arms-watch/ for more information.

Figure 8. Internationalisation of intrastate conflict



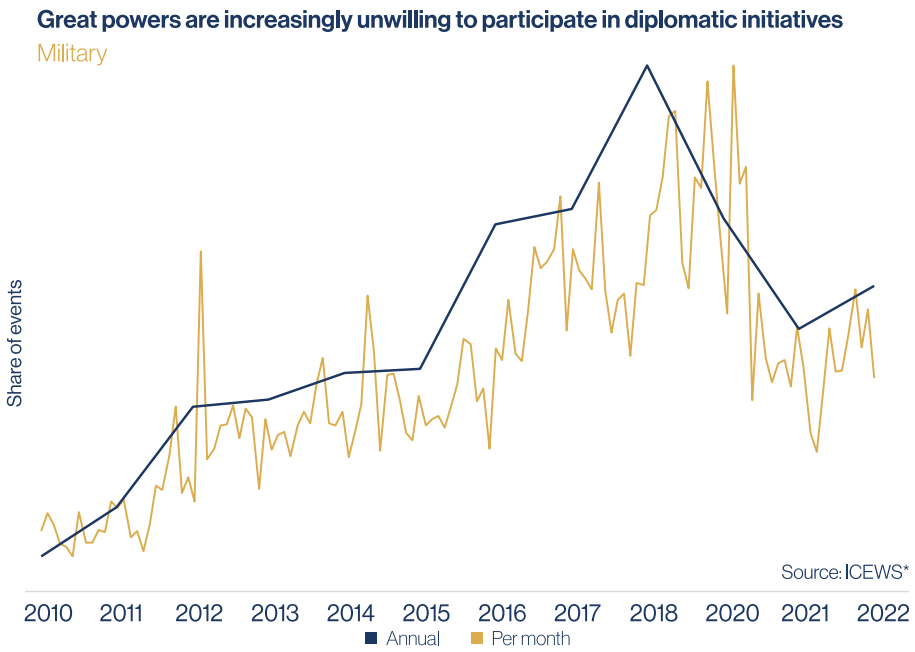
Source: UCDP

Figure 9. Great powers are increasingly retreating into power blocs with likeminded countries



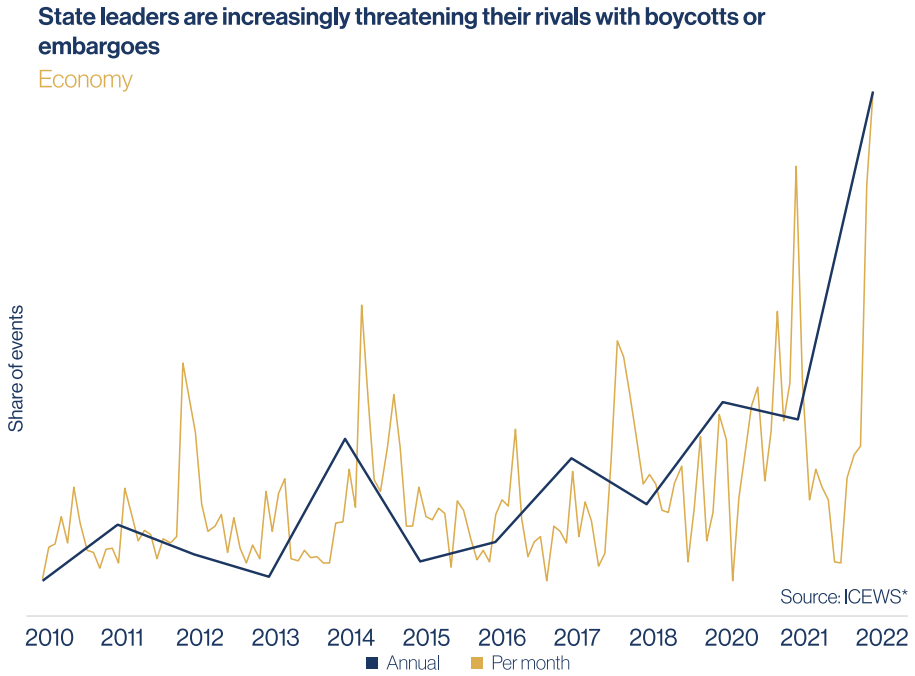
* Based on a count of the number of distinct events detailing states reducing their relations with one another, expelling one-another from aid or other multilateral agencies; halting negotiations with one-another; or reducing or breaking relations with one-another. Identified through filtering events by their ICEWS-assigned CAMEO codes (160, 161, 162, 1621, 1622, 1623, 164, 166, or 1663). Final scores are representative of percentage values; they detail what share (or percent) of all events in a given timeframe were coded as CAMEO codes 160, 161, 162, 1621, 1622, 1623, 164, 166, or 1663. Countries included in event count were China, France, Germany, India, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Figure 10. Great powers are increasingly unwilling to participate in diplomatic initiatives



* Based on a count of the number of distinct events detailing states making pessimistic comments regarding the viability of cooperating with one-another, rejecting mediation or other forms of diplomatic cooperation, or presenting one-another with ultimatums. Identified through filtering events by their ICEWS-assigned CAMEO codes (012, 0242, 0244, 092, 093, 094, 112, 1121, 1122, 1123, 1124, 1125, 113, 114, 124, 1243, 125, 126, 127, 129, 134, 135, 136, or 139). Final scores are representative of percentage values; they detail what share (or percent) of all events in a given timeframe were coded as CAMEO codes 012, 0242, 0244, 092, 093, 094, 112, 1121, 1122, 1123, 1124, 1125, 113, 114, 124, 1243, 125, 126, 127, 129, 134, 135, 136, or 139. Countries included in event count were China, France, Germany, India, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Figure 11. State leaders are increasingly threatening their rivals with boycotts or embargoes



* Based on a count of the number of distinct events detailing states threatening one-another with sanctions, boycotts, or embargoes; conducting strikes or boycotts against one-another; or imposing boycotts, embargoes, or sanctions on one another. Identified through filtering events by their ICEWS-assigned CAMEO codes (1312, 143, 163 respectively). Final scores are representative of percentage values; they detail what share (or percent) of all events in a given timeframe were coded as CAMEO codes 1312, 143, or 163.

3.2. **Technological advancement and proliferation**

Against the backdrop of a more competitive global environment, technologies are advancing rapidly. Improvements in speed, range and precision beef up advanced militaries' striking power while more modest systems are available to a growing number of state and non-state actors, eroding Western military superiority. During the Cold War, only the US and USSR produced and deployed land-attack cruise missiles with ranges over 500 km; today twelve states produce them while 23 states and one non-state actor possess such missiles (see Figure 12). Meanwhile, a total of 70 states managed to obtain anti-ship cruise missiles with ranges between 100-300 km.[36] The battlefield is further changed by the rapid introduction of non-kinetic and non-traditional capabilities (drones, cyber) and enablers (such as Artificial Intelligence (AI)) – their potential often not yet fully understood but actively experimented within and off battle theatres around the world. In any case, all-purpose technologies such as AI will increase the speed of warfare and add to transparency, putting strategic stability at risk.[37] AI's potentially revolutionary nature is likely to intensify power gaps – military but also economic – between the haves and have nots. Adapting military doctrines and concepts in a timely manner and understanding adversary doctrines becomes increasingly challenging in such a volatile and diverse technological environment. Weapon proliferation and advancements are paralleled by an erosion of international norms and treaties: today, fewer treaties regulate the development and deployment of systems, while appetite for transparency and confidence-building is at a new low.

Those at (perceived) risk of losing military prowess may feel compelled to strike pre-emptively

The risks and implications for conflict are evident: with more actors emboldened by military clout, capabilities improving and diversifying, and rules and norms eroding, the potential for miscalculation rises, the threshold for use lowers, while deterrence and escalation become harder to manage. Rapid changes in technological capabilities may incentivise risky bids to change the status quo, while those at (perceived) risk of losing military prowess may feel compelled to strike pre-emptively.[38] To make things worse, technological developments typically outpace changes in strategic thinking and doctrines, adding to volatility and straining states' ability to assess adversary moves. What is more, the democratisation of violence enabled by the proliferation of weapon technology adds to an ever more volatile and diffuse military landscape. At the extreme, technological trends increase the risk of interstate war, but with ever more actors capable of acquiring or developing modest missiles, off-the-shelf drones or digital capabilities, the potential of intrastate conflict to break out can also be expected to increase.[39]

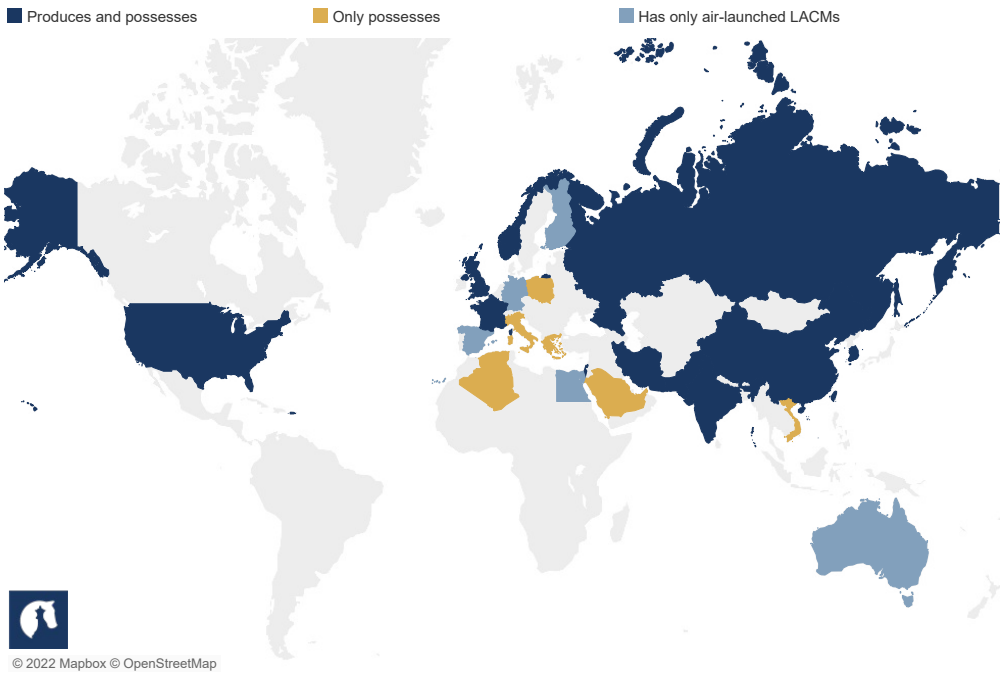
36 Fabian Hoffmann, "Cruise Missile Proliferation: Trends, Strategic Implications, and Counterproliferation" (London: The European Leadership Network (ELN), 2021).

37 Frank G. Hoffman, "Will War's Nature Change in the Seventh Military Revolution?," *Parameters* 47, no. 4 (2017): 19–31; James Johnson, "Artificial Intelligence & Future Warfare: Implications for International Security," *Defense & Security Analysis* 35, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 147–69; Michael Horowitz, "Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 3 (May 15, 2018), https://tnsr.org/2018/05/artificial-intelligence-international-competition-and-the-balance-of-power/.

38 For a general introduction: Jacquelyn Schneider, "The Capability/Vulnerability Paradox and Military Revolutions: Implications for Computing, Cyber, and the Onset of War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42, no. 6 (September 19, 2019): 841–63.; Todd S. Sechser, Neil Narang, and Caitlin Talmadge, "Emerging Technologies and Strategic Stability in Peacetime, Crisis, and War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42, no. 6 (September 19, 2019): 727–35. On international law and the potential threat of emerging technologies, *inter alia* Eliot A. Cohen, "Technology and Warfare," in *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, by John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, and Colin S. Gray, 6th Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 127–43.

39 Camino Kavanagh, "Digital Technologies and Civil Conflicts: Insights for Peacemakers," Brief, Conflict Series (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, February 2021).

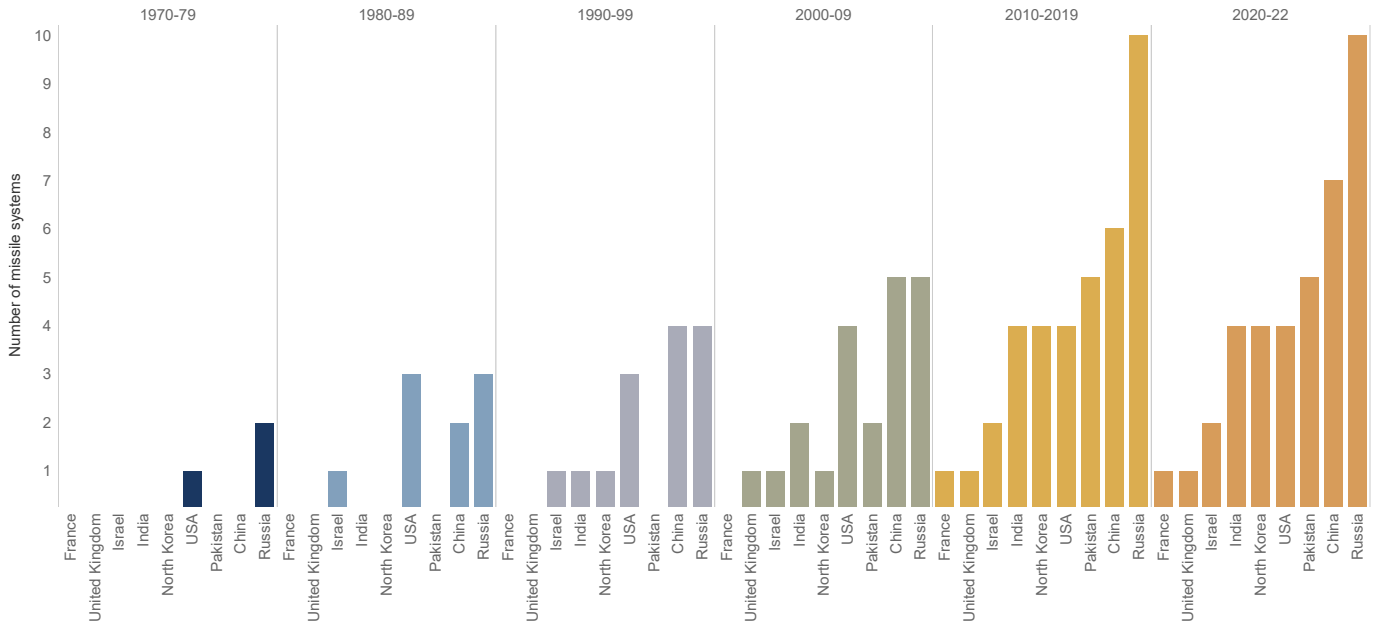
Figure 12. Production and possession of land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs)



Source: CSIS Missile Threat

Figure 13. Proliferation of dual-capable missiles

States with dual-capable systems or missiles that come in both nuclear and conventional variants 1970-2022



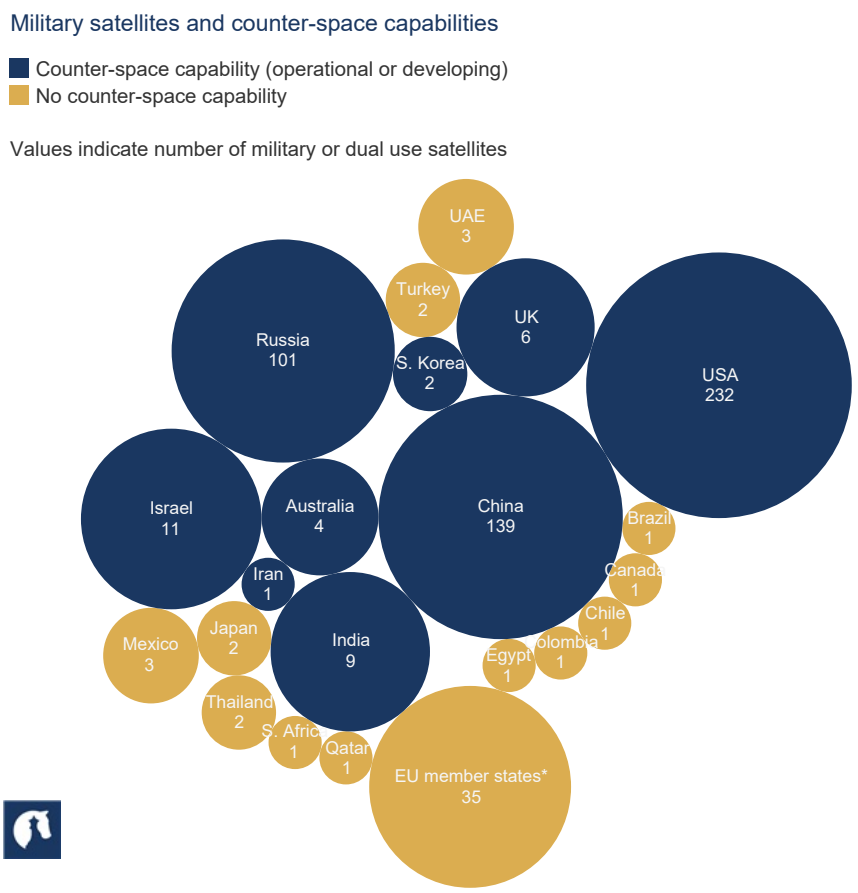
Source: CSIS and Nautilus

3.2.1. What this means for European militaries

As technology can instigate, accelerate and propagate conflict in myriad – yet hard to predict – ways, the implications for future European interventions are also diffuse and manifold. With escalation risks rising, deterrence and assurance missions will become more important, and the possibility of escalation into high-intensity warfare will slowly accumulate. As space and anti-satellite capabilities are proliferating both horizontally and vertically, Europe is likely to engage more actively in missions that seek to counter threats in space. Yet the proliferation and development of military technologies do not just affect major military powers, and the proliferation of technologies such as drones and cruise missiles will continue to render regions such as the Middle East more volatile. Non-state actors will be emboldened, raising the stakes for security force assistance, counterinsurgency and peacekeeping missions.

Technology can instigate, accelerate and propagate conflict in myriad – yet hard to predict – ways

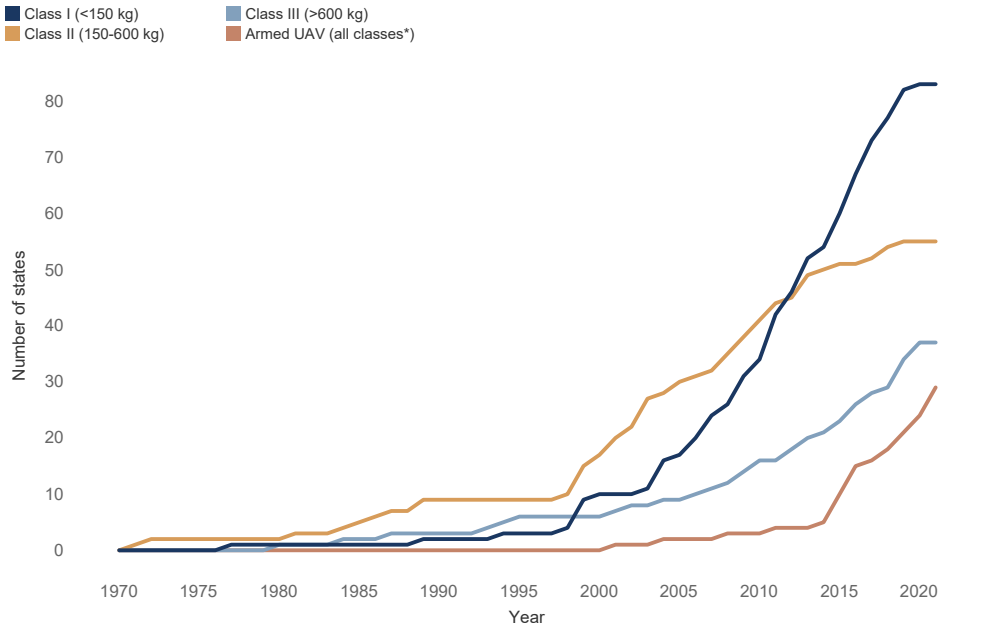
Figure 14. Military space assets: military satellites and counter-space capabilities



Source: UCS Satellite Database 01/2022 ed.; CSIS Space Threat Assessment 2021, 2022; SWF Global Counterspace Capabilities 2022.
**EU member states: Denmark 1; France 14; Germany 7; Italy 8; Luxembourg 1; Netherlands 1; shared French-Italian 2; shared Belgian-French-Greek-Italian-Spanish 2; shared American-Swedish 1.*

Figure 15. Military drone proliferation

Introduction of military drones by weight class, and of armed drones



Source: Dan Gettinger, The Drone Databook (The Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College, 2019); New America, World of Drones (2020); Drone Wars (2021)
**small loitering munitions excluded*

3.3. **Political and social volatility**

With economic, demographic and environmental pressures mounting, political and social volatility is likely to persist if not exacerbate as governments find it increasingly difficult to meet their populations' demands. Polarisation along ethnic, religious, and ideological lines is a key concern, with digitalisation acting as an important accelerator. The effects of echo chambers and influencing activities will exacerbate societal cleavages. In 2021, 32 countries experienced a worsening of what is called toxic polarisation – marking a sixfold increase in ten years' time.[40] And where polarisation prospers, freedom falters: in all top 5 autocratising countries Brazil, Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Turkey, toxic polarisation was followed by a plunge on the Liberal Democracy Index.[41] Globally, Freedom House has noted a decline in political rights and civil liberties for 16 consecutive years as the share of the world's population living in free environments dropped from 46% in 2005 to 20.3% in 2021.[42] The decline was most evident in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Worryingly, rising volatility is likely to mount

40 To capture *polarisation of* society, V-Dem measures the extent to which the differences in opinions result in major clashes of views and polarisation. *Political polarisation* measures the extent to which society is polarised into antagonistic, political camps where political differences affect social relationships beyond political discussions. Finally, *Political Parties Hate Speech* is used to measure how often major political parties use hate speech as part of their rhetoric. This indicator captures the extent to which political parties' use of this rhetoric directly affects level of polarisation. V-Dem Institute, "Autocratization Changing Nature?," Democracy Report 2022 (Gothemburg: University of Gothemburg, 2022), 33, https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf.

41 Murat Somer, Jennifer L. McCoy, and Russell E. Luke, "Pernicious Polarization, Autocratization and Opposition Strategies," *Democratization* 28, no. 5 (July 4, 2021): 929–48.

42 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2022: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule" (Washington, D.C: Freedom House, February 2022), https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2022/global-expansion-authoritarian-rule.

to state collapse.[43] Without meaningful action, by 2030 as many as 2.2 billion people (26% of the global population) will live in fragile contexts with weak governance and poor security, social, environmental and economic conditions.[44] State fragility is particularly prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, even if political volatility presents difficulties to all types of governments, including those at the most liberal and most illiberal ends of the spectrum.

These figures do not bode well for stability. Evidence shows that countries experiencing either autocratisation or democratisation are more prone to civil war.[45] Indeed, especially young anocracies – countries that are neither democratic nor autocratic – are at particular risk of intrastate conflict.[46] A rapid erosion of democracy is also worrisome: studies have shown that countries that were ravaged by civil war typically saw their polity score drop by at least six points within three years.[47] What is more, polarisation along ethnic lines appears increasingly dangerous: since the Second World War, 53% of civil wars were fought between ethnic factions; since the end of the Cold War this share has increased to 75%. Especially the combination is dangerous: in anocracies experiencing ethnic factionalism, the outbreak of civil war is 30 times more likely.[48] And even though the internet can prove instrumental for mass mobilisation – transferring power to the people – protests can also be a dangerous trigger of conflict.[49]

In anocracies experiencing ethnic factionalism, the outbreak of civil war is 30 times more likely

3.3.1. What this means for European militaries

For Europe, it means that its neighbourhood in the east and south continues to be volatile and potentially war-prone. A plot of countries that experienced democratic decline between 2018 and 2021 as well as high levels of political polarisation (see Figure 16) suggests that Mali, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Chad and Guinea are at the highest risk today. For European militaries, the political and social volatility experienced around the world put strains on their security force assistance, peace enforcement and stabilisation, and counterterrorism capabilities. At the extreme, internal stability may be threatened to a level where also within the EU, such missions may be needed. Indeed, also a number of EU member states experience a both negative change in democracy score and high levels of political polarisation, most notably Austria, Cyprus and France. Finally, both within and outside Europe, counter-hybrid missions will undoubtedly gain in importance as flows of information and increasingly also energy, food and refugees are being weaponised, with potentially a growing role for the armed forces too.

43 United States National Intelligence Council, "Global Trends 2040: A More Contested World," Global Trends (National Intelligence Council, March 2021), https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/GlobalTrends_2040.pdf.

44 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Conflict & Fragility - OECD," OECD: Better policies for better lives, 2020, https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/conflict-fragility/.

45 Barbara F. Walter, *How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them*, First Edition (New York: Crown, 2022).

46 Patrick M. Regan and Sam R. Bell, "Changing Lanes or Stuck in the Middle: Why Are Anocracies More Prone to Civil Wars?," *Political Research Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2010): 747–59.

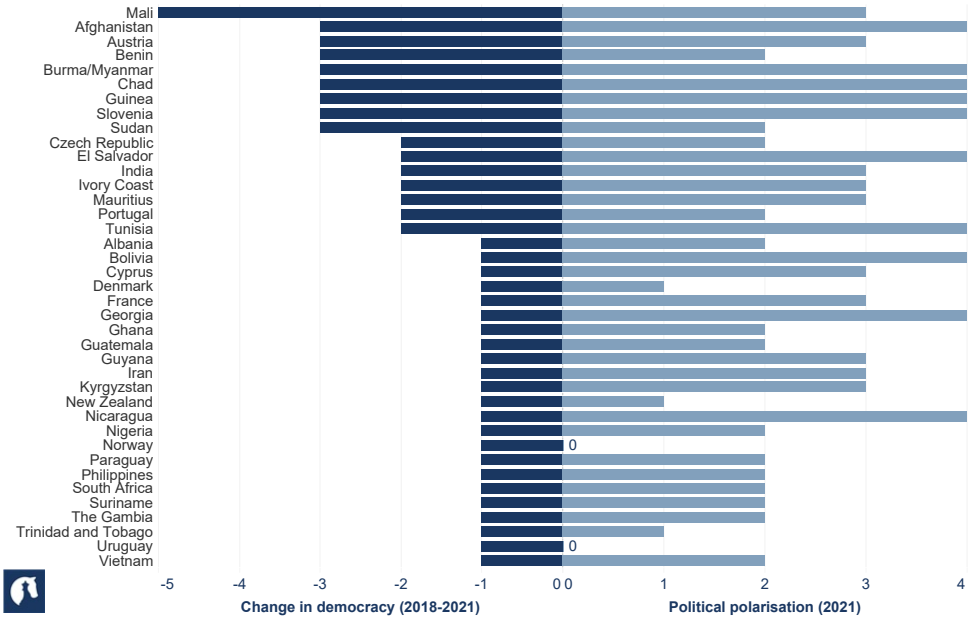
47 Walter, *How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them*, 140.

48 Adreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

49 Walter, *How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them*.

Figure 16. Countries experiencing both democratic decline and political polarisation

Political polarisation is a measure of antagonism between political groups, ranging from 'not at all' to 'large extent' (0-4) taken for 2021. Filtered for countries experiencing negative change in democracy score (0-9) between 2018-2021.



Source: VDem
Political polarisation has been reverse coded from its original representation by VDem so that the highest value level indicates the highest level of polarisation

3.4. Climate change

On its current path, human-induced global warming is set to reach 1.5°C by 2040, causing rising temperatures and sea levels as well as an uptick in extreme weather events such as storms, droughts and floods. The effects will be diffuse and manifold – including land degradation, water misuse and a loss in biodiversity – yet not all populations will be equally exposed. Risks are highest in regions already at their thermal limits; along coastlines; or exposed to ice or seasonal rivers. The effects will burden poorer regions disproportionally, as they will intersect with existing vulnerabilities such as environmental degradation and lower resilience, exacerbating food, water, health and energy insecurity.[50] Climate change is expected to uproot large populations as early as 2030, potentially affecting 216 million people globally by 2050. Sub-Saharan Africa may see 85.7 million climate migrants by 2050, or 4.2% of the population; in North Africa this share can be as high as 9 % (19 million people).[51]

Global warming heightens the risk of war and conflict in several ways.[52] Especially when converging with existing socio-political and environmental factors,[53] climate change-induced

50 Hans-Otto Pörtner et al., eds., "Summary for Policymakers," in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

51 Viviane Clement et al., "Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration" (World Bank, 2021).

52 Tim Sweijs, Marleen de Haan, and Hugo van Manen, "Unpacking the Climate Security Nexus: Seven Pathologies Linking Climate Change to Violent Conflict" (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, March 2022).

53 Dr Malin Mobjörk, Florian Krampe, and Kheira Tarif, "Pathways of Climate Insecurity: Guidance for Policymakers," SIPRI Policy Brief (Solna: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, November 2020).

scarcity of water, food and land resources may stoke inter-group or inter-communal violence, and in the worst case scenario trigger civil war. Tensions and social unrest can further spiral when mitigation measures add to marginalisation and inequality.[54] Research has shown that between 1980 and 2010, 23% of conflict outbreaks in ethnically fractionalised countries coincided with climate-related disasters.[55] The risk of interstate scarcity-related war also heightens, for instance when a country's water management negatively affects a downstream neighbour.[56] Migration and the resulting urbanisation caused by slow-onset climate change or rapid-onset hazards may foster social tensions as they exacerbate scarcity, feelings of relative deprivation and ethnic tensions.[57] Indeed, fast-growing cities have proven to be especially conflict-prone, as they typically create and maintain vastly unequal socio-economic conditions.[58] In places where climate change-induced livelihood insecurity coincides with state fragility, non-state armed groups may proliferate, stoking terrorism, guerrilla warfare and potentially civil war.[59] Finally, climate change can fuel interstate conflict as melting ice opens a potential conflict frontier in the Arctic, and as tensions may rise over climate mitigation measures such as geoengineering.[60]

Between 1980 and 2010, 23% of conflict outbreaks in ethnically fractionalised countries coincided with climate-related disasters

Significantly more so than the other trends, climate change will put a strain on disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response as the rapid onset of extreme weather events but also slower warming effects will drive up the frequency and scale of disasters and crises. As Figure 17 shows, climate-induced vulnerability exists across all continents but the likelihood of hazards to occur and the prospective adverse consequences on natural and human systems vary. Heatwave-induced vulnerability is highest in the Sahel, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India; droughts affect most of South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and China. Coastal flooding poses particular challenges to China, India, Vietnam as well as parts of Africa, most notably Mauritania and Mozambique. Meanwhile India, Indonesia and Vietnam have above-average vulnerability levels to riverine flooding, while tropical storms may affect most of the globe (with the wealthier countries less vulnerable).

54 Carol Hunsberger et al., "Climate Change Mitigation, Land Grabbing and Conflict: Towards a Landscape-Based and Collaborative Action Research Agenda," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue Canadienne d'études Du Développement* 38, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 305–24.

55 Carl-Friedrich Schleussner et al., "Armed-Conflict Risks Enhanced by Climate-Related Disasters in Ethnically Fractionalized Countries," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 33 (July 25, 2016): 9216–21.

56 Fred H. Lawson, "Egypt versus Ethiopia: The Conflict over the Nile Metastasizes," *The International Spectator* 52, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 129–44; Thomas Bernauer and Tobias Siegfried, "Climate Change and International Water Conflict in Central Asia," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 227–39.

57 Vally Koubi, "Climate Change and Conflict," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2019): 343–60.

58 See for instance Ronak B. Patel and Frederick M. Burkle, "Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis," *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* 27, no. 2 (April 2012): 194–97; Nicolai Schulz, "Dangerous Demographics? The Effect of Urbanisation and Metropolisation on African Civil Wars, 1961–2010," *Civil Wars* 17, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 291–317.

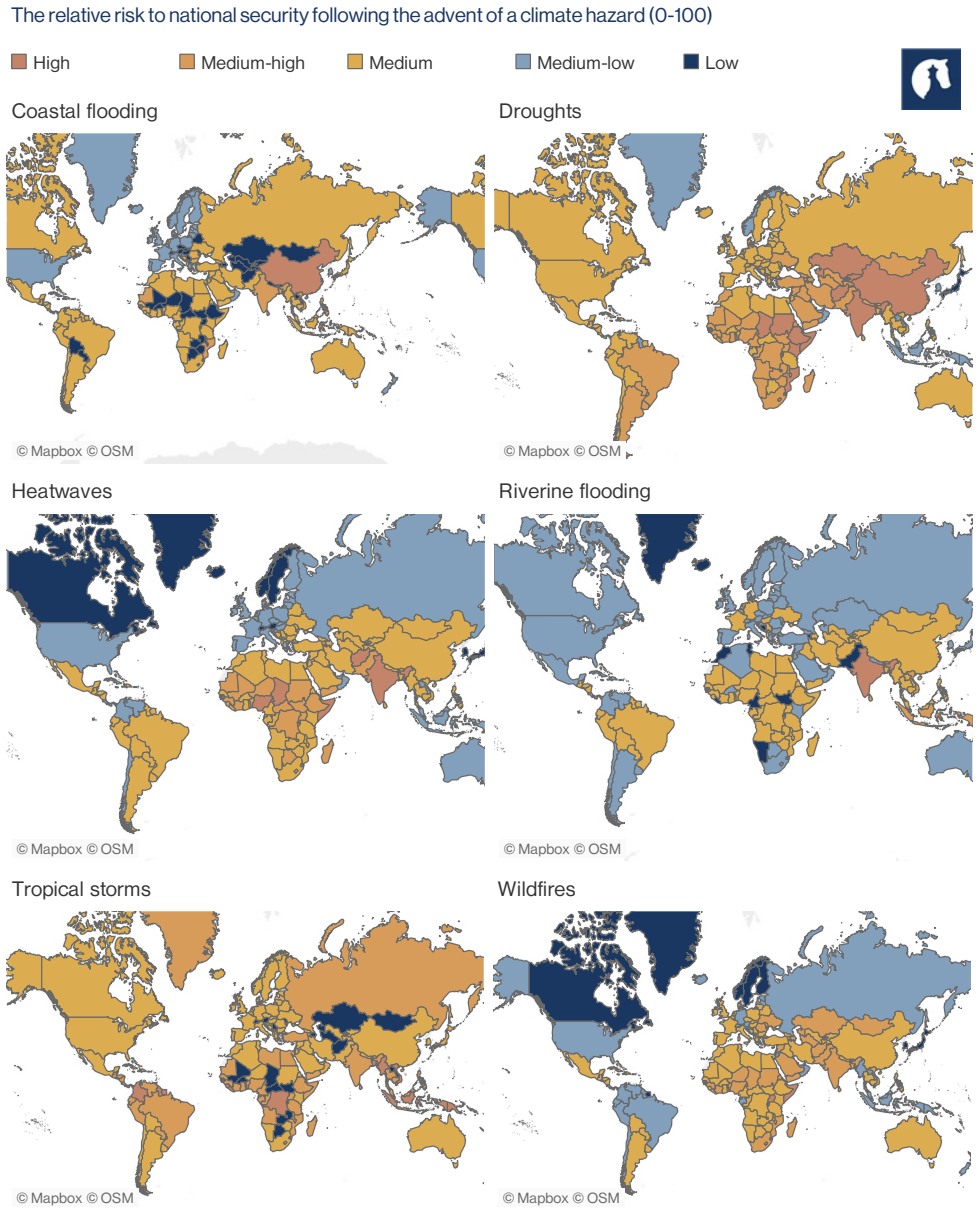
59 Katharina Nett, "Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate: Analysing the Links between Climate Change and Non-State Armed Groups," Report, Climate Diplomacy (Berlin: Adelphi, 2016), https://climate-diplomacy.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/CD%20Report_Insurgency_170724_web.pdf.

60 Duncan McLaren and Olaf Corry, "Clash of Geofutures and the Remaking of Planetary Order: Faultlines Underlying Conflicts over Geoengineering Governance," *Global Policy* 12, no. S1 (2021): 20–33; Kristian Åtland, "The Security Implications of Climate Change in the Arctic Ocean," in *Environmental Security in the Arctic Ocean*, ed. Paul Arthur Berkman and Alexander N. Vylegzhanin (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 205–16.

3.4.1. What this means for European militaries

The multiplicity of climate-related conflict pathologies also increases the risks of civil conflict and, even if less likely, interstate war. There is thus a climate-related demand for peace enforcement and stabilisation missions, as well as counterterrorism and security sector reform activities. Moreover, climate change is already well underway to render the Arctic into a renewed area of major power competition, potentially spurring a need for freedom of navigation efforts or even deterrence and assurance. Finally, as a result of the increasing prevalence of extreme weather events, an uptick in (the need for) disaster relief and humanitarian crisis management activities is to be expected.

Figure 17. Climate hazard likelihood and potential insecurity risk



Source: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS)
For more information on how climate related insecurity risks are calculated, please see: https://hcss.nl/report/climate-security-assessment-a-methodology-and-assessment-of-the-nexus-between-climate-hazards-and-security-of-nations-and-regions/

Key takeaways

Table 8 below offers a summary of the trends, their security implications, geographical manifestations, and implications for policy. In a nutshell, for European militaries, the policy implications that emerge are diffuse and extensive. Deterrence and assurance missions will be a main focus, yet operations to protect sea lines of communication, enforce sanctions, counter threats in cyberspace and space; stabilise intrastate conflicts, push back insurgencies and alleviate human suffering have by no means become unnecessary.

Table 8. Trends, security implications, geographical manifestation, policy implications

	Sub-trends	Security implications	Regions	Policy implications
Strategic competition	Great power rivalry; China's politico-military rise; Russian aggression and revisionism	Competition over spheres of influence, territory and resources; access to sealines of communication and space; hybrid conflicts	Eastern Europe (non-NATO/EU territory); EU/NATO territory; the Indo-Pacific; the Arctic; Africa	Deterrence and assurance; counter-hybrid; sanctions and law enforcement; freedom of navigation and overflight; countering threats in space; high-intensity warfare
Technological advancements and proliferation	Proliferation and qualitative improvements in weapon technologies; introduction of non-kinetic and non-traditional technologies such as drones, cyber and AI; erosion if international norms and treaties	Lowering threshold for use of weapons; pre-emptive strikes; hybrid conflicts	EU/NATO territory; the Middle East; the Indo-Pacific; Central Asia; the Americas	Deterrence and assurance; sanctions and law enforcement; counter-hybrid; arms control and non-proliferation efforts; countering threats in space
Political and social volatility	Polarisation along ethnic, religious and ideological lines; erosion of democracy; state fragility; violent extremism; digitalisation; economic, demographic and environmental pressures	Civil war; polarisation; hybrid conflicts	The Middle East; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Eastern Europe (non-NATO/EU territory); EU/NATO territory	Peace enforcement and stabilisation; counterinsurgency and counterterrorism; military cooperation with non-NATO (or EU) partners
Climate change	Human-induced global warming causing rising temperatures, sea-level increases, extreme weather events; food, water, energy and health insecurity	Intergroup violence; conflict over resources; polarisation; migration; interstate competition in the Arctic	The Middle East; North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; the Arctic	Peace enforcement and stabilisation; disaster relief and humanitarian crisis management; counterinsurgency and counterterrorism (and potentially freedom of navigation; deterrence and assurance)

4. The future of intrastate conflict

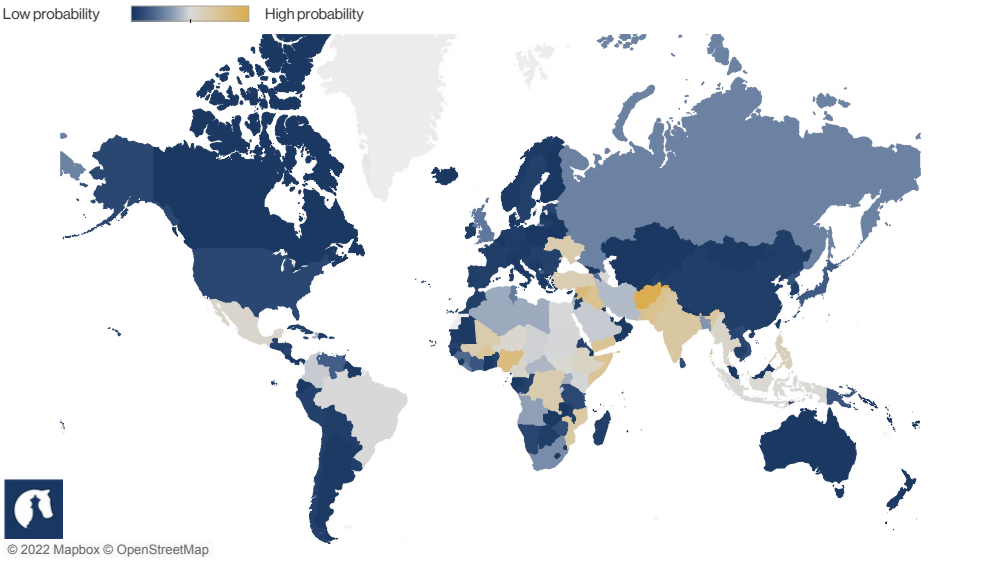
Civil wars have become increasingly concentrated in a few regions of the world around hotspots of violence

When it comes to intrastate conflict, the world can be divided roughly into zones of peace and zones of violence. Continuing a trend that emerged after the end of the Cold War, civil wars have become increasingly concentrated in a few regions of the world around hotspots of violence, including parts of Latin America, the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Northern Africa, and South and South East Asia.[61] According to short- and medium-term conflict risk forecasts, shown in Figure 18, Figure 19 and Figure 20, this trend is set to continue. Strikingly, a declining share of conflicts remains confined within state borders as spill-over of conflict is only becoming ever more prevalent, in line with a longer-term trend. In fact, over the past two decades, the number of internationalised intrastate conflicts quintupled – from five to twenty-five conflicts – in absolute terms (see Figure 20).

In Latin America, the toxic mix of political instability, social unrest and drug-related criminality continues to cause conflict while cross-border spill-over effects run high. Drug-related violence inflicted by the state as well as between cartels in Mexico and other parts of the

Figure 18. One-year intrastate conflict forecast (2023)

Conflict probabilities are scaled between 0 (low probability) and 1 (high probability)



Country probability scores are aggregated from provincial probability scores. Community, economic, governance, & conflict variables are sourced from UCDP, GDELT, ICEWS, Phoenix, TERRIER, GHSL, World Development Indicators, Gridded global datasets for GDP and Human Development Index, and EM-DAT. Probability scores were benchmarked using different ensemble methods. The visualisation shows values computed with the random forest algorithm as the simplest and most interpretable among them. A decision tree shows how a collection of predictors distinguishes between predicted presence or absence of conflict fatalities. The random forest algorithm reduces the uncertainty and bias from any single decision tree. Source: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

61 Barbara F Walter, "Conflict Relapse and the Sustainability of Post-Conflict Peace," 2010, 41.

region continues unabated with spiking homicide rates as a result.[62] Venezuela, a safe haven for Colombian guerrilla groups involved in drug trafficking, is torn by strong political instability caused by years of economic mismanagement and corruption, while plummeting oil prices in 2014 and fierce US sanctions have further ravaged the country.[63] Dutch constituent countries and special municipalities in the Caribbean Sea are at risk here. Brazil meanwhile continues to grapple with criminality and structural social violence caused by economic deprivation and inequality as well as rapid industrialisation and related urbanisation.[64] Resource-related conflicts including ones over land use and water management, especially surrounding the Amazon river, add to the continuation of violence.[65] In the Sahel, but also in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, war appears ever more contagious, with countries such as Chad, Mali and Sudan at highest risk of conflict in the years to come. In the region, poor governance, democratic backsliding, foreign influencing, insecurity, extreme poverty and the worsening effects of climate change indeed prove fertile ground for terrorism and for other forms of violence.[66] Governments appear simply unable to get a grip over their societies. In the Middle East, a continuation of or relapse into conflict in Iraq, Syria and Yemen are to be expected as state fragility, violent extremism, sectarian politics and climate change-induced scarcity remain unresolved. Further eastward, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh grapple with government and development issues. India's heightening polarisation resulting from divisive political leadership and competitive caste politics, paired with unstable economic development, may prove a dangerous catalyst of violence.[67] In Myanmar, a failed democratisation process and the violent reining in of civilian rule by its military apparatus, has plunged the country back into civil war.[68] In the Philippines, conflict and violence are continuing as the state-pursued war on drugs rages on, Islamic militarism remains unresolved and grievances in the newly autonomous Bangsamoro region linger.[69]

62 "Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartel" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021), https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels; Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Changing the Game or Dropping the Ball? Mexico's Security and Anti-Crime Strategy under President Enrique Pena Nieto," Latin America Initiative (Brookings, 2014).

63 Daniel Wallis, "Venezuela Violence Puts Focus on Militant 'colectivo' Groups," *Reuters*, February 13, 2014, sec. Media and Telecoms, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-protests-colectivos-idUSBREA-1C1YW20140213; Patricia Torres and Nicholas Casey, "Los Colectivos Venezolanos, Las Bandas de Civiles Armados Que Atacan a Los Manifestantes y Defienden a Maduro," *The New York Times*, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/04/22/espanol/colectivos-venezuela-nicolas-maduro.html.

64 Pedro Henrique Soares Leivas and Anderson Moreira Aristides dos Santos, "Horizontal Inequality and Ethnic Diversity in Brazil: Patterns, Trends, and Their Impacts on Institutions," *Oxford Development Studies* 46, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 348–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2017.1394450; Eliana Rodrigues Pereira Mendes, "The Roots of Violence in Brazil: Impasses and Possibilities," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 34–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2017.1333144; "Brazil: Extreme Inequality in Numbers," Oxfam International, May 25, 2022, https://www.oxfam.org/en/brazil-extreme-inequality-numbers.

65 Marcos Alan S. V. Ferreira, "Peace and Conflict in Brazil," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 1–11.

66 Héni Nsaibia, "10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2022: The Sahel," *ACLED* (blog), accessed July 13, 2022, https://acleddata.com/10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2022/sahel/.

67 Niranjan Sahoo, "Mounting Majoritarianism and Political Polarization in India - Political Polarization in South and Southeast Asia: Old Divisions, New Dangers," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed July 28, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/08/18/mounting-majoritarianism-and-political-polarization-in-india-pub-82434. Gareth Price, "How Polarized India Erupted Into Violence," Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, February 27, 2020, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/02/how-polarized-india-erupted-violence.

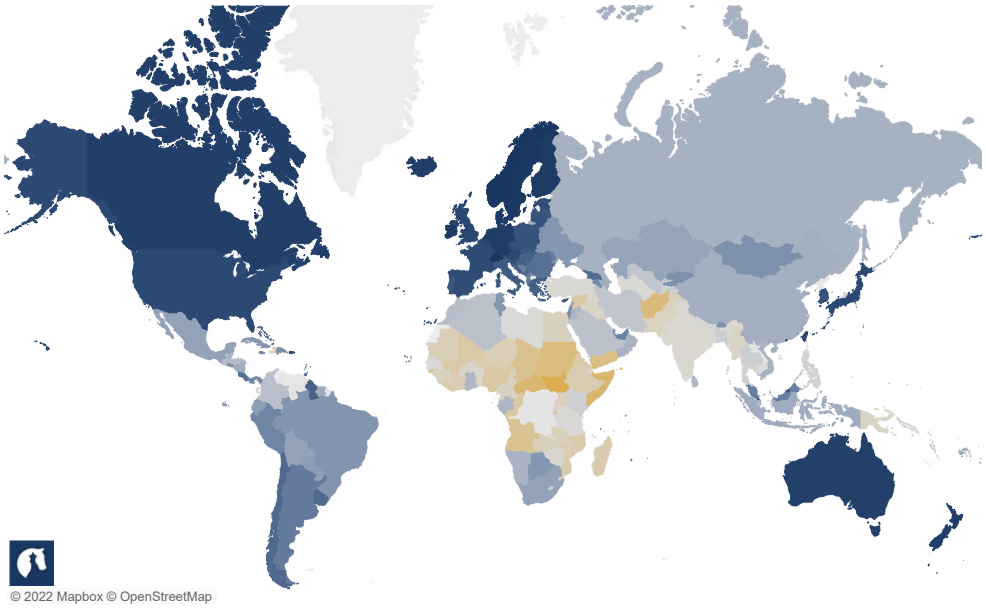
68 "How Polarized India Erupted Into Violence," Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, February 27, 2020, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/02/how-polarized-india-erupted-violence; Russell Goldman, "Myanmar's Coup, Explained," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2022, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/article/myanmar-news-protests-coup.html.

69 Roudabeh Kishi, "The Drug War Rages on in the Philippines: New Data on the Civilian Toll, State Responsibility, and Shifting Geographies of Violence," *ACLED* (blog), November 18, 2021, https://acleddata.com/2021/11/18/the-drug-war-rages-on-in-the-philippines-new-acled-data-on-the-civilian-toll-state-responsibility-and-shifting-geographies-of-violence/; "The Philippines: Militancy and the New Bangsamoro" (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Figure 19. Five-year intrastate conflict forecast (2027)

Conflict vulnerability is scaled between 0 (low vulnerability) and 1 (high vulnerability)

Low vulnerability — High vulnerability

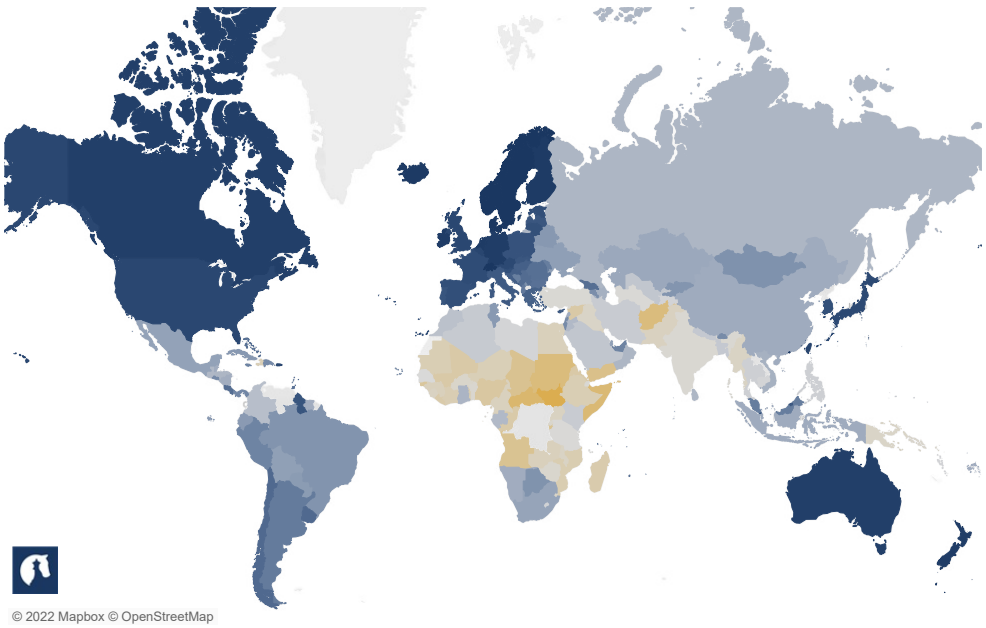


Source: Pardee Institute's International Futures.
Country-year forecasts for vulnerability to intrastate conflict are calculated based on the GOVRISK variable. For the methodology, see: https://pardeewiki.du.edu/index.php?title=Governance#Security.

Figure 20. 10-year intrastate conflict forecast (2032)

Conflict vulnerability is scaled between 0 (low vulnerability) and 1 (high vulnerability)

Low vulnerability — High vulnerability



Source: Pardee Institute's International Futures.
Country-year forecasts for vulnerability to intrastate conflict are calculated based on the GOVRISK variable. For the methodology, see: https://pardeewiki.du.edu/index.php?title=Governance#Security.

Key takeaways

Even if European states are becoming increasingly preoccupied with great power competition and the potential for high-intensity warfare, intrastate conflict risk forecasts suggest that at least the demand for more typical post-Cold War peacekeeping or stabilisation missions from conflict- prone regions is unlikely to dwindle – this is the case for Africa and the Middle East but also Latin America where spill-over of conflict could present serious challenges to Dutch constituent countries and special municipalities in the Caribbean Sea. Similarly, there will be demand for counterinsurgency and counterterrorism missions, at the same time as climate security risks will require militaries to engage in disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response operations. Table 9 summarises the key sub-trends, resultant conflicts, regions of manifestation and policy implications.

Table 9. Sub-trends, conflicts, regions, policy implications

	Sub-trends	Security implications	Regions	Policy implications
Intrastate conflict	Structural fragility Internationalisation and spill-over of conflict Resource scarcity	Violent extremism Organised (transnational) crime Democratic backsliding and internal polarisation Climate change-induced security threats and/or resource scarcity	The Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa Latin America The Middle East Central-Asia	Peace enforcement and stabilisation Counterinsurgency and counterterrorism Military cooperation with non-NATO (or EU) partners Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response

Spillover of conflict could present serious challenges to Dutch constituent countries and special municipalities in the Caribbean Sea

5. Dangerous dyads

Over the last two centuries, the majority of interstate wars occurred between so-called rivals: states that view one another as strategic competitors for whatever reason and typically have an unresolved conflict of interest.[70] More specifically, such relationships are characterised by longstanding rivalries between two states that stretch out over time, involving unresolved disputes that feature periodically recurring conflict.[71] Potentially dangerous rivalries can be discerned by looking at a pair's history of militarised disputes, yet not all rivals are engaged in such conflict at all times.[72] Absent such disputes, a history of antagonistic foreign policies and decision-makers' threat perceptions can instead be indicative of the existence of a rivalry.[73] From that logic, a list of thirty dangerous dyads was created, for which the outbreak of war will be especially consequential from a European perspective.[74] Building on the work of D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam,[75] the war potential of these dyads is assessed based on seven risk factors, which are both theoretically and empirically related to the outbreak of interstate war.[76] The seven risk factors include: balance of power, power transition, nuclear deterrence, arms races, alliances, regime type similarity, and trade dependence. Their presence within a dyad either increases or decreases the risk that conflict breaks out, yet, importantly, they depend on different theories and at times different logics. For instance, according to the balance-of-power logic, symmetry in military forces promotes stability, yet according to power-transition theory, symmetry (in concert with the presence of transition) increases conflict risk.

The majority of interstate wars occurred between so-called rivals: states that view one another as strategic competitors for whatever reason and typically have an unresolved conflict of interest

Below, the different logics are briefly summarised, and the thirty dyads assessed using a trichotomous scale that highlights whether each risk factor increases risk, decreases risk, or whether the evidence is mixed/neutral. A more elaborate discussion of their effect and the theoretical and empirical evidence cited in the literature as well as of their operationalisation can be found in Annex A. Even though our overall assessment seeks to peer ten years into the future, it should be noted the time horizons vary across the risk factors. For balance of power, power transition, and trade dependence 10-year country-based projections as forecast by the Pardee Centre for International Futures are used. Alternatively, the current state of affairs

70 Studies range from 50 to 75 percent depending on the definition of rivalry. Jack S Levy and William R. Thompson, *Causes of War* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 57.

71 Paul F Diehl and Gary Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry* (The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 18–26.

72 Diehl and Goertz, 6.

73 William R. Thompson, "Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2001): 557–86.

74 Dyads are either selected based on their conflict history or handpicked. We use Heidelberg's conflict dataset (2021) that reports on conflict intensity per dispute/conflict per year, filtering for conflicts relevant to Europe (based on expert judgement) and conflicts that have been ongoing for three consecutive years (2019, 2020 and 2021) with a three-year combined intensity score of at least 5 (1 being dispute and 5 being war). Some dyads deemed relevant were also added manually. Some rivalries in the Americas, such as between the US and Mexico or Cuba, or between Belize and Guatemala, are excluded, simply because for Europe the implications of a war would be limited. Yet potential conflict outbreak between rivals in Asia or the Middle East could be consequential, simply for Europe's own direct interests in a region or because it would bear consequences for transatlantic burden-sharing.

75 D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam, *The Behavioral Origins of War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

76 All dyads exist of two states except Russia-NATO. Importantly, given recent developments, NATO indicators are calculated based on a 32-country alliance that includes Finland and Sweden.

(nuclear deterrence, alliances and regime type similarity) or a qualitative projection of the next three years (military build-ups) are used, either because of a lack of forecast data or due to recent changes such as for instance the drastic increases in military expenditures in the European theatre.

Balance of power: According to the balance-of-power logic, the relative military power parity between two states should ceteris paribus produce a certain degree of peace and stability. Higher power differentials instead lead to the heightened risk of escalation. **Error! Reference source not found.**Only three dangerous dyads are roughly, or close to, equal in military power: the US and China, Romania and Hungary, and Israel and Iran in 2032, according to projections.[77] The share of highly unequal dyads is large.

Power transition: Following the power transition logic, a relative decline or increase in one state's power may entice it to initiate war as it either seeks to protect its ascent or prevent further decline. A 2032 forecast of power transitions relative to the balance of power suggests –unsurprisingly perhaps– that the US and China, Ethiopia and Sudan, China and Japan, Egypt and Ethiopia and finally Iran and Saudi Arabia, are at increased risk of conflict escalation.

The action-reaction dynamic inherent to arms build-ups may result in either a deliberate or inadvertent escalation to war

Nuclear deterrence: Deterrence is particularly strong when *both* states in a dyad possess nuclear weapons. From this perspective, four dyads should therefore be relatively stable: Russia and the US; Russia and NATO; the United States and China; and China and India. All the other dyads are imbalanced and therefore potentially more risk-prone.

Arms build-up: The action-reaction dynamic inherent to arms build-ups may result in either a deliberate or inadvertent escalation to war. Dyads in which both countries are investing heavily in military capabilities are therefore at increased risk of war. Slightly over one-third of all dyads are projected to experience a two-sided build-up over the next three years, including Russia and Ukraine, Russia and NATO, Russia and Moldova, Turkey and Greece, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Egypt and Ethiopia, and Japan and North Korea. Dyads experiencing a one-sided build-up are also, yet at a somewhat more limited, risk of war escalation. This is the case for India and China, Vietnam and China, Egypt and Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda, and Sudan and Ethiopia.

Alliances: Different types of alliances have different implications for the outbreak of war. When a state has meaningful[78] defence commitments from third states, potential attackers may be discouraged – and the dangerous dyad therefore less war-prone. The only dyads in which neither state has official meaningful defence commitments include Kosovo and Serbia; China and India; China and Vietnam; Israel and Iran; and Israel and Palestine. Dyads in which only one state has such commitments include Russia and Georgia; Russia and Ukraine; Russia and Moldova; the US and Venezuela; China and the US: China and Japan; China and Taiwan; Israel and Lebanon; Syria and the US; Iran and Saudi Arabia; and Afghanistan and Pakistan. In these dyads, only the state with meaningful defensive alliance commitments is at a lower risk of being attacked.

Conversely, states are more likely to *start* a conflict if they have one or more allies committed to offensive support or to remain neutral in that conflict. Among the dangerous dyads, no

77 A variable of 0.5 signals complete parity and a variable of 1.0 indicates that the larger state possesses 100% of capabilities in the dyad. For an overview of conflict indicators and their operationalisation, see Annex A.

78 Defined as either multiple alliances and/or one with a great power.

states have offence pacts and only a hand-full have neutrality pacts; these variables are therefore not included in Table 10: Risk factor assessment for 30 dangerous dyads. Still, since neutrality pacts are potentially destabilising, dyads that involve NATO (with 23 of such pacts), Russia (11) and Ukraine (10) could be at greater risk.

Regime similarity: Similarity in regime type has a stabilising influence on the relation between states. Only a handful of dyads share their regime type, including all five African dyads, China and Vietnam, Turkey and Syria, and Iran and Saudi Arabia. According to this logic, for these dyads, the risk of conflict outbreak is therefore lower. Conversely, dyads with different regime types are risky. They include more than half of all assessed dyads, including Russia and the US, NATO, Moldova and Georgia; China and the US, India, Japan, and Taiwan; Israel and Iran, Lebanon and Palestine; and Azerbaijan and Armenia. When states are neither very similar nor very different in their regime type, the effect on conflict risk is either mixed or neutral.

Similarity in regime type has a stabilising influence on the relation between states

Trade dependence: Greater dependence in terms of trade discourages a potential attacker as the economic loss or so-called exit costs may be too large to sustain. Therefore, for dyads in which a mutual trade dependence exists, the risk of conflict may be lower. Hungary and Romania, as well as China and the US, are therewith less at risk of conflict outbreak. Conversely, for dyads with a one-sided trade dependence, the relatively independent state has less to lose as well as more to gain from initiating a conflict; imbalanced dyads in terms of trade dependency are thus at greater risk of conflict escalation. According to this logic, dyads at risk include China and Vietnam, China and Taiwan, Russia and Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Georgia, and finally Turkey and Syria. Slightly imbalanced dyads include China and Japan, Russia and Hungary, and China and India. For all other dyads, both countries are relatively independent in terms of trade, and therefore the effect of their trade relation on conflict outbreak is neutral.

Table 10 below provides an overview of the thirty dyads and the seven risk factors.

Table 10. Risk factor assessment for 30 dangerous dyads

		Balance of power	Power transition	Nuclear deterrence	Armament build-up	Defensive alliances	Regime similarity	Trade dependence
Russia	Georgia	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
Russia	United States	Not balanced	No power transition	Nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Russia	Ukraine	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Imbalanced
Russia	NATO	Not balanced	No power transition	Nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	N/A
Russia	Moldova	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
Russia	Hungary	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Somewhat imbalanced
Kosovo	Serbia	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	No alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Mutually independent
Turkey	Greece	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Romania	Hungary	Balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Mutually dependent
Armenia	Azerbaijan	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
United States	Venezuela	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
Egypt	Ethiopia	Not balanced	Power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Egypt	Sudan	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Burundi	Rwanda	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Ethiopia	Sudan	Not balanced	Power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Rwanda	Uganda	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Similar	Somewhat imbalanced
China	United States	Balanced	Power transition	Nuclear	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Mutually dependent
China	India	Not balanced	No power transition	Nuclear	One-sided build-up	No alliances	Different	Somewhat imbalanced
China	Vietnam	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	No alliances	Similar	Imbalanced
China	Japan	Not balanced	Power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Somewhat imbalanced
China	Taiwan	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Imbalanced
South Korea	North Korea	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Japan	North Korea	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	Two-sided build-up	Two-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Syria	Turkey	Not balanced	No power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Similar	Imbalanced
Israel	Iran	Balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	No alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Israel	Lebanon	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Israel	Palestine	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	N/A	No alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Syria	United States	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	No build-up	One-sided alliances	Different	Mutually independent
Iran	Saudi Arabia	Not balanced	Power transition	Non-nuclear	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Similar	Mutually independent
Afghanistan	Pakistan	Not balanced	No power transition	Imbalanced	One-sided build-up	One-sided alliances	Neither very similar nor very different	Somewhat imbalanced

Key takeaways

Interstate conflict risk is projected to increase given systemic developments. From a European security perspective, thirty dangerous dyads are particularly dangerous and need to be watched carefully. In particular, renewed attention to arms control, interstate conflict prevention and mediation, and alliance dynamics is needed.

6. Systemic collapse: structural features and steps to war

Not all intrastate wars remain confined within borders, and neither do all interstate wars remain contained between two states. At the most extreme, war contagion and spill-over of war lead to the collapse of an entire international or regional system. Indeed, the First World War shows that when escalation is badly managed and certain conditions are met, major power tensions may culminate into an all-out, systemic war. More generally, this is more likely when six structural features[79] are present in the international system: when there is a disbalance between raw power and international standing among rising or declining great powers;[80] when great powers vie for regional influence and territories;[81] when a rigid alliance system is in place that allows for major power entrapment into conflict;[82] when nationalist sentiments are on the rise in multiple countries, feeding war proneness among both the elite and population;[83] and finally when smaller powers behave recklessly, feeding tensions between the great powers.[84]

Even though systemic wars are rather rare

Even though systemic wars are rather rare (with a historical track record of eight[85]), they have all-encompassing effects. As policymakers and military planners need to anticipate both wars that are most likely and wars that would be most impactful, systemic war needs to be included in a comprehensive study of future conflict. Worryingly, in today's international system, four of the structural features are present, one is partially present, and only one is absent (for an overview and comparison with the period preceding the outbreak of the First World War, see Textbox 1 and Table 11).[86] In short, there is a disbalance between raw material power and international standing, causing revisionist behaviour by China and Russia while the US seeks to maintain

79 For an overview and literature review of long-term causes, see Jack S. Levy and William Mulligan, "Why 1914 but Not Before? A Comparative Study of the July Crisis and Its Precursors," *Security Studies* 30, no. 2 (2021): 213–15.

80 See for instance Charles F. Doran and Wes Parsons, "War and the Cycle of Relative Power," *The American Political Science Review* 74, no. 4 (1980): 947–65, https://doi.org/10.2307/1954315; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

81 See Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited*, 135–66.

82 For instance Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security* 9, no. 1 (1984): 58.

83 For a nuanced discussion on the role of nationalism in the First and Second World War, see Michael Mann, "The Role of Nationalism in the Two World Wars," in *Nationalism and War*, ed. John A Hall and Sinisa Malesevic, 2013, 172–96.

84 See Tim Sweijs, "The Role of Small Powers in the Outbreak of Great Power War," Centre of Small State Studies (Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

85 These include: the Peloponnesian War, the Macedonian War, the Thirty Years' War, War of the Spanish Succession, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the First World War and the Second World War. Manus I. Midlarsky, "Systemic Wars and Dyadic Wars: No Single Theory- ," *International Interactions* 16, no. 3 (December 1990): 171–81.

86 Shivshankar Menon, "A New Cold War May Call for a Return to Nonalignment," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed July 28, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/01/nonalignment-international-system-alliance-bloc/; James Traub, "Cold War 2.0 Is Ushering In Nonalignment 2.0," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed July 28, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/09/nonalignment-us-china-cold-war-ukraine-india-global-south/. Also, see Hugo Meijer and Luis Simón, "Covert Balancing: Great Powers, Secondary States and US Balancing Strategies against China," *International Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March 8, 2021): 463–81.

the status quo. States increasingly vie for influence and over territory, with the invasion of Ukraine as a key example but weapon transfers from the West to Ukraine also being part of this trend. Foreign policy is clearly becoming militarised, as is demonstrated by that same war and the increasingly belligerent naval presence of China in the South China Sea. Finally, domestic nationalist discourses are becoming more dominant across the world. When it comes to tighter alliance structures, today's track record is mixed, with some countries (Finland and Sweden in NATO and Australia in AUKUS) seeking alliance protection while others (India, South Africa) choosing to hedge at this point.[87] Finally, reckless behaviour by smaller and middle powers remains relatively limited, even if some states, including those in the Gulf, are diversifying their military partnerships in a quest to reap the benefits from the transition into a multipolar world.

87 Menon, "A New Cold War May Call for a Return to Nonalignment"; Traub, "Cold War 2.0 Is Ushering In Nonalignment 2.0." Also, see Meijer and Simón, "Covert Balancing: Great Powers, Secondary States and US Balancing Strategies against China."

Textbox 1. The structural features of the international system preceding the First World War[88]

Six factors

Throughout the period 1880-1914, a complex interplay of six structural features culminated in the First World War. First, a disbalance between raw power and international standing spurred Germany to behave aggressively in a bid to correct for what it perceived as its lack of international recognition and exclusion. Second, major powers vied for influence in regions such as the Balkans, the Alsace-Lorraine border region and colonies in Africa. Third, in Europe a complex alliance formation process took place through which the continent became divided between the Dual Alliance signed between Germany and Austria-Hungary and the Triple Entente concluded between England, France and Russia. Although these defensive agreements were sought to increase Europe's stability, the system's rigidity proved catalytic in the onset of war. Fourth, a quest to maximise economic, financial, diplomatic and cultural power translated into the militarisation of foreign policies whereby major powers engaged in arms races and belligerent international interactions. Where necessary, a lack of economic or soft power was compensated for by military prowess. The German-British naval arms race that followed the former's quest to break British maritime economic dominance is a key example. Fifth, the tense international environment was mirrored at home through increasingly nationalist discourse, whipping up public support for military build-ups and ultimately defensive war. Sixth, and finally, the reckless behaviour of smaller powers seeking to reap the benefits of great power competition ultimately proved detrimental to European security. Serbia in particular managed to exacerbate tensions between the major European powers as it sought to enlist French and Russian support for its expansionist ambitions, therewith pitting the two powers against Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the entrapment that resulted from the provision of security guarantees helped turn the conflict into a major war.

88 For an elaboration of the case study, see Annex B.

Table 11. System features, comparison 1880-1914 and 2022

System feature	1880-1914:[89] power(s) involved	1880-1914: example(s)	Assessment present situation:	2022: example(s)
Disbalance between raw power and international standing	Germany	Exclusion of Germany from colonial agreements	+	China seeks to recoup its role as the Middle Kingdom; the US pushes back Russia seeks to reclaim its old role as self-perceived empire
Competition over regional influence and territory	All major powers	Alsace-Lorraine; Balkan Wars	+	Russia's invasion of Ukraine; Western weapon transfers to Ukraine; Chinese belligerence on Taiwan; influence campaigns in Africa
Rigid alliance system	All major powers	Triple Entente; Dual alliance	+/-	Tighter alliance structures and increased polarisation; Finland and Sweden joining NATO But also: non-alignment movement (India, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, the UAE, Vietnam)
Militarisation of foreign policy	Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia	Austrian military threats against Serbia	+	Chinese maritime claims and aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea A global increase in threats of use of force
Domestic nationalism	All major powers		+	China's official discourse on ethics, morality and kindship in the relation to Taiwan
Reckless or opportunistic small power behaviour	All major powers, Austria-Hungary and Russia in particular	Serbia pitting Russia and France against Austria-Hungary	-	Within NATO, small and middle powers such as Poland, the Baltics and Slovakia thus far thread carefully. Yet traditional US partners such as the UAE are strengthening their (military) ties with China.

89 For an effective introduction into the structure, dynamics, and failures of the international system before World War 1, and the literature on it, see Volker R. Berghahn, "Origins," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume 1: Global War*, ed. Jay Winter, vol. 1, The Cambridge History of the First World War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 16–38; Paul W. Schroeder, "Stealing Horses to Great Applause. Austria-Hungary's Decision in 1914 in Systemic Perspective.," in *An Improbable War?: The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture before 1914*, ed. Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 17–42; Greg Cashman and Leonard C. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War: Patterns of Interstate Conflict from World War I to Iraq* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), most importantly 27-30.

Key takeaways

The collapse of an international order through a systemic war is the most dangerous risk. Worryingly, most of the structural features that caused the international system to break down in the First World War are present today (see Table 11) – the only exception being the presence of reckless behaviour of smaller powers. Even so, when provoked, small and medium powers along Europe's eastern borders may get caught up in an escalatory spiral with a revisionist Russia to their east, potentially drawing in the European heartland with a full blown systemic war as a possible, worst-case result. Again, Europeans should focus their attention on escalation management, confidence-building and conflict prevention efforts.

Most of the structural features that caused the international system to break down in the First World War are present today

7. Perceptions shaping realities

Policymakers in the US and increasingly across Europe are well underway to reinterpret the strategic environment and translate current (and future) threats into strategy. Shifts in official thinking are captured by a review of strategic documents such as NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, the EU's 2022 Strategic Compass and national security strategies. In a nutshell, strategic competition features as number one threat especially in US and NATO thinking, with the US' emphasis more on China and NATO's emphasis more on Russia. Meanwhile the EU, even if making significant steps towards aligning the Russian threat perception, also continues to place emphasis on the threats to European security emerging from instability in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Strait of Hormuz.

7.1. Washington: China first

The US is concerned first and foremost with China's rising economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power, and second with Russia's disruptive behaviour.[90] Its key priority in the years to come is to "promote a favourable distribution of power to deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the United States and [its] allies, inhibiting access to the global commons, or dominating key regions."[91] With strategic competition as Washington's first priority, its military presence is anticipated to be most robust in the Indo-Pacific and Europe. In similar anticipation of competition between the major military powers, the US most recent security strategy emphasises the need to invest in cutting-edge technologies and capabilities to maintain its military and national security advantage, while also seeking to promote shared norms and seek new agreements on emerging technologies, space and cyber space – yet also on climate and environment-related issues.

This prioritisation of strategic competition implies that the US is shifting away from expeditionary missions in primarily the Middle East region. Still, it continues to recognise the regionally disruptive role played by regional powers, such as Iran, and the challenges posed by state fragility, non-state actors, and violent extremism. To address these threats, the 2021 security strategy calls for a carefully tailored military presence in the Middle East, serving Israel's security, deterring Iranian aggression, disrupting Al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks, and prevent an IS resurgence. That is not to say that the US entirely precludes a role in potential humanitarian crises and armed conflict in regions such as Africa and the Middle East, but that it seeks to maintain proficient special operations forces to focus on crisis response and priority counterterrorism and unconventional warfare missions.

90 Joseph R. Biden, "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," The White House, March 3, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/. P.8

91 Biden. P.9.

7.2. **NATO: back to its raison d'être**

As outlined in the 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO is returning to its original *raison d'être*: to guarantee collective security against Russia.[92] Of NATO's three core post-Cold War tasks – deterrence and defence, conflict prevention and management, and cooperative security – emphasis therewith shifts to the first. As an illustration, the 2010 version mentioned deterrence only five times, in the newly adopted Concept the words deterrence and deterrent feature as many as 23 times. Conversely, the number of references to cooperation or cooperative security decreased from 23 to 12.[93] The shift in threat perception and rhetoric is also matched by some changes in posture. In response to the threat to the eastern flank, the allies are reinforcing their conventional deterrent forces and their readiness.[94]

NATO is returning to its original raison d'être: to guarantee collective security against Russia

Beyond recognising Russia as its number one priority, NATO is also taking a clear step towards recognising the Indo-Pacific region as crucial to Euro-Atlantic security, interests, and stability – and towards viewing China as a threat thereto. NATO aims to counter China's disruptive and rising influence, and to expand its efforts to secure the Indo-Pacific region. Yet no clear military capabilities or goals are connected to those aims. At the same time, NATO continues to recognise the threat of insecurity and instability in North Africa, the Middle East and the Sahel – but especially in light of their effects on security and stability within NATO states. Threats highlighted in this context are terrorism and intrastate conflict, exacerbated by fragile governance, climate change, poverty, and the negative influence of NATO's geopolitical authoritarian rivals. As such, it seeks to ensure the resources, capabilities, training and command and control arrangements for crisis management, stabilisation and counterterrorism missions, "including at strategic distance".[95] NATO will furthermore engage in military cooperation and training-type missions, mentioning specifically its partnerships with Georgia, Ukraine, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as other parts of the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region, where cooperation to counter third-party interference and coercion is to be bolstered.

7.3. **The EU: cautious alignment**

Europe's strategic thinking is similarly (even if more slowly) undergoing a major change. Were in the 2010s Europeans still largely focused on expeditionary missions such as counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, today this priority is declining in salience and being redirected. Expeditionary ambitions as pronounced in the EU's Strategic Compass increasingly aim toward the direct protection of European interests, including suppressing terrorism, supporting the rule of law to prevent migration, and protecting access to resources and

92 "Strategic Concept" (NATO, 2022).

93 "Strategic Concept" (NATO, 2010).

94 The new NATO Force Model, announced during the Madrid 2022 summit, sets as a target over 100,000 forces deployable within 10 days (compared to a previous 40,000 troops deployable within 15 days), as well as another 200,000 forces deployable within in 30 days, and at least 500,000 deployable in 30-180 days."New NATO Force Model," 2022, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf. It was also announced that for "the first time since the Cold War" there will be "upgraded defence plans, with forces pre-assigned to defend specific Allies". NATO, "Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg Following the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Heads of State and Government (2022 NATO Summit)," June 30, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_197288.htm.

95 "Strategic Concept," 2022, 9.

maritime trade routes.[96] While the Middle East is losing its prominent place, regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and Strait of Hormuz are now key concerns to Europe.[97]

Crucially, European threat perceptions shift towards "the return of power politics in a contested multipolar world".[98] Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent war in Eastern Ukraine, the protection of European territorial integrity and security against Russian assertiveness has been a growing concern – yet the 2022 war is the real wake-up call.[99] Mission and capability priorities are therefore shifting towards deterrence and assurance as well as high-intensity warfare, with particular emphasis placed on the development of strategic capabilities to conduct crisis management operations, to project power in the maritime domain, to bolster aerial defences, to allow for space access, and to act in the cyber domain.[100]

European territorial integrity and security against Russian assertiveness has been a growing concern – yet the 2022 war is the real wake-up call

The return of great power competition bears not only implications for Europe's posture towards Russia, but also the Strategic Compass highlights a European concern about the shifting power balances in the Indo-Pacific, especially with a rising China. It recognises the need to protect its interests in the region, especially in terms of ensuring the rule of law in the maritime domain – yet its extent unclear as member states are divided as to how extensive such a role would be.[101] Finally, the document carries with it also a recognition of the growing economic and political importance of the Arctic.[102] Finally, European strategies recognise the need to counter the growing threats of cyber warfare, disinformation campaigns, technological breakthroughs, WMD proliferation, and organised crime.[103] However, the European states – save for particularly France on some points – are less explicit than the US and other global powers on the need to invest in emerging technologies such as AI, quantum computing, or space-based military capabilities.

96 European Union, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security.," March 21, 2022, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/.p.16.

97 See for instance Ministère des Armées, Republique Française, "Actualisation Stratégique 2021," October 2, 2021, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/actualites/actualisation-strategique-2021; European Union, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security."; Netherlands Ministry of Defense, "Defensievisie 2035: Vechten voor een veilige toekomst" (Ministerie van Defensie, October 15, 2020), https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/publicaties/2020/10/15/defensievisie-2035.

98 European Union, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security." P.17.

99 See for instance Defense, "Defensievisie 2035," 29; Daniel Fiott, "Uncharted Territory?: Towards a Common Threat Analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU Security and Defence.," Brief (Luxembourg: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2020), 3, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2815/362443; Bundesregierug Deutschland, "Weissbuch 2016. Zur Sicherheitspolitik und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr." (Berlin: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 2016), 31–32.

100 European Union, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security."

101 France, for instance, is relatively ambitious and concrete on this point: the French strategic update mentions with regards to the Indo-Pacific: "As a European nuclear power with global interests, France cannot define its interests solely in terms of geographical proximity to the homeland: it must imperatively maintain a geostrategic reach in line with current developments and its ambitions, which are first and foremost to protect its citizens and territories, but also to preserve its influence and freedom of action" Ministère des Armées, Republique Française, "Actualisation Stratégique 2021." p.33..

102 See for instance Defense, "Defensievisie 2035." Annex II.

103 For instance European Union, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security.," 23. See also Daniel Fiott, "Uncharted Territory?: Towards a Common Threat Analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU Security and Defence," *European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)*, July 9, 2020, 7, https://doi.org/10.2815/362443.

Key takeaways

Table 12 below offers a summary of the key components of the official threat perceptions. With the risks associated with the changing distribution of power and Russian aggression featuring high across all official documents, deterrence and assurance is once again Europe's number one priority – not least in light of the US' key preoccupation with China.

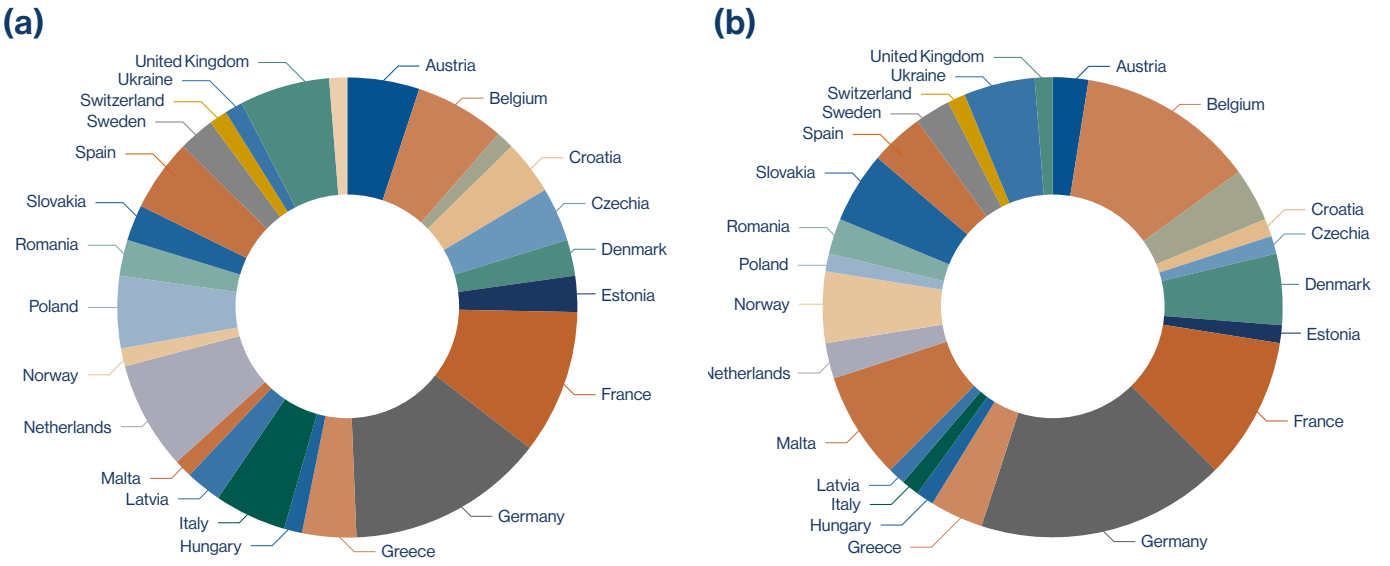
Table 12. Official security perceptions: threats, missions, regions

	Threats	Missions	Focus regions
The US	Changing distribution of power Disruptive technologies	Deterrence and assurance Military partnerships	Indo-Pacific and Europe
NATO	Russian aggression and revisionism Democratic backsliding Terrorism, conflict, fragility and instability	Deterrence and assurance Military cooperation and training-type missions	Eastern Europe (non-NATO/EU territory)
The EU	Russian aggression and major geopolitical shifts Hybrid threats Climate change	Crisis management Counter-hybrid Military cooperation Freedom of navigation and overflight	Europe The Sahel, Horn of Africa and Strait of Hormuz Indo-Pacific

8. Wars to come, Europeans to act: what the experts say

Between 20 April and 12 May 2022, 80 European experts based in 23 countries and representing at least 25 different nationalities filled out the survey. They represent 'old and new Europe'; the north and south; the east and west. With some exceptions, the respondents are based in or come from a country that is either part of the EU or NATO. The majority of respondents (71%) work at think tanks, 19% work in academia, and 9% in government or EU agencies.

Figure 21. Where experts are based (a) and their nationality (b)

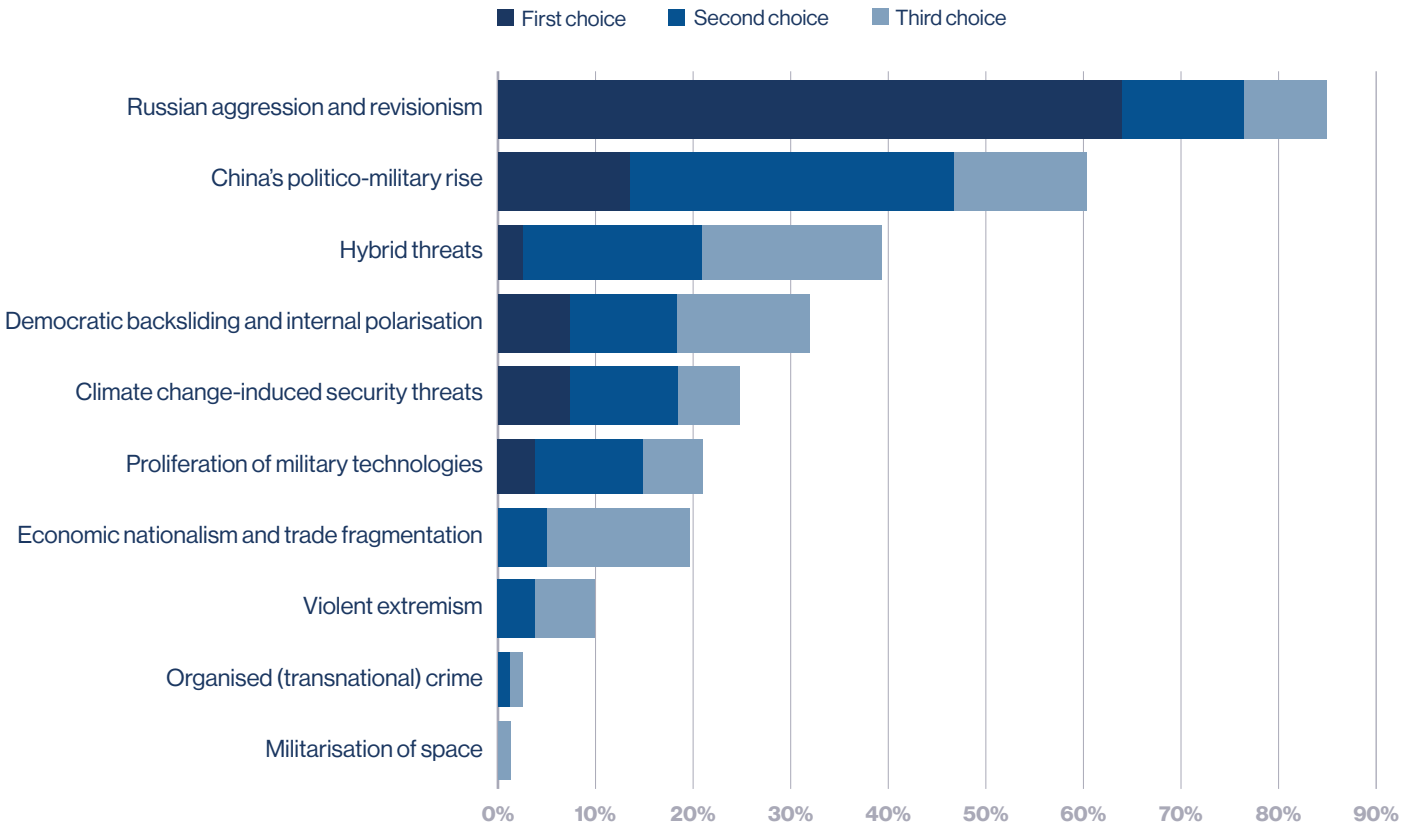


8.1. Main concerns

Interstate competition is experts' number one concern

The survey clearly reflects today's strategic environment. Interstate competition is experts' number one concern. When asked to rank ten threats to European security over the next ten years, 65% of respondents put Russian aggression and revisionism as their first choice, and as many as 85% put Russia in their top 3 threats. China's politico-military rise came right after, with 60% of experts choosing China's rise as either their first, second or third most important threat to European security. Following interstate competition, political and social volatility appeared as a key worry: 40% put hybrid threats in their top three threats, and 32% listed democratic backsliding and internal polarisation among the most severe threats to European security. Based on experts' top 3, climate change (25%), the proliferation of revolutionary or destabilising technologies (21%) and economic nationalism and trade fragmentation (20%) came as fifth, sixth and seventh most important threats. Marking clearly a break with the post-9/11 security environment, violent extremism appeared only in 10% of experts' top 3 threats.

Figure 22. Which are, in your opinion, the most important threats to European security over the next 10 years? Overview of threats that were listed as first, second or third choice.

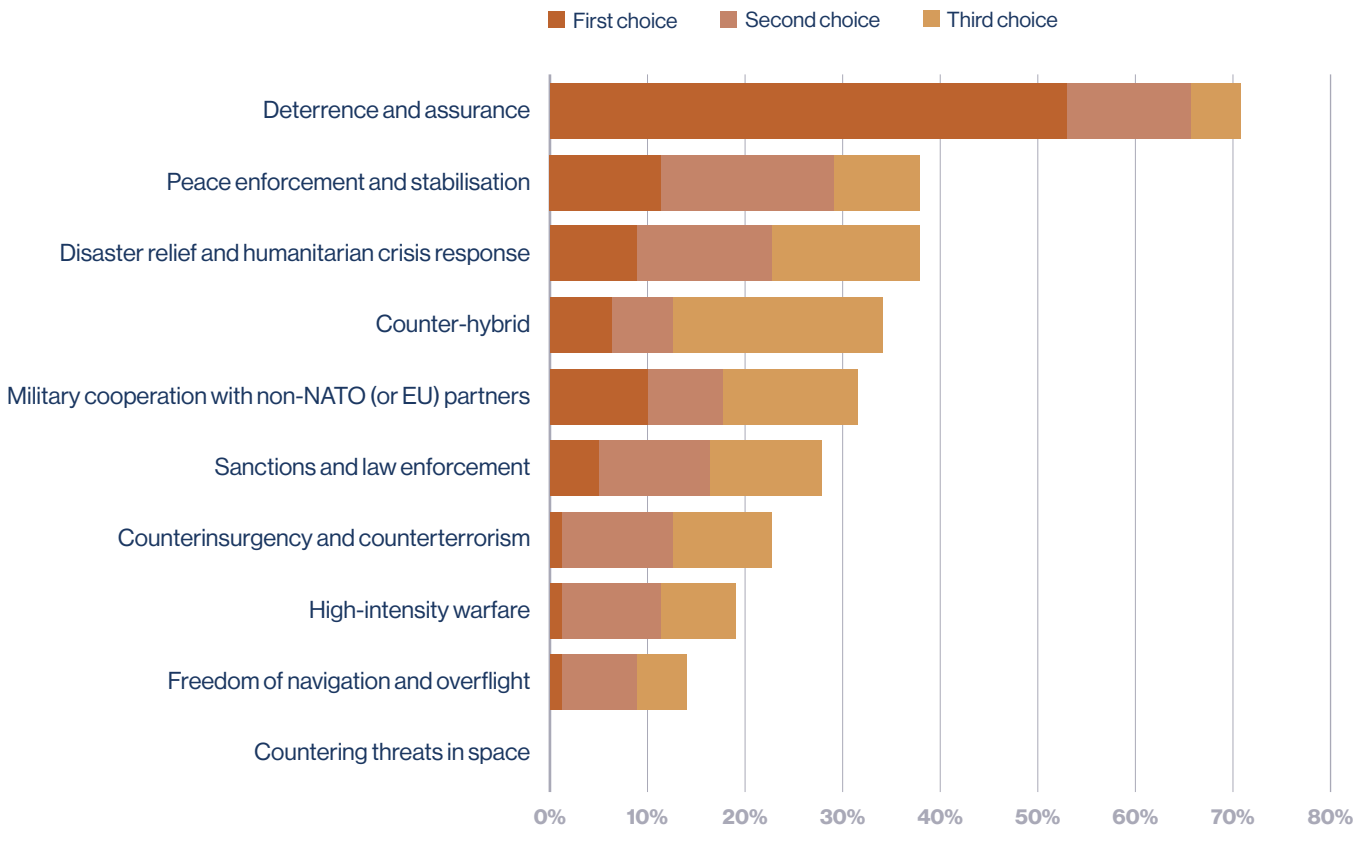


Deterrence and assurance are becoming the first and most important priority for European militaries

8.2. **Prioritised mission types**

Again unsurprisingly, deterrence and assurance are becoming the first and most important priority for European militaries: 71% of respondents marked this mission type as their first, second or third choice. Peace enforcement and stabilisation, as well as disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response came second and third (both 38%), highlighting the recognition that Europe will need to take care of stability in its neighbourhood. While only one respondent expects high-intensity warfare to be Europe's most frequent military endeavour, almost 19% of respondents put it in their top three.

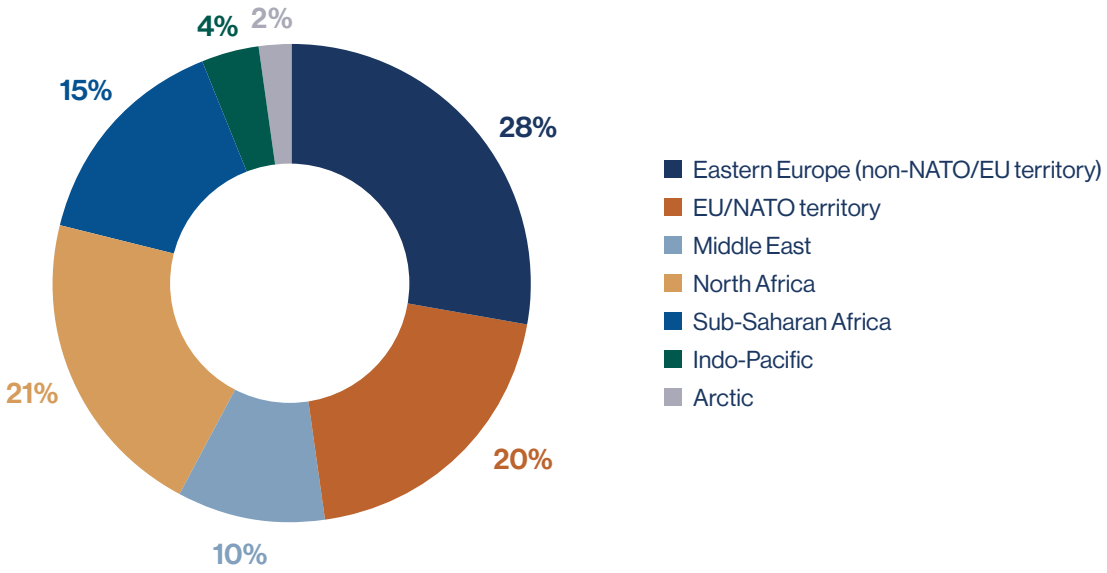
Figure 23. Please rank the military mission types that European armed forces will be carrying out most frequently, either collectively or individually, over the next 10 years, from most likely to least likely. Overview of mission types that were listed as first, second or third choice.



8.3. **Expected regions**

Asked to rank the most important regions for Europeans to engage in over the next ten years, experts clearly expect missions to be carried out close to or at home. Of the respondents, 84% put Eastern Europe (non-NATO/EU territory) in their top 3; 64% North Africa; and 61% EU/NATO territory. The era of interventionism in the Middle East is clearly over: only 28% ranked this region among their top 3. And while many perceive China as a key threat to European security, only 13% of experts thought of the Indo-Pacific as a top-3 region to engage in for European militaries.

Figure 24. Where will European military missions most frequently take place over the next 10 years? Please rank the following regions (including land, air, maritime) from most likely to least likely. Overview of regions that were listed as first, second or third choice.

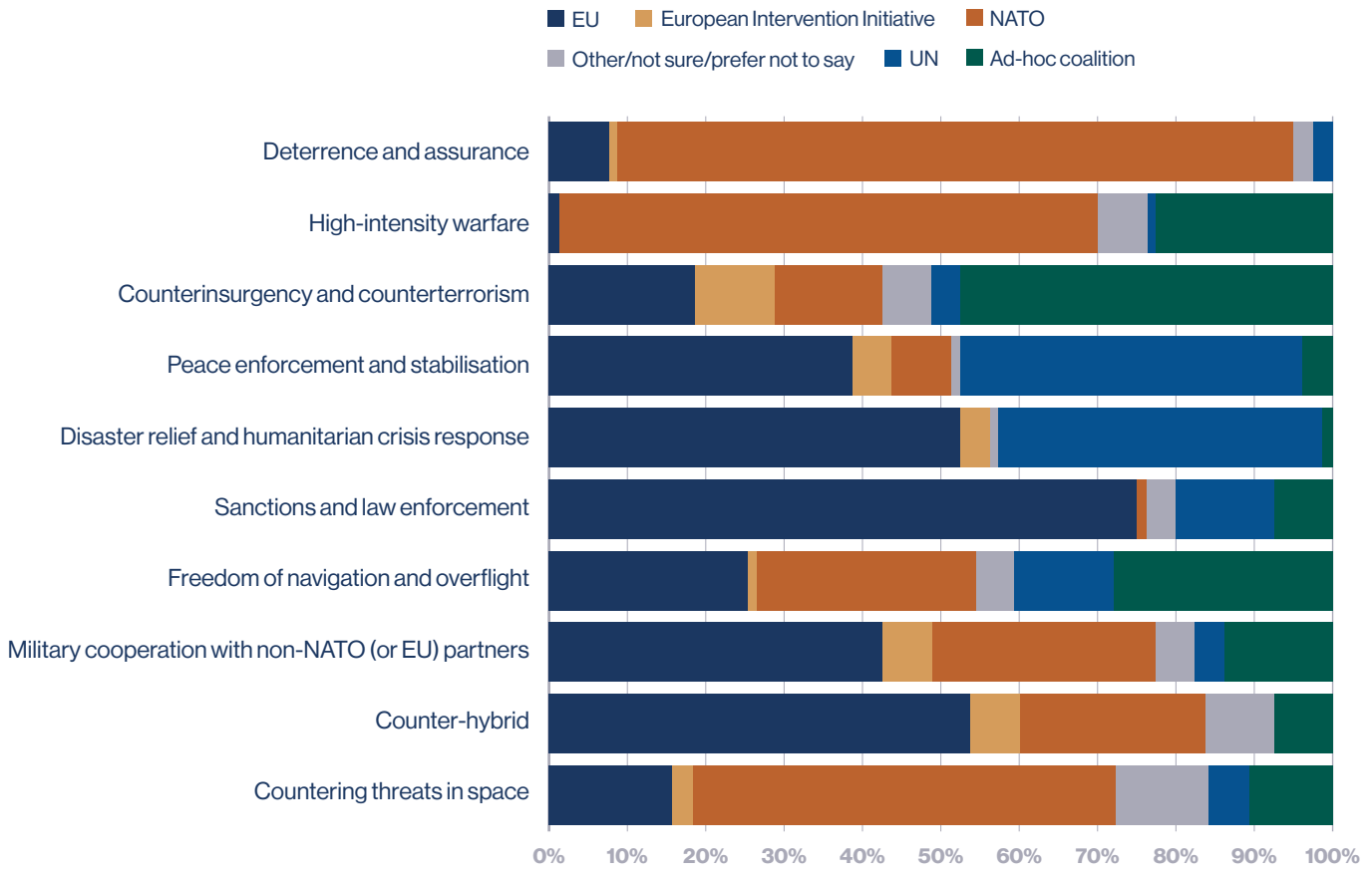


When it comes to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, almost half of the surveyed experts preferred an ad-hoc coalition

8.4. **Preferred response formats**

Respondents were also asked about the *preferred* (and not necessarily most capable) format to carry out each type of military mission. For the majority of respondents, NATO preferably takes the lead in carrying out deterrence and assurance (86%), high-intensity warfare (69%) and countering threats in space (54%). EU-led missions are preferred for disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response (53%) as well as sanctions and law enforcement (75%). Respondents were somewhat divided as to which format should carry out freedom of navigation and overflight missions, choosing either NATO (28%), ad-hoc coalitions (28%) or the EU (25%). Only when it comes to counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, almost half (48%) of the surveyed experts preferred an ad-hoc coalition.

Figure 25. From your perspective, what would be the preferred format to carry out each of the military mission types? Please choose the most preferred format per mission type.



Key takeaways

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Russia comes out as the most important security risk, followed by China's political-military rise, while deterrence and assurance missions are seen as the most important mission types for European security forces, with Eastern Europe and EU/NATO territory as the most vital regions. Experts foresee a clear (preferred) division of labour between NATO and the EU, with the former focusing on deterrence, assurance, and high-intensity warfare and the latter taking on disaster relief, humanitarian crisis response, counter hybrid and security cooperation. Meanwhile ad-hoc coalitions are considered the preferred format for counterterrorism and -insurgency operations. Such a division of labour is not as clearly anticipated in strategic documents by said organisations. (Table 13 below offers a summary).

Table 13. Expert survey: threats, missions, regions, task division

	Future threats	Future missions	Most salient future regions	Task division
Expert survey	Great power competition Hybrid threats Democratic backsliding Technological competition	Deterrence and assurance Peace enforcement and stabilisation Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response Counter-hybrid Military cooperation with non-EU/NATO partners	Eastern Europe EU/NATO territory North and Sub-Saharan Africa	NATO: deterrence and assurance; high-intensity warfare; countering threats in space EU: Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response; sanctions and law enforcement; counter-hybrid; military cooperation with non-EU/NATO partners Ad-hoc: counter-terrorism/insurgency

Experts foresee a clear (preferred) division of labour between NATO and the EU

9. Policy conclusions

Synthesising the main insights on future war and instability from chapter 3 to 8, a total of five of higher level policy imperatives for European militaries emerge. Together, they set out the broader parameters within for more concrete policy steps – which follow in the second part of this conclusion.

Watch out for War with a capital W. The picture that emerges is by all means grim. Conflict between the major military powers is a defining feature of the current era, spurring a radical shift back to the traditional defence tasks of deterrence and assurance. For Europeans, this means a renewed focus on its backyard: Eastern Europe. But the challenges stemming from renewed strategic competition extend well beyond the European continent: as existing rules and norms are being challenged, the protection of sea lines of communication in the Indo-Pacific, the Strait of Hormuz, the Arctic and elsewhere will require attention, resources and capabilities. In addition, the return of great power competition intersects with and adds to regional rivalries such as in the Middle East, emboldening middle powers to advance their strategic interests and compete with one another – either just below or above the threshold of war.

Non-military means to counter systemic breakdown deserve rigorous examination and preventative measures need to be taken to avoid entrapment

Escape entrapment. If strategic competition is left unchecked and escalation management fails, a full-blown, systemic war may loom. Most of the structural features that have caused the international system to break down before are present today. The risk of systemic collapse is small yet cannot be underestimated given its impact. In this context, risky dyads are those in which great powers are involved on both sides, either directly or through defence commitments. Relevant dyads include Russia-US, Russia-NATO, China-US, China-Japan, China-Taiwan, North Korea-South Korea, and Japan-North Korea. The risk could be higher when the dyad involves a power transition: this is the case for China-US and China-Japan. Non-military means to counter systemic breakdown deserve rigorous examination and preventative measures need to be taken to avoid entrapment and alleviate pressures. So the increases in military budgets and strengthening of military postures need to be combined with sustained diplomatic efforts to keep the channels of communication open. Confidence-building efforts through bilateral and multilateral arrangements need to be pursued while room for manoeuvre for de-escalation is preserved.

Prevent and contain interstate conflict. Even if great powers manage to avert a systemic war, interstate conflict risk is nonetheless projected to increase given a confluence of global trends. Dangerous dyads in Europe and Europe's immediate neighbourhood are, in addition to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, Russia-Moldova, Turkey-Greece, and Armenia-Azerbaijan. In Africa, Egypt-Ethiopia and Ethiopia-Sudan stand out, while in the Middle East the Iranian-Saudi relationship is projected to be unstable. Here too deterrent efforts need to be coupled with preventive measures aimed at preventing war outbreak and containing its spill over effects.

Continue to address global instability factors. Security challenges that occupied policymakers and militaries in the post-Cold War era have not disappeared. The risks that come with state fragility, including polarisation, violent extremism and intergroup violence, are unlikely to abate. Indeed, new trends and developments further exacerbate such risks. In traditional societies, digitalisation and rapid modernisation can be highly destabilising, while the democratisation of military technology renders such risks increasingly violent. If anything, the reach and scale of these security challenges are expected to rise as the result of increased strategic competition over zones of influence, and the continuing transnationalisation of violent extremism, and digitalisation. Political and social volatility can be manipulated more effectively by outside actors while advances in communication technologies make discontent, radicalism and polarisation spread further and further. New technologies and battle-tested playbooks will enable hybrid conflict on steroids in the decade to come. A fierce battle of narratives is being fought and 'the West' is by no means on a winning streak. Importantly, such challenges are not constrained to foreign lands; European societies are by no means immune to radicalisation, polarisation and democratic decline.

European societies are by no means immune to radicalisation, polarisation and democratic decline

Even if strategic and interstate competition has become policymakers' main worry, intrastate wars and other forms of political and social volatility will thus demand attention and resources. Efforts to tackle the structural drivers of vulnerability, escape conflict traps and make pillars of progress advance and not undermine societies need to be revamped. European militaries are thus expected to be stretched across domains, regions and mission types. Stabilisation, peace enforcement, disaster-relief, counter-hybrid, and military cooperation all feature high. The Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa, but also the Middle East and Eastern Europe demand attention.

Address the climate-security nexus. Last, global warming leads to increasing insecurity over food, water, energy and health, causing people to flee and pitting communities, countries and regions against one another. The Middle East, North-Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arctic are the regions where the conflict risks will be most severe. Given their proximity and relevance to Europe, Europeans cannot look the other way. Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis management, peace enforcement and stabilisation, but also counterterrorism activities will therefore occupy their militaries.

9.1. Policy recommendations

Even if strategic alignment among European (and NATO) countries is taking place, allowing for better prioritisation, the challenges ahead are manifold and the implications for policy responses diffuse. As the world is growing increasingly complex and belligerent, an ever-larger variety of military capacities will be required and expected from European states in a growing number of regions. Even with deterrence and assurance missions becoming Europe's most important military activity, more typical post-Cold War security challenges are not necessarily going away, therewith sustaining the need for security force assistance, and counterinsurgency and peacekeeping missions in its neighbourhood. The rapidly crystalising effects of climate change add additional layers of fragility, while new technologies already spur a demand for counter-hybrid activities and soon/already also the need for counter-space threats capacity. Freedom of navigation and overflight are likely to be challenged by major, small and non-state powers alike, yet access to the global commons will remain fundamental to European security and prosperity. Finally, should deterrence missions fail, Europe may find itself dragged into high-intensity warfare, either in its direct neighbourhood

or elsewhere. In such a scenario, alliance commitments may force Europe to act, also beyond its own region.

European militaries – currently racing to catch up in terms of capabilities, planning and strategy – will thus be stretched. Even with well-thought-through prioritisations, reality can catch up, and states will not always have the freedom to choose where to get involved. Policy recommendations therefore are:

1. Deter and assure. Russia's belligerence pushes European militaries to focus on revamping their deterrence and assurance postures and capabilities. Europe should:

1.1 Move forward and intensify efforts to implement NATO's New Force Model. This includes enhancing NATO's presence on the eastern flank through replacing current battlegroups by brigade-sized units with prepositioned stocks for heavily armoured vehicles and as such complement the deterrence-by-punishment component of the Alliance's deterrence posture with a more robust deterrence-by-denial component. NATO needs to ensure the readiness of 100,000 troops in less than 10 days, 200,000 troops within 30 days and at least 500,000 troops in 1-6 months; with an Allied Reaction Force of 40,000 troops (replacing the NATO Response Force) to be deployable before a crisis occurs; Europeans should contribute equally to achieve set goals.

The new strategic environment requires increased European investments in its defence posture

1.2 Increase investments in defensive and offensive capabilities. The new strategic environment requires increased European investments in its defence posture and as such bolster the European NATO pillar. European states should invest in deep strike as well as A2/AD capabilities, yet also rapidly fill current deficiencies such as in command-and-control capacity, combat service support, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). In addition, Europe needs to overcome ammunition as well as personnel shortages.

1.3 Ensure alliance and EU cohesion. Throughout the first months of the Russo-Ukrainian war, NATO has shown remarkable cohesion. Allies should not take it as a given that this will inevitably continue as the war continues, or when other security challenges arise. Therefore, allies should coordinate closely, fulfil their alliance commitments, and reaffirm and ensure the fulfilment of democratic principles on which NATO is founded. Concretely, this means that the rule of law needs defending across the alliance and within the EU, including in countries such as Hungary, Poland and Turkey .

1.4 Increase the ability of NATO partners to fend for themselves. Invest in military cooperation programmes such as the NATO Partnership for Peace or the European Peace Facility to bolster military capabilities of partner states and therewith discourage potentially revisionist behaviour by third states (a so-called porcupine strategy). Georgia, Moldova and naturally Ukraine should take priority.

1.5 Re-examine the arms control-deterrence nexus. Even if current times are barely optimal for arms control, deterrence ultimately depends on it. Increased time, efforts and resources need to be dedicated also to arms control, non-proliferation and confidence-building measures, including dialogues on doctrines and postures, information exchanges, hotlines, and pre-notifications. In particular, increased attention should be paid to how such measures relate to deterrence.

1.6 Dedicate effort and resources to nuclear security and safety. With nuclear deterrence once again taking a prominent position in NATO's revamped deterrence and

assurance strategy, ensuring the safety and security of nuclear forces and arrangement is extremely important, to ensure the safety of civilians and set an example to nuclear powers elsewhere.

1.7 Hold explorative discussions on European nuclear burden sharing. Today's changing security landscape and perception thereof as well as the uncertainty with regard to a sustained US interest in European security spur the need to reinvigorate initial discussions on the role of French and British nuclear forces in Europe's collective security. Such discussions were first brought up by French president Emmanuel Macron in 2020[104] and could be carried forward.

2. Get serious about European specialisation. To efficiently deploy European capabilities and overcome current deficiencies such as in command-and-control capacity, combat service support, airlift, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, multinational defence cooperation should be advanced. Ultimately, European militaries should be able to carry out Libya-type operations independently from the United States.[105] Concretely, Europe should:[106]

A European intervention group with the flexibility for the UK to participate in could be established to bring together specialised capabilities for higher-end operations

2.1 Further invest in and expand structured capability groups for collective defence purposes. This can be done per region. For instance, the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force could be developed into a structured capability group for Northern Europe with participating countries contributing different capabilities.

2.2 Establish *functional* structured capability groups, for instance to allow for European crisis management autonomy. In addition to the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5000 troops, a European intervention group with rapid decision-making procedures and the flexibility for the UK to participate in could be established to bring together specialised capabilities for higher-end operations; while stabilisation groups could pool sources for lower-end post-conflict operations.

2.3 Advance integration between national armed forces. For example, further integration of the Dutch and the German armies will be necessary to ensure availability and readiness of troops as the battlegroup in Lithuania is being transformed into a heavy brigade.

3. Invest in a strong European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB). Across Europe, military budgets have increased by roughly 40%. Dealing with time pressure to fill capability gaps rapidly, Europeans however will be inclined to spend uncoordinatedly and buy off-the-shelf products from non-European defence industries. This would increase Europe's capability fragmentation, erode its defence sector and undermine European defence integration writ large. Instead, Europeans should:

3.1 Coordinate capability priorities through existing frameworks to identify and plug capability gaps. Examples include the EU's Capability Development Plan (CDP) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) as well as NATO's Defence Planning

104 Shannon Bugos, "France Offers Nuclear Deterrent to All Europe," Arms Control Association, March 2020, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-03/news/france-offers-nuclear-deterrent-europe.

105 See Daniel S Hamilton and Hans Binnendijk, "One Plus Four: Charting NATO's Future in an Age of Disruption," NATO Task Force Report (NATO Task force, February 16, 2022), https://www.transatlantic.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NATO-TF-SC-final-feb-16-2022.pdf.

106 Building on the recommendations offered by Dick Zandee and Adája Stoetman, "Specialising in European Defence" (Clingendael | Netherlands Institute of International Relations, July 2022).

Capability Review (DPCR) and related Capability Targets. National defence funding plans have often been insufficient for the implementation of these capability priorities, in part because NATO defence planning priorities have been misaligned with national ones.[107] Given the complexity and severity of today's threat environment, cautious alignment between national and NATO/EU capability priorities is necessary.

3.2 Coordinate procurement. As Europeans are rushing to replenish their stocks and increase the quantity of their defence equipment, they should work together to avoid fragmentation, ensure interoperability, and increase their leverage vis-à-vis sellers. Collective procurement of additional PAC-3 missiles among European Patriot users is an example. The recently proposed a *Short Term Instrument for increasing collaboration of the Member States in the defence procurement phase* should be established.[108] That said, coordinated procurement of complex systems and platforms is only feasible among close strategic partners (e.g. the Netherlands and Germany) as it depends on the synchronisation of development and procurement cycles.

As Europeans are rushing to replenish their stocks and increase the quantity of their defence equipment, they should work together

3.3 Create European Champions capable of carrying out large scale defence projects along the production and procurement cycle, including research and development, production, after-sales services and upkeep/upgrade programmes. A strong industrial policy at the European (not national) level is key to avoid fragmentation and allow for European industries to deliver both quantitatively and qualitatively, for instance in the domain of aerospace, naval platforms, missile technology and missile defence. At the same time, ensure that small and medium size defence players – who are crucial to innovation – have access to funding programmes and the supply chains of the large system integrators. For instance, it could be wise to fund the development of capabilities by small coalitions consisting of one large producer supported by a limited set of smaller ones based on excellence – instead of very large coalitions of providers based on geographical spread.

3.4 Strike a balance between renovation and innovation. Industrial efforts should be carefully balanced to ensure that the military needs of both today and the future are met. To ensure the continuing existence of a European defence industry, the need to innovate cannot be overlooked. Increased government support for education and R&D is necessary. Concretely, European states should increase their R&D investment to at least 2% of military expenditures as recommended by the European Defence Agency.

4. Share responsibilities and capabilities with allies and partners. In an increasingly complex and dangerous world, Europe cannot do everything, everywhere. For example, deterring Russia in the Baltics and Eastern Europe requires different capabilities than deterring China in the Indo-Pacific. Choices need to be made, in consultation with allies and partners outside of Europe, and a division of labour is inevitable. European NATO partners should:

4.1 Consult with non-European NATO partners on effective burden-sharing, designating different tasks among alliance members to avoid a duplication of efforts or militaries being stretched too thin. In the short term, the balance between US and European boots on the ground in the east should be carefully considered. A permanent presence of (European) NATO countries in the Baltic States and Poland – which as of now NATO countries

107 "NATO Defence Planning Capability Review 2019/2020 - the Netherlands" (NATO, October 14, 2020).

108 "Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Establishing the European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act" (19/072022), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022PC0349&from=NL.

deployed there cannot furnish simply because of troop shortages – can help rebalance the European contribution to NATO's collective defence.

4.2 Closely cooperate and coordinate with partners in the Indo-Pacific; share and pool resources and infrastructure already present in the region; and designate zones of responsibility to secure sealines of communication, whereby Europe could focus on waters closer to Europe such as the Western Indian Ocean.[109]

4.3 Think beyond 2024. In their strategic planning, Europeans should think ahead and carefully consider the potential that alliance commitments will not always be as robust as they appear today. The potential of a future US administration revising its defence posture in and commitment to Europe forced Europeans to take more responsibility for their own security. European states should strike a careful if not precarious balance between trans-atlanticism and Europeanism, showing their commitment to the alliance yet also building towards a future in which its existence may be jeopardised.

The coast guard and navy could assume a more active role in surveilling and protecting underseas communication cables

5. Prepare for a future in which access to resources, technology and space is not necessarily a given. Concretely, European militaries should:

5.1 Prepare to take a more active role in securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs) by ensuring the appropriate naval capabilities. Further analysis of future resources and supply chain vulnerabilities is needed to allow for an effective anticipation of future military capability needs. The Arctic is one such focus region, with the Joint Expeditionary Force as a potential structured capability group to assume responsibility here. For the securing of SLOCs further away from Europe (e.g. the Indo-Pacific), blue water naval capabilities should be pooled and shared – potentially within the EU given its collective interest – and potentially integrated into permanent structured capability groups.

5.2 Step up efforts to secure access to space-based communication and increase resilience of its space capabilities. Efforts within the EU to ensure space-based secure connectivity are slowly picking up and should be intensified: they include Galileo, Copernicus and the recently proposed Security Connectivity Initiative.[110]

6. Continue developing capabilities to engage in hybrid conflict and hybrid war. Given the enormous humanitarian, economic, and military costs associated with interstate war, states are likely to continue competing under the threshold of large-scale violence, including in cyberspace or through the use of proxies.

6.1 Enhance the resilience of vital infrastructure. For instance, the coast guard and navy could assume a more active role in surveilling and protecting underseas communication cables in for instance the North Sea.[111]

6.2 Strengthen defensive and offensive cyber capabilities to allow for in-band (within domain) responses -and therewith strengthen the potential for smaller states to deploy

109 Also see Paul van Hooft, Benedetta Girardi, and Tim Sweijs, "Guarding the Maritime Commons: What Role for Europe in the Indo-Pacific" (The Hague Centre For Strategic Studies, 2022).

110 "Questions and Answers: Secure Connectivity," Text, European Commission, accessed September 14, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_22_922.

111 Also see Frank Bekkers et al., "The High Value of The North Sea" (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, September 2021), https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Value-of-the-North-Sea-HR.pdf.

an "asymmetric deterrence" capability vis-à-vis larger states.[112] It also requires enhanced abilities to detect and defend against cyberattacks to reduce vulnerability. For cyber deterrence to succeed, coordination among government agencies; state and private actors; and international partners is necessary.

6.3 Bolster societal resilience within Europe and elsewhere, to decrease vulnerability against foreign influencing and counter polarisation. Outside of the EU, the focus should be with NATO Europe's eastern and southern flanks, especially Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Dutch constituent countries and special municipalities in the Caribbean Sea. Engage with the private sector and leverage legal instruments to reduce opportunities for meddling via social media and other online platforms. Invest in education on democratic principles. A role for the military could be to strengthen awareness of security risks across all domains.

Invest in climate-related contingency preparedness through incorporating climate risk scenarios in war games and exercises

7. Prepare for a hot and unstable world. Global warming is rapidly creating myriad security risks, and militaries – known for their vast carbon footprints – cannot stay behind in preparing for such challenges and work towards a cleaner organisation themselves.

7.1 Invest in climate-related contingency preparedness through incorporating climate risk scenarios in war games and exercises. Prepare for an increased role in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and other types of defence support to civil authorities.

7.2 Incentivise research and development to decrease militaries' carbon footprint. This entails moving towards carbon-free electricity for and net zero emissions from army installations as well as developing and investing in electrified vehicles fleets and more.

7.3 Help address third countries deal with the impact of climate change, even if the direct impact costs are not directly affecting Europe, to help mitigate potential conflict instigators. Additional funding for countries most at risk of climate-change-induced conflict can prove cost-effective in the future. Continue embedding climate security risks within development cooperation policy programmes, for instance by ensuring fair access to water and food resources through equitable governance arrangements.

8. Lastly: it should be clear that meeting security threats requires more than kinetic capabilities. Instead, leverage all instruments of influence. The effective implementation of a comprehensive toolbox and holistic approach to security is therefore essential and diplomatic and political instruments need to be brought to bear alongside robust defence capabilities. Note that defence organisations have a key role to play here too especially by taking early warning, conflict prevention, and military diplomacy seriously. Europeans should:

8.1 Invest in the military, diplomatic and political capabilities to mitigate interstate and intrastate conflict risk. Strengthen early warning capabilities and create a link with early action within ministries of defence and foreign affairs. Target Security Force Assistance accordingly. Develop the human capital (cadres of trained diplomats, military attaches, and conflict resolution professionals), the knowledge and expertise, the institutional infrastructure, and the networks with NGOs, to facilitate conflict prevention, mediation and conflict resolution.

112 For an elaboration, see Louk Faesen et al., "The Promises and Perils of a Minimum Cyber Deterrence Posture: Considerations for Small and Middle Powers," HCSS Progress (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, April 2022), https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Cyber-Deterrence-Final.pdf.

Annex A. Interstate conflict indicators

Balance of power

States typically balance power distributions, either alone or in coalitions, to hold potential aggressors in check. Whenever an equilibrium is upset, states move to restore the status quo or establish a new balance – and stability is lost. The existence of a relative balance in military power between states is typically thought to produce a certain degree of peace and stability.[113] Yet balance of power theory has been contested, both theoretically and empirically. Even under balanced conditions, states can be tempted to try to gain the upper hand in a relatively equal contest of power of which the outcome is uncertain.[114] In offensive realist thinking, states' inherent sense of insecurity pushes them to always seek relative advantages and maximise their power, therewith upsetting the balance of power.[115] What is more, history shows that also relatively weak states have waged wars against adversaries that are evidently stronger.[116] The relation between power balances and states' decisions to initiate conflict is thus a complex one.

Power transition

In a different vein than the balance of power logic, it has been argued that relative parity between states in combination with changing power distributions threatens stability.[117] Whether a state in a relatively equal dyad gains or loses in power, it may be more prone to initiate war as it either seeks to protect its ascent or prevent further decline.[118] Empirical

113 Ernst B. Haas, "The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept, or Propaganda?," *World Politics* 5, no. 4 (July 1953): 442–77; Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979).

114 A classic example is A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (Knopf, 1958). See also the review of this argument by D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam, *The Behavioral Origins of War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 77–80. Bennett and Stam find that particularly in politically relevant dyads, power inequality tends to be associated with lower prevalence of conflicts, idem 112.

115 For an overview of realist thinking on balance of power, see John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2016), 51–67; an influential realist classic on the importance of power balances: Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*; for a defensive realist perspective, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; on the dynamics of balance in international relations history Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Cornell University Press, 1999).

116 For instance T. V. Paul and Thazha Varkey Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

117 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; George Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics*, 1st ed. 1987 edition (Place of publication not identified: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987); A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Ronald L. Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century*, 1st ed. (New York: Seven Bridges Press, LLC / Chatham House, 2000).

118 Organski and Kugler, *The War Ledger*; Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500-2000*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1989); Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics* 40, no. 1 (1987): 82–107, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010195; Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.

support for such claims is not unequivocal: while some studies suggest a 50%[119] or 75%[120] chance that a power transition may lead to war, other studies find less convincing evidence.[121] In even greater contrast, some have argued that power transitions are the result of war, not their cause.[122] Even so, power shifts in a relatively balanced dyad could potentially indicate a challenging dynamic in which one state may be enticed to initiate war.

Nuclear deterrence

States are typically expected to refrain from initiating war with states that possess a credible and capable nuclear capacity for fear of retaliation and catastrophic military losses.[123] This notion of nuclear deterrence is generally accepted, yet caveats apply. Since nuclear weapons are relatively novel and possessed by only a number of states, quantitative evidence is limited and inconclusive.[124] Moreover, the success of nuclear deterrence is defined by what does *not* happen and therefore hard to capture. While there is some indication that nuclear-armed states are less likely to be attacked,[125] some have insisted that nuclear weapons simply cannot be exclusively credited for the lack of conflict between nuclear-armed states.[126] Others highlight that a more limited, non-nuclear conflict can still break out.[127] Finally, the possession of nuclear arms has little effect on a state's proneness to initiate conflict with non-nuclear states. Despite such criticism of nuclear deterrence theory,[128] here it is assumed that conflict within balanced nuclear dyads is less likely compared to non-nuclear dyads, while in case of an imbalanced dyad, only the non-nuclear power is less likely to initiate war.

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119 Organski and Kugler, *The War Ledger*; W.R. Thompson, "Succession Crises in the Global Political System: A Test of the Transition Model," in *Crisis in the World-System*, by A Bergesen, 1st ed. (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1983), 93–116; Henk Houweling and Jan G. Siccama, "Power Transitions as a Cause of War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, no. 1 (1988): 87–102, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002788032001004.

120 Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

121 See for instance Doran and Parsons, "War and the Cycle of Relative Power"; Douglas Lemke and Suzanne Werner, "Power Parity, Commitment to Change, and War," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1996): 235–60, https://doi.org/10.2307/2600958.

122 Richard Ned Lebow and Benjamin Valentino, "Lost in Transition: A Critical Analysis of Power Transition Theory," *International Relations* 23, no. 3 (2009): 389–410.

123 Lawrence Freedman and Jeffrey Michaels, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy: New, Updated and Completely Revised* (Springer, 2019).

124 For these statistical inquiries, see Bennett and Stam, *The Behavioral Origins of War*, 2003, 112; Robert Rauchhaus, "Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis: A Quantitative Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 258–77; Erik Gartzke and Dong-Joon Jo, "Bargaining, Nuclear Proliferation, and Interstate Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 209–33 see also the literature overview there.

125 See for instance Gartzke and Jo, "Bargaining, Nuclear Proliferation, and Interstate Disputes."

126 Other factors such as economic exhaustion, domestic distraction or lack of war intent may equally play a role. Ward Wilson, "The Myth of Nuclear Deterrence," *The Nonproliferation Review* 15, no. 3 (November 1, 2008): 421–39.

127 Cf. inter alia Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and William H. Riker, "An Assessment of the Merits of Selective Nuclear Proliferation," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 26, no. 2 (1982): 283–306; Jacek Kugler, "Terror without Deterrence: Reassessing the Role of Nuclear Weapons," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 28, no. 3 (September 1, 1984): 470–506. On the related 'Stability-Instability Paradox', Glenn H. Snyder, *The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror* (Chandler, 1965). also the sources above.

128 A classic on strategic criticism is: Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Four Paradoxes of Nuclear Strategy," *American Political Science Review* 58, no. 1 (March 1964): 23–35; see for a review of criticisms inter alia: Anthony Burke, "Nuclear Reason: At the Limits of Strategy," *International Relations* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 506–29, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117809348697;. For a general overview of nuclear strategy's evolution and controversies Freedman and Michaels, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*.; Kjølv Egeland, Thomas Fraise, and Hebatalla Taha, "Casting the Atomic Canon: (R)Evolving Nuclear Strategy," *European Journal of International Security*, December 9, 2021, 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2021.35; and Lawrence Freedman and Jeffrey H. Michaels, "Casting the Atomic Canon: (R)Evolving Nuclear Strategy: A Reply," *European Journal of International Security*, May 17, 2022, 1–11, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2022.13; also

Arms races

The action-reaction dynamic inherent to arms races can prove an important catalyst for both deliberate and inadvertent interstate war. One state's quest to bolster its security through investing in military capabilities may undermine the security of another state, or at least be perceived as such. As a result, states may get dragged into a vicious cycle in which two states build up their arsenals. According to this spiral model, mutual distrust steadily increases and the benefits associated with a first-strike may then spur countries to attack pre-emptively.[129] The causal relation between arms competition and conflict has been contested, with empirical work demonstrating that a majority of wars did not follow upon arms races.[130] Analysis of armament competition during the Cold War meanwhile suggests that arms build-ups can also lead to peace and stability, with disarmament races being potentially more dangerous.[131] Regardless of how armament dynamics play out differently for different dyads, overall arms races demonstrate a build-up of tensions within a dyad and therewith serve as an early warning indicator of escalation potential.[132]

Alliances

Because alliances change the balance of power,[133] they carry important implications for the probability of war.[134] When states balance against a revisionist power, a potential aggressor is kept in check through combined opposition. Yet the opposite may also happen: revisionist states can be joined in an alliance by other states – so-called bandwagoning – and potentially emboldened by it. The effects of alliances on conflict onset can therefore not be generalised, yet the nature of an alliance can be telling of why some alliances deter aggression and others encourage it. One key empirical study found that countries are 28% less likely *to be attacked* if they have one or more allies committed to intervene on behalf of the target; yet countries are more likely to *start* a conflict if they have one or more allies committed to offensive support (by 47%) or to remain neutral in that conflict (by 57%).[135] Alliance type thus matters, with defence commitments supposedly stabilising and offence or neutrality pacts destabilising a dyadic relation.[136]

129 Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, New edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Pres, 2017).

130 Paul F. Diehl, "Arms Races and Escalation: A Closer Look," *Journal of Peace Research* 20, no. 3 (September 1983): 205–12.

131 Michael D. Intriligator and Dagobert L. Brito, "Can Arms Races Lead to the Outbreak of War?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 1984): 63–84.

132 Michael D Wallace, "Arms Races and Escalation: Some Evidence," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 1 (1979): 3–16.

133 Here defined as written agreements, signed by official representatives of at least two independent states, that include promises to aid a partner in the event of military conflict or to remain neutral in the event of conflict. Definition by the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP).

134 Jack S. Levy, "Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495-1975," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25, no. 4 (1981): 581–613; Edward V. Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft*, 1st ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliance*, 1st ed. (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1987), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt32b5fc; Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3, https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540.

135 Brett Ashley Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes," *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 3 (July 2003): 427–39.

136 Alliances come in many forms, including defence commitments, offence pacts, neutrality pacts, consultation pacts and nonaggression pacts.

Regime type similarity

While democratic peace has drawn most academic interest,[137] similarity in regime type more generally appears to have an influence on the relations between states. Indeed, empirical research has found that politically similar states are more likely to ally with each other (if only after 1945)[138] or cooperate on trade policy.[139] More crucially, also militarised conflict is less likely between states with similar regime types.[140]

Trade interdependence

Because of the economic losses that come with war-disrupted trade as well as the cultural rapprochement between trading partners, stronger trade relations are often thought to dissuade states from initiating conflict with one another.[141] This notion of a Kantian peace is not unchallenged, with many contesters pointing to the First World War when trading states *did* fight one another. It has even been argued that trade dependencies can be drivers of conflict, for instance when trade drives intra-dyad inequality of when provocative changes in trade policies upset relations.[142] What is more, a trade relation can be unbalanced, in which case the state with lower exist costs (that is, a lower level of trade dependency) in a dyad has relatively little to lose but also the capacity to inflict harm on its adversary.[143] Without negating the complexity of the trade-conflict relation, academic disagreement on the matter or differences in operationalising trade dependencies, here it is assumed that a mutual trade dependence has a pacifying effect, while unilateral dependency can be destabilising. Mutual independence, conversely, is not expected to have an effect on conflict proneness.

137 Fred Chernoff, "The Study of Democratic Peace and Progress in International Relations," *International Studies Review* 6, no. 1 (2004): 49–77; Jarrod Hayes, "The Democratic Peace and the New Evolution of an Old Idea," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 4 (December 2012): 767–91; Jameson Lee Ungerer, "Assessing the Progress of the Democratic Peace Research Program: Assessing the Progress of the Democratic Peace Research Program," *International Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (March 2012): 1–31.

138 Brian Lai and Dan Reiter, "Democracy, Political Similarity, and International Alliances, 1816-1992 on JSTOR" 44, no. 2 (2000): 203–27.

139 Edward D. Mansfield, Helen V. Milner, and B. Peter Rosendorff, "Why Democracies Cooperate More: Electoral Control and International Trade Agreements," *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 477–513.

140 Suzanne Werner, "The Effects of Political Similarity on the Onset of Militarized Disputes, 1816-1985," *Political Research Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2000): 343–74; Mark Souva, "Institutional Similarity and Interstate Conflict," *International Interactions* 30, no. 3 (July 1, 2004): 263–80.

141 For an introduction of the strands and basis of liberalism, including the trade-based "commercial liberalism", see Andrew Moravcsik, *Liberal International Relations Theory* (Harvard University Press, 2001); examples of studies engaging with these arguments and finding positive effects of trade relations on peace are Han Dorussen and Hugh Ward, "Trade Networks and the Kantian Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 29–42; John R. Oneal et al., "The Liberal Peace: Interdependence, Democracy, and International Conflict, 1950-85," *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 1 (February 1, 1996): 11–28; John R. Oneal and Bruce M. Russett, "The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950-1985," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1997): 267–93; Solomon W Polacheck and Judith A McDonald, "Strategic Trade and the Inventive for Cooperation," in *Disarmament, Economic Conversion, and Management of Peace*, ed. Manas Chatterji and Linda Rennie Forcey (New York: Praeger, 1992).

142 For a theoretical and empirical critique of studies that find a positive effect of trade on peace, and the potential conflict-causing effect of said relations, see for instance: Katherine Barbieri and Gerald Schneider, "Globalization and Peace: Assessing New Directions in the Study of Trade and Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 4 (July 1, 1999): 387–404.; Katherine Barbieri, *The Liberal Illusion: Does Trade Promote Peace?* (University of Michigan Press, 2002).

143 Timothy M. Peterson, "Dyadic Trade, Exit Costs, and Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 4 (June 2014): 564–91; David J. Lektzian and Christopher M. Sprecher, "Sanctions, Signals, and Militarized Conflict," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 2 (2007): 415–31.

Operationalisation of conflict indicators

Indicator	Operationalisation
Balance of power	The balance of power in a dyad is measured by taking the raw military capabilities of the larger state divided by the combined raw capabilities of both states. The raw military capabilities are forecast for 2032 by Pardee Centre for International Futures' Global Power Index (GPI), which represents a largely material account of relative power (yet also includes aspects of diplomatic capabilities). A variable of 0.5 signals complete parity and a variable of 1.0 indicates that the larger state possesses 100% of capabilities in the dyad. Dyads with a variable below 0.6 are labelled as *Balanced;* dyads with a variable of 0.6 or higher as *Not balanced*.
Power transition	Power transition is measured first by calculating for each state in a dyad the 5-year growth in GPI as forecast for 2032; second by calculating the delta between state A and B; third by transforming the variable into a range from 0 (when the power relation is unequal) to 1 (when the power relation is equal) by calculating 2 – (2* the forecast balance of power in 2032)[144]; and fourth multiplying this by the GPI delta. Dyads with a variable of more than 1 are marked as experiencing a power transition; dyads with a variable of 1 or lower are marked as not experiencing a power transition.
Nuclear deterrence	Dyads are labelled as either nuclear (with both sides possessing nuclear weapons), non-nuclear, or imbalanced (with only one side possessing nuclear weapons). The present situation (the year 2022) is used for each assessment.
Arms build-up	A 3-year average of more than 8% military expenditure growth for both states in a dyad is considered an arms race.[145] Military expenditure growth rates are estimated for 2022, 2023 and 2024 based on various projections, forecasts and official announcements (see Arms build-up assessment). When both states in a dyad are expected to see an annual military expenditure growth of at least 8% in the period 2022-2025, a dyad is labelled as experiencing a two-sided build-up; if only one as a one-sided build-up.
Alliance portfolios	For each state within the dyad, the number of third-state defence commitments and neutrality pacts are taken. Ashley Leeds's Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) data (1815-2018) is used and carried forward one year by Pardee Center for International Futures.[146] When a state has multiple defensive alliances and/or one with a great power, it is considered to have a notable defensive alliance portfolio.
Political similarity	Regime type similarity is measured by comparing the V-DEM score of 2021 of both states in a dyad, with 0 meaning that the two states score exactly the same and 1 meaning one is full democracy and the other full autocracy. Dyads with a regime similarity score below 0.15 are labelled as similar; dyads with a regime similarity score between 0.15 and 0.299 are labelled as neither similar nor very different, dyads with a regime similarity score of 0.3 or above are labelled as different.
Trade interdependence	Trade interdependence is measured as country A's trade with country B as a percentage of country A's GDP or the other way around (country B's trade with country A as a percentage of country B's GDP). Dyads for which the trade dependency differs by more than 10 percentage points are labelled as imbalanced; dyads with a delta of between 4 and 9 percentage points as somewhat imbalanced; dyads in which both countries have a trade dependency of at least 5% are labelled as mutually dependent; dyads with trade dependencies of below 2.5% are labelled as mutually independent.

144 This is to account for a potential disbalance in power: when the power distribution between two states is highly unequal, a power transition has less effect on war proneness compared to when the power distribution is equal.

145 Bennett and Stam, *The Behavioral Origins of War*, 2004, 77.

146 We have made some minor changes, e.g. removed the US-Afghanistan consultation pact (this footnote only needs inclusion if in the end we decide to also look at consultation pacts)

Arms build-up assessment

Military expenditure build-up[147]

Country	Military expenditure 2021	Military expenditure 2022	Projected growth	Expected military build-up 2022-2024
Afghanistan		$99 million	2020: $280 million[148] 2022: $99 million	No
Armenia	$678 million[149]	$754 million[150]		Yes
Azerbaijan[151]	$2.2 billion	$2.6 billion	2021: $2.2 billion 2022: $2.6 billion (18% growth) 2025: $2.8 billion (7.6% growth)	Yes
Burundi		$68 million[152]	2020: $67 million[153] 2022: $68 million (1.4% growth)	No
China		$229.5 billion	(2021-2022 defence increase of 7.1%)[154]	No
DPRK		$4.5 billion	Alleged build-up[155] yet no data available	Yes
Egypt		$4.357 billion	Egyptian pounds: 2019: 59.4 billion 2020: 66.3 billion (12% growth)	Yes
Ethiopia			2020-2021: spending cut $504.7 to $487.8 million[156] According to Pardee projection a military build-up	Yes
Georgia		$286 million	2020: $290 million[157] 2022: $286 million (1.3% decline)	No

147 Diego Lopes da Silva et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2021" (SIPRI, April 2022), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/fs_2204_milex_2021_0.pdf; "Defense Spending by Country (2022)," Global Fire Power, accessed July 19, 2022, https://www.globalfirepower.com/defense-spending-budget.php.

148 "Afghanistan Military Expenditure, 1949-2021," Knoema, accessed July 21, 2022, https://knoema.com//atlas/Afghanistan/Military-expenditure.

149 Ulkar Natiqqizi, "After War Victory, Azerbaijan Keeps Increasing Military Spending | Eurasianet," Eurasianet, May 12, 2022, https://eurasianet.org/after-war-victory-azerbaijan-keeps-increasing-military-spending.

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151 Natiqqizi.

152 "Uganda Ups Military Expenditure in Arms Race to Catch up with Kenya," The Citizen (blog), April 26, 2022, https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/east-africa-news/uganda-ups-military-expenditure-in-arms-race-to-catch-up-with-kenya-3794934.

153 "Burundi Military Expenditure, 1949-2021," Knoema, accessed July 21, 2022, https://knoema.com//atlas/Burundi/Military-expenditure.

154 Jon Grevatt and Andrew MacDonald, "China Increases 2022 Defence Budget by 7.1%," Janes.Com (blog), accessed July 19, 2022, https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/china-increases-2022-defence-budget-by-71.

155 Associated Press, "North Korean Leader Reaffirms Arms Buildup," VOA, accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/north-korean-leader-reaffirms-arms-buildup/6613311.html.

156 Otiato Guguyu, "Uganda Ups Military Expenditure in Arms Race to Catch up with Kenya," Monitor (blog), April 26, 2022, https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/uganda-ups-military-expenditure-in-arms-race-to-catch-up-with-kenya-3794488.

157 "Georgia Military Spending/Defense Budget 1996-2022," Macrotrends, accessed July 21, 2022, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/GEO/georgia/military-spending-defense-budget.

Country	Military expenditure 2021	Military expenditure 2022	Projected growth	Expected military build-up 2022-2024
Greece	5.5 billion euros	$6.6 billion	11.5€ billion earmarked up until 2028[158] 2019: $5.019billion 2020: $5.492billion (9.4% growth) 2021: $8.006billion (45.7% growth) 2022: $8.393billion (4.8% growth)	Yes
Hungary		$3.263 billion	Plan to meet NATO commitment of 2% by 2024 / Defence spending to be increased by 30%[159] 2019: $2.19 billion 2020: $2.767 billion (26% growth) 2021: $3.112 billion (12.4% growth) 2022: $3.263 billion (4.8% growth)	Yes
India	$76.6 billion		Announced 10% increase for the 2022-23 budget[160]	Yes
Iran	$24.6 billion		2019: $12.53 billion 2020: $15.83 billion (26.31% growth) Increase between 2020-2021 of 11%[161]	Yes
Israel		$24.3 billion	Increase of $2.15 billion (3.1%) from 2021 to 2022[162]	No
Japan	$54.1 billion		86 billion pounds as a goal over 5 years (until 2027)[163]	Doubling its defence budget[164] Yes
Kosovo		$112 million / 100€ million[165]	2018:$59.8 million 2019:$67.4 million (12.7% growth) 2020:$77 million[166] (14.2% growth) 2022: expected 112 (45% increase vis-à-vis 2020)	Yes
Lebanon	$0.786 billion[167]	$1 billion	2020: $0.786 billion 2022: $1 billion (27% growth)	Yes
Moldova		$47 million / 46 million euros	Increased defence spending by 16.9% in 2022[168]	Yes

158 "Greece Ramps up Military Spending," NEOS KOSMOS, June 9, 2022, https://neoskosmos.com/en/2022/06/09/news/greece/greece-ramps-up-military-spending/.

159 "Govt to Increase Defence Spending by 30 Percent Next Year," Hungary Today (blog), September 25, 2021, https://hungarytoday.hu/govt-increase-defence-spending-30-percent-next-year/.

160 "Update: India Increases Defence Budget by 10%," Janes.Com (blog), accessed July 20, 2022, https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/update-india-increases-defence-budget-by-10.

161 Anna Ahronheim, "Iran Increased Military Spending in Past Year – Report," The Jerusalem Post | JPost.Com (blog), April 25, 2022, https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-705009.

162 "Israel Defence to Receive Budget Increase of $2.15bn in 2022," Middle East Monitor (blog), July 28, 2021, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210728-israel-defence-to-receive-budget-increase-of-2-15bn-in-2022/.

163 Ra Mason, "Japan's Doubling of Its Defence Budget Will Make the World a More Dangerous Place – Here's Why," The Conversation (blog), May 10, 2022, http://theconversation.com/japans-doubling-of-its-defence-budget-will-make-the-world-a-more-dangerous-place-heres-why-182625.

164 Mason.

165 Barbara Halla, "Kosovo Approves 2022 Budget amid Parliamentary Disquiet," www.euractiv.com, December 20, 2021, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/kosovo-approves-2022-budget-amid-parliamentary-disquiet/.

166 "Kosovo Military Expenditure 2021-2022," Take-Profit, accessed July 20, 2022, https://take-profit.org/en/statistics/military-expenditure/kosovo/.

167 "Lebanon - Government Defence Expenditure 2020," Country Economy, accessed July 21, 2022, https://countryeconomy.com/government/expenditure/defence/lebanon.

168 Madalin Necsutu, "Moldova Vows to Defend Itself from Possible Russian Aggression," Balkan Insight (blog), June 2, 2022, https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/02/moldova-vows-to-defend-itself-from-possible-russian-aggression/.

Country	Military expenditure 2021	Military expenditure 2022	Projected growth	Expected military build-up 2022-2024
Pakistan	$11.3 billion		Announced 11% growth in defence spending for 2022-23[169] 2019: $10.579 billion 2020: $10.394 billion (1,74% decline) 2021: $10.324 billion[170] (0,67% decline)	Yes
Palestine	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Romania	$5.6 billion		Increased defence budget: 2.02% to 2.5% of GDP[171] 2019: $4,6 billion 2020: $5.05 billion (9.7% growth) 2021: $5.294 billion (4,8% growth) 2022: $6,013 billion (13,5% growth)[172]	Yes
Russian Federation[173]	$65.9 billion	April: $26.4 billion	Since the war in Ukraine, Russia's defence spending was up nearly 40% in the first four months of 2022[174]	Yes
Rwanda	$140 million	$164 million[175]	2020: $140 million 2022: $164 million (17% growth)	According to Pardee, Yes
Saudi Arabia	$55.6 billion	$46 billion[176]	2019: $67.614 billion 2020: $64.558 billion (4,51% decline) 2021: 53.759 billion[177] (16,76% decline) $56.5 billion in 2027[178] (5,09% growth)	No
Serbia		1.1 billion euros	Planned additional 500 million euros a year for 2022-2027[179] 2020: 786€ million 2021: 872€ million (10.9% growth) 2022: 1.157€ billion[180] (32.6% growth)	Yes
South Korea			2019: $43.601 billion 2020: $45.523 billion (4.4% growth) 2021: $47.676 billion (4.7% growth)[181]	No

169 "Pakistan Hikes Defence Budget by over 11%; Allocates Rs 1,523 Billion," Business Standard India, June 10, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/pakistan-hikes-defence-budget-by-over-11-allocates-rs-1-523-billion-122061001138_1.html.

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171 Christina Mackenzie, "Seven European Nations Have Increased Defense Budgets in One Month. Who Will Be Next?," Breaking Defense (blog), March 22, 2022, https://breakingdefense.com/2022/03/seven-european-nations-have-increased-defense-budgets-in-one-month-who-will-be-next/.

172 "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2022)" (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, June 2022), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf.

173 "With Troops in Ukraine, Russia's Defence Spending Leaps 40%," Reuters, May 19, 2022, sec. Europe, 2, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/with-troops-ukraine-russias-defence-spending-leaps-40-2022-05-18/.

174 "With Troops in Ukraine, Russia's Defence Spending Leaps 40%."

175 "Uganda Ups Military Expenditure in Arms Race to Catch up with Kenya."

176 Agnes Helou, "Saudi Arabia Decreases Defense Spending to $46 Billion," Defense News (blog), December 13, 2021, https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2021/12/13/saudi-arabia-decreases-defense-spending-to-46-billion/.

177 "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database."

178 "Saudi Vision 2030 Will Drive Defence Expenditure to $56.5bn in 2027 | Times Aerospace," Times Aerospace (blog), June 3, 2022, https://www.timesaerospace.aero/news/defence/saudi-vision-2030-will-drive-defence-expenditure-to-565bn-in-2027.

179 "Vučić: Serbia Continues to Develop and Enhance Its Military Capabilities," Ministry of Defence Republic of Serbia, December 11, 2021, http://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/tekst/18140/vucic-srbija-nastavlja-da-razvija-i-dodatno-snazi-svoje-vojne-kapacitete-18140.

180 "Balkan Defence Monitor 2022" (Belgrade Centre for Security Policy), accessed July 21, 2022, https://bezbednost.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Balkan-Defence-Monitor.pdf.

181 "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database."

Country	Military expenditure 2021	Military expenditure 2022	Projected growth	Expected military build-up 2022-2024
Sudan		$287 million	2019: $1.53 billion 2020: $0.934 billion (38,95 decrease) 2021: $0.889 billion (4,81% decrease) 2022: $0.287 billion[182] (67,7%)	No
Syrian Arab Republic		$2.02 billion		No
Taiwan			2019: $11.521 billion 2020: $11.923 billion 3.4% growth) 2021: $12.090 billion[183] (1.4% growth)	No
Turkey	$15.5 billion		Announced increase to 14.39% in nominal terms in 2023, and another 10.12% in 2024[184],	Yes
Uganda[185]	$934 million	$1.066 billion	2020-2021 was a 8.3% increase[186]	Yes
Ukraine	$5.9 billion	$11.8 billion	2021: $5.9 billion 2022: $11.8 billion (100% growth)	Yes
US		$782 billion	$813 billion for 2023[187], $843 billion in 2024[188] (3.6% growth)	No
Venezuela		$1.9 billion	2019: $0.42 billion	Very volatile, lots of ups and down in terms of defence budget
Vietnam		$6.237 billion	$8.5 billion in 2027, Growth rate of 8.5%[189]	Yes

182 "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database."

183 "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database."

184 Charles Forrester, "Turkey Announces Ambitious Defence Spending Increase in Draft Economic Plan," Janes.Com (blog), September 7, 2021, https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/turkey-announces-ambitious-defence-spending-increase-in-draft-economic-plan.

185 "Uganda Ups Military Expenditure in Arms Race to Catch up with Kenya."

186 Guguyu, "Uganda Ups Military Expenditure in Arms Race to Catch up with Kenya."

187 Valerie Hernandez, "Global Military Spending Hits a Record High," International Banker (blog), July 4, 2022, https://internationalbanker.com/news/global-military-spending-hits-a-record-high/.

188 "US Budget 2023: Biden Proposes Boosting Defence Spending to $813 Billion amid Tensions over Russia," The Times of India, March 28, 2022, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/us-budget-2023-biden-proposes-boosting-defence-spending-to-813-billion-amid-tensions-over-russia/articleshow/90501547.cms; Paul McLeary et al., "Biden Requests $813B for National Defense," POLITICO (blog), March 2022, https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/28/biden-requests-largest-defense-budget-00020859.

189 "Vietnam Aims to Enhance Its Naval and Air Forces," APDR (blog), February 7, 2022, https://asiapacificdefencereporter.com/vietnam-aims-to-enhance-its-naval-and-air-forces/.

NATO	Military expenditure 2021	Military expenditure 2022	Projected growth	Expected military build-up 2022-2024
Germany[190]	$56.0 billion / 46.9 billion€	75.5€ billion by 2022 (projected)	50.1€ billion for 2023[191] 85.6€ billion by 2026 (70% growth)	Yes
UK	$68.4 billion		$62.5 billion / 47.4 billion pounds for 2024/25[192] 2019: $57.713 billion 2020: $60.675 billion (5.1% growth) 2021: $62.489 billion[193] (2.9% growth)	No but makes sense since they had already reached the 2% GDP limit
France		41€ billion	Proposed 44€ billion for 2023[194], even before Ukraine scheduled to hit 50€ billion by 2025[195]	
Canada		$36.3 billion	Projected $51 billion by 2026-27[196], $75 billion are needed over 5 years to reach the 2% goal 2019: $51.270 billion 2020: $52.747 billion (2.8% growth) 2021: $53.559 billion (1.5% growth)	Yes

190 Alexandra Marksteiner, "Explainer: The Proposed Hike in German Military Spending," SIPRI, March 25, 2022, https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2022/explainer-proposed-hike-german-military-spending.

191 "Germany Approves 2023 Defence Budget," Janes.Com (blog), accessed July 20, 2022, https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/germany-approves-2023-defence-budget.

192 Mackenzie, "Seven European Nations Have Increased Defense Budgets in One Month. Who Will Be Next?"

193 "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database."

194 Vivienne Machi, "France to Request Multibillion-Dollar Defense Budget Boost in 2023," Defense News (blog), July 8, 2022, https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2022/07/08/france-to-request-multibillion-dollar-defense-budget-boost-in-2023/.

195 "Macron Seeks Bigger Military Budget in 'War Economy,'" The Defense Post (blog), June 13, 2022, https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/06/13/macron-bigger-military-budget/.

196 "Canada's NATO Defence Spending Target $75.3B Away," Canada's National Observer (blog), June 10, 2022, https://www.nationalobserver.com/2022/06/10/news/canada-nato-defence-spending-target-753b-away.

Annex B. The run up to systemic global war (1880-1914)

Authors: Daan Sanders and Lotje Boswinkel

What causes an international system to come crashing down into a systemic, total war? The period that led to the outbreak of the First World War, perhaps the most seminal and complex systemic war, gives a number of key insights. From 1880 onwards, tensions between Europe's major powers steadily rose to a breaking point through colonial disputes, narrowly averted war scares over national security, and armed conflicts in the Balkans. Two heavily armed alliance blocs came to divide Europe. When the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Bosnian Serb on 28 June 1914, Europe's great powers failed to de-escalate but instead plunged the entire continent and a good part of the rest of the globe into the Great War. Six intimately connected and mutually reinforcing risk indicators shaped the destabilisation of the international system and determined its sliding towards a great armed conflict.[197]

Disbalance between raw power and international standing

The Great War partly erupted because several systemic powers sought to reshape the European balance of power and security architecture, with particularly Germany and Austria-Hungary becoming increasingly revisionist. The very foundation of Germany – that is, the German unification into the Prussian-led German Empire (1871) – shocked the European power balance as an expansionist Germany under Wilhelm II aimed to carve out a prominent place in the international system as a great power. Concerns about a German potential to dominate Europe rose in France – Germany's arch-rival – but also in Britain and Russia. Through diplomatic, legal, economic and military means, these powers attempted to curb Germany's rise: they excluded Germany from colonial agreements and began working more closely together on security-related matters – fuelling German resentment and mistrust of

197 For an effective introduction into the structure, dynamics, and failures of the international system before World War 1, and the literature on it, see Volker R. Berghahn, "Origins," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume 1: Global War*, ed. Jay Winter, vol. 1, The Cambridge History of the First World War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 16–38; Paul W. Schroeder, "Stealing Horses to Great Applause. Austria-Hungary's Decision in 1914 in Systemic Perspective.," in *An Improbable War?: The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture before 1914*, ed. Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 17–42; Greg Cashman and Leonard C. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War: Patterns of Interstate Conflict from World War I to Iraq* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), most importantly 27-30.

the international system.[198] Russia's growing military and economic power in the early 1910s, coupled to its rapprochement with Britain and France, strengthened German fears of a land war from two sides and on the seas. Amongst Germany's political elites, a notion found foothold that German chances to win a potentially necessary war to reshape the European continent would decrease with time – 1914 was therefore now or never.[199]

Competition over regional influence and territory

Conflicts over territorial holdings and spheres of influence steadily exacerbated tensions between the European powers. Slumbering disputes, such as the Franco-German dispute over the Alsace–Lorraine border region, caused permanent dissatisfaction with the status quo. Other territorial disputes were in flux. A series of Balkan Wars (1880 to 1913) led to a decline of Ottoman influence in the region, while the Russian-backed Balkan nations rose from the ashes of a new Balkan. As Slavic- and Balkan-nationalism spread from Russia and newly independent states – Serbia most notably – to the minorities in the fragile multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire, the agitated Austro-Hungarian leadership lamented the upset power balance and threats to their national security and interests, and berated other systemic powers for their non-intervention. In Austria-Hungary, most leaders concluded that their remaining interests in the Balkans needed to be protected at all costs – including a war – before the empire collapsed under further loss of the Balkans.[200]

Germany, an ambitious yet late player to the European power game, was eager to make up for its lack of colonies and influence outside Europe. Colonial powerhouses and status-quo powers France and Britain, however, opposed this. For instance, during the Moroccan Crises (1905-1906 and 1911) Germany attempted to gain a foothold in the Mediterranean and Northern Africa, but was rebuked by strengthening British-French cooperation. Humiliated and antagonised, German leaders concluded that war might be necessary for Germany to break out of this deadlock – while the French and British concluded that war might be necessary to keep Germany in check.[201]

Rigid alliance system

The escalation from small incidents into a systemic war involving all major powers cannot be explained without considering the European alliance system. The diplomatic and military balancing game that European powers played, preventing supremacy through shifting alliances and wars, was replaced by a permanent structure of peacetime alliances. In two decades, Europe became divided between the diametrically opposed dual-alliance between

198 Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe Went to War in 1914.* (London: Penguin Group, 2013), 141–47, 151–59, and passim.

199 Levy and Mulligan, "Why 1914 but Not Before?," particularly 225-227; Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 327–34 and passim.

200 Schroeder, "Stealing Horses to Great Applause. Austria-Hungary's Decision in 1914 in Systemic Perspective."; Berghahn, "Origins," 32–33; Cashman and Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War*, 47–50.

201 Cashman and Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War*, 43–46; for a nuancing of the image of a rigid alliance system as the structural root of the Great War, particularly the Anglo-German relations as not as belligerent, see Levy and Mulligan, "Why 1914 but Not Before?," 230–35.

Germany and Austria-Hungary (1880), joined by Italy in 1882; and on the other side the Triple Entente consisting of the Franco-Russian Alliance (1894), the British-French *Entente Cordiale* (1904) and the British-Russian alliance (1907).[202] These alliances between former rivals were the result of rigidising counter-balancing acts. But rather than stabilise the European security system, they exacerbated international tensions; they made the system inflexible and raised the stakes of a systemic crisis enormously. The great powers, bound to support allies, became entangled in unstable regions such as North Africa and the Balkans, where a minor conflict involving two of these powers would leave little room for crisis negotiations and de-escalation.[203]

Militarisation of foreign policy

As particularly Austro-Hungary, Russia and Germany perceived that their wielding of economic and financial tools, diplomacy, and cultural ties yielded insufficient results, the peaceful mechanisms for international conflict resolution of the Concert of Europe were replaced by military coercion and deterrence.[204] The British, French, Belgian and other governments followed this trend, leading to arms races and belligerent international relations.[205]

As Austria-Hungary's soft power attempts failed to keep Serbia in its influence sphere, both Serbia and Russia expanded their influence in the region. Austria gradually employed military threats against Serbia, which in turn antagonised Russia.[206] Germany engaged in military build-ups to compensate for the soft-power failures of past decades. To break the British maritime dominance – perceived as a threat to Germany's ambitions and national security – Germany expanded its fleet (1898-1914). British leaders, holding maritime dominance to be the keystone of British and colonial security, followed suit. This led to a naval arms race that fuelled Anglo-German distrust and animosity and eventually spread to the land.[207] An increasingly revisionist Germany, wedged in between two potential enemies, adopted large army expansion laws in 1912-1913; France and Russia, feeling threatened by the German might, reciprocated with mass mobilisation and heavy arms legislation – as then did most of the rest of the European states.[208] By 1914, Europe was armed to the teeth and millions of citizens could be drafted. Such high stakes made the major powers even more nervous for their

202 Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 121–59.

203 As particularly clearly analyzed in Clark, see 350.

204 Jack S. Levy and William Mulligan, "Systemic Effects of Economic Interdependence and the Militarisation of Diplomacy: 1914 and Beyond," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 0, no. 0 (February 22, 2022): 1–27; William Mulligan and Jack S. Levy, "Rethinking Power Politics in an Interdependent World, 1871–1914," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 49, no. 4 (March 1, 2019): 611–40.

205 David Stevenson, "Was a Peaceful Outcome Thinkable? The European Land Armaments Race before 1914," in *An Improbable War?: The Outbreak of World War I and European Political Culture before 1914*, ed. Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 130–48.

206 Levy and Mulligan, "Systemic Effects of Economic Interdependence and the Militarisation of Diplomacy"; Mulligan and Levy, "Rethinking Power Politics in an Interdependent World, 1871–1914." Schroeder, "Stealing Horses to Great Applause. Austria-Hungary's Decision in 1914 in Systemic Perspective."; Berghahn, "Origins," 32–33; Cashman and Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War*, 47–50. The Balkan Wars, which saw Russia and the Russian-backed smaller powers reach Austria-Hungary's doorstep, exacerbated the process.

207 For an introductory overview of the Anglo-German naval arms race and World War 1, see: Berghahn, "Origins," 26–30; John H. Maurer, "Arms Control and the Anglo-German Naval Race before World War I: Lessons for Today?," *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 2 (1997): 285–306, https://doi.org/10.2307/2657942.

208 see Dale C. Copeland, "International Relations Theory and the Three Great Puzzles of the First World War," in *The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making*, ed. Jack S. Levy and John A. Vasquez (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 167–98; Stevenson, "Was a Peaceful Outcome Thinkable? The European Land Armaments Race before 1914."

national security, which led them onto a path of pre-emptory mobilisation and pre-emptory attacks.

Domestic nationalism

Socio-political cultures and domestic politics contributed to the militarisation and destabilisation of international relations, leading to a climate that bred a systemic war. Expressed through the discourse in the press, literature, art and politics, European societies fostered nationalism, belligerence, militarism, social Darwinist-inspired rivalry, and a feeling that new industrial war was a sign of the times. While the working class leaders – fearing their people would bear the brunt of a major war's onslaught – opposed escalatory policies, the majority of the populations supported military build-ups, mobilisation, and a defensive war for their nation.[209]

Domestic political instability pressured governments' limited room to de-escalate and compromise on foreign policy, and severely limited their ability to formulate stable, coherent policies such as deterrents. Most class-based, imperialist, monarchical regimes in Europe were on their last legs. The multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire's internal balancing act was nearing collapse. Britain faced Irish rebellion, political polarisation and constitutional crises; an unstable France saw a rapid succession of governments; Russian Czar Nicholas II's government dealt with the internal fallout of a lost war against Japan (1905); in the young German Empire a struggle raged between (Prussian) aristocracy, industrial elites, and the new working class.[210] The governmental structures that made up foreign and defence policies were also in flux, with aristocrats, business magnates, military leaders, and career politicians in a struggle over their states' foreign and defence policies.[211]

The frequently shifting and uncompromising foreign policies led to mutual distrust, failing deterrence, and miscalculations that were key in the failures to de-escalate in the summer of 1914. Domestic sentiments legitimising war made political room for leaders to declare a major war.

Reckless or opportunistic small power behaviour

From 1880 onwards, many conflicts between Europe's major players revolved around smaller states. Major powers quarrelled over smaller states' neutral or aligned status, or one another's ambitions to conquer them. Tensions were regularly exacerbated by those smaller states that actively vied for great power support and aimed to pit the larger states against one another.

For instance, a Franco-German crisis over control of Luxembourg (1867) almost turned into war as the Dutch leadership badly managed their conflicting demands: France sought to buy the region from the Netherlands, while Prussia sought to include it in the German confederation. Similarly, Belgian neutrality and Belgian rights to independent foreign and defence

209 Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 226–39; Berghahn, "Origins," 18-19,22-25,35-36.

210 As insightfully listed and explained in Cashman and Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War*, 50–55; see also Berghahn, "Origins."

211 Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, particularly 184-185.

policies caused permanent tensions in Western Europe, up to the point in 1914 when the German violation of Belgian neutrality in its attack on France influenced the British decision to engage in full-blown participation in the War.[212] Serbia eventually escalated the eventual systemic war as its leaders fuelled domestic belligerence against Austro-Hungary and the Ottomans; pitted Austria-Hungary, the Ottomans, Russia and France against one another; aggressively pursued Serbian territorial expansion and nationalism against other states' interests; and enlisted Russian and French backing for these endeavours. When a Bosnian Serb shot Franz Ferdinand, Austro-Hungarian antipathy and the hard-headed Serbian position contributed to the decisions to declare war, while Russian and French defensive agreements with Serbia helped turn the conflict into a major war.[213]

The July Crisis: a perfect storm of crisis escalation

By 1914, the mix of structural international tensions over influence spheres and colonies, rigid alliances, growing militarisation, belligerent nationalism and internal pressure had pushed the European international system to the point of collapse. While the killing of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke in June pushed it over the edge, war did not immediately break out. The assassination set in motion a month-long July Crisis in which the European states and the collective security system failed to de-escalate.

After the murder, the ball was in the Austro-Hungarian court. Its leaders blamed the Serbian government for Franz Ferdinand's death: Serbia had facilitated the assassination with its hateful rhetoric and benign attitude towards Serbian nationalist terrorism – a claim that was denied by Serbia and Russia.[214] After deliberations, the Austro-Hungarian leadership decided a war with Serbia could be the last opportunity to curb the existential threat of a growing Serbia, to roll back Russian encroachment on the Balkans, to reshape the international rules, and to calm the rising waves of internal ethnic fragmentation. Determined not to back down in another Balkan conflict and backed by a German blank check of support, the Austro-Hungarian leadership opted for a prime example of militarised foreign policy.[215] An unacceptable ultimatum – violating Serbian sovereignty – was issued to Serbia on 23 July. As Serbia refused, Austria-Hungary declared war, causing a cascade of war declarations between members of the opposing alliances, dragging almost the entirety of Europe into an unprecedented war in a matter of weeks.

The alliance system played a crucial, if complex role in this escalation process. Made to keep adversaries in check and keep the continent in balance, the alliance system turned out to do the exact opposite. The Russian government, committed to supporting Serbia and protecting

212 Williamson Murray, "Small Nations under the Gun. Europe 1914-1940," in *Small Powers in the Age of Total War, 1900-1940*, ed. Herman Amersfoort and Wim Klinkert (Brill, 2011), 185; Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 350-352;494-495 and passim. Apart from having to respond to Germany's blatant violation of international law and treaties by invading Belgium in 1914, the British held the Low Countries' neutrality and independence to be critically important to British security and the general balance of power in Europe. German domination of the region could not be accepted.

213 Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 27-64,272-281,286,351-356 and passim.

214 Clark, 408-410 most importantly.

215 Jack S. Levy, "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914," *International Security* 15, no. 3 (1990): 154–56; also Jean-Jacques Becker and Gerd Krumeich, "1914: Outbreak," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume 1: Global War*, ed. Jay Winter, vol. 1, The Cambridge History of the First World War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 16–38; Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, passim.

its standing in the Balkans (all the while facing domestic pressure to do so), failed to deter Austria-Hungary from attacking Serbia while emboldening Serbian resistance. The Dual Alliance with Germany meanwhile encouraged Austria-Hungarian aggression.[216] After the latter's failed attempt to deter Russia from intervening,[217] Russian began to mobilise on 24 July to signal resolve in its support for Serbia. Intended to deter the Austrian-German coalition, it had the opposite effect: it triggered the existential German fear of losing a two front-war. Indeed, Germany's war plans relied on defeating France first and only then taking on the supposedly slow advance of the Russian army. Germany responded in kind through mobilisation, and after a failed attempt at convincing Russia to halt its military mobilisation, declared war on Russia on 1 August.[218]

France meanwhile failed to deter Germany from attacking Russia.[219] Though not the war's main supporters, by July 1914 French statesmen did come to see the upcoming war as a chance to curb Germany's rising power.[220] As Germany mobilised, France responded in kind. On 3 August, Germany declared war on France and attacked its Western rival in order to fulfil its preventative two-front war plan. The British government had long been hesitant and unclear about its resolve, but now felt obliged to support its allies. Britain was outraged by the German violation of Belgian neutrality (4 August) and unwilling to risk Germany further upsetting the power balance in Europe by winning on the Western Front. The British Empire, the largest in the world, joined the war on 4 August.[221]

Thus, within a month, a political murder led to a regional conflict, which escalated into a continental war that, through colonial ties, dragged with it large parts of the world.

216 Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, passim.

217 Cashman and Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War*, 69; see also Becker and Krumeich, "1914: Outbreak."

218 Becker and Krumeich, "1914: Outbreak," 54–56; Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 506-508 most importantly.

219 Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 409.

220 see Schroeder, "Stealing Horses to Great Applause. Austria-Hungary's Decision in 1914 in Systemic Perspective.," particularly 19-21.

221 see Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 541-551 most importantly.

Annex C. Survey questions

1. Which of the following options best describes your current employment?
   a. Government
   b. Think tank
   c. Academia
   d. Industry
   e. Other, fill in:

2. What is your nationality?

3. Where is your organisation based?

4. Which are, in your opinion, the most important threats to European security over the next 10 years? Please rank from most important to least important. (obligatory)
   i. China's politico-military rise
   ii. Russian aggression and revisionism
   iii. Proliferation of revolutionary and/or destabilising military technologies
   iv. Militarisation of space
   v. Economic nationalism and trade fragmentation
   vi. Hybrid threats (information operations, cyber threats)
   vii. Climate change-induced security threats and/or resource scarcity
   viii. Violent extremism
   ix. Organised (transnational) crime
   x. Democratic backsliding and internal polarisation

5. If a particular threat was not listed in the previous question but would make your top 3 threats, please use the following text box to add.

6. Please rank the military mission types that European armed forces will be carrying out most frequently, either collectively or individually, over the next 10 years, from most likely to least likely:
   i. High-intensity warfare
   ii. Deterrence and assurance
   iii. Counterinsurgency and counterterrorism
   iv. Peace enforcement and stabilisation
   v. Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response
   vi. Sanctions and law enforcement (embargoes, border control, exclusion zones)
   vii. Freedom of navigation and overflight
   viii. Military cooperation with non-NATO (or EU) partners: armaments cooperation, defence reform and capacity building, education and training
   ix. Counter-hybrid (cyber, information)
   x. Countering threats in space

7. If a particular threat was not listed in the previous question but would make your top 3 threats, please use the following text box to add.

8. Where will European military missions most frequently take place over the next 10 years? Please rank the following regions (including land, air, maritime) from most likely to least likely:
   i. EU/NATO territory
   ii. Eastern Europe (non-EU/NATO territory)
   iii. North Africa
   iv. Sub-Saharan Africa
   v. Middle East
   vi. Central Asia
   vii. Indo-Pacific
   viii. Arctic
   ix. Americas

9. From your perspective, what would be the preferred format to carry out each of the military mission types? *(matrix-format, one answer possible per row)*

	NATO	EU	UN	European Intervention initiative	Ad-hoc coalition	Other/not sure/prefer not to say
High-intensity warfare						
Deterrence and assurance						
Counterinsurgency and counterterrorism						
Peace enforcement and stabilisation						
Disaster relief and humanitarian crisis response						
Sanctions and law enforcement (embargoes, border control, exclusion zones)						
Freedom of navigation and overflight						
Military cooperation with non-NATO (or EU) partners: armaments cooperation, defence reform and capacity building, education and training						
Counter-hybrid (cyber, information)						
Countering threats in space						

10. If a specific format was not listed in the previous question but would make your top 3 formats, please use the following text box to add.

11. If you have additional comments, suggestions, feedback or questions, please enter them in the box below.

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The Hague Centre
for Strategic Studies

HCSS
Lange Voorhout 1
2514 EA Hague

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