

Defence assistance

More German weapons for Ukraine are possible – here's how

Guest commentary from [Kristian Klinck](#), [Alexander Müller](#) and [Sara Nanni](#)

Germany is urgently needed to secure the survival of Ukraine. Even if this leads to temporary shortages for the Bundeswehr.

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Western assistance has played a decisive role in ensuring that Ukraine still exists at all as an independent state. In addition to financial, humanitarian and political aid, the supply of weapons is crucial in order to ensure Ukraine's survival.

About the authors

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We consider ourselves duty-bound to support Kyiv in its fight for survival – for Ukraine is also defending our interests and values. Russia's war of aggression marks a watershed, one that also calls for us to embark on new paths in order to defend our aim of a rules-based world order in which the force of the law prevails, and not the law of force. That is ultimately what is at stake: in what sort of Europe and what sort of world we wish to live in future?

Many countries, including Germany, have enabled Ukraine to defend itself against Russian aggression, initially with light weapons, including guns and anti-aircraft missiles, and now also with heavy weapons such as armoured vehicles and multiple rocket launchers. In contrast to how things looked on 24 February 2022, it currently appears that the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine will last for a long time to come. Russia has so far provided no grounds to assume that it will put an end to its aggression. In light of this, in order to create a new and lasting foundation to the support for Ukraine, new ideas are now called for in terms of how Europe's stronger economies can organize more support.

Germany is already doing a lot. Yet as one of Europe's most significant countries in economic terms, we can and we should be doing even more. It is in our own security policy interests for Ukraine to survive as a democratic state and for Russia's war of aggression to fail. That is why we are calling for arms supplies to Ukraine to be increased significantly.

The aim here is a long-term plan for a sustainable supply of weapons systems to Ukraine (including training, munitions and technical support), instead of repeatedly merely reacting to current challenges. This is to be achieved in a coordinated approach together with our partners and the defence industry. New equipment for the Bundeswehr, for our allies and for Ukraine must be provided quickly. A coordinated approach enables us to accept temporary cutbacks for the Bundeswehr, for example in the form of contributions of materials in use that are then replaced in a timely fashion.

There is no conflict of interests between national defence and support for Ukraine

To date, the primary reason given for the relatively low level of German arms supplies was that the Bundeswehr is operating below the required levels in terms of much of its equipment. This line of argument claims a conflict of interests between the ability to defend our country and the alliance on the one hand, and support for Ukraine on the other, with the first point being given priority.

Yet this conflict is one that has been construed – as at the current time, Europe's security and stability are being defended in Ukraine. The outcome of the war has direct consequences for Europe, and therefore also for Germany: a Russian victory reduces the security of Europeans. Moscow would not only push its borders closer to the European Union, but would also have shown that it can achieve its political aims through a war of aggression in Europe. Globally, a dramatic erosion of the principle of refraining from the use of force, as anchored in the UN Charter, could be expected. A defeat for Kyiv would thus mean greater uncertainty, instability and risk of escalation for Europe; while Ukraine's victory would bring more security.

The war in Ukraine determines the future security order in Europe

The basis of the NATO plans are scenarios, in which it is played out how an opponent might attack and what each country has to do to contribute towards defence. But the war in Ukraine is happening now, in real terms. This is not a simulation. The better Ukraine does in defending itself against Russia, the weaker Russia becomes in terms of material and staff – and

accordingly, the lower the requirements are for NATO, at least in the short term. On top of this, through a lack of military resources, Russia is certainly unable to open a second front. So far, it has avoided an escalation with NATO. The deterrent logic is working. The end of the war in Ukraine will define the future security order in Europe along with the role of the Europeans – with a sovereign Ukraine the best outcome for this.

Another reason why we see no conflict of interests is that the increased requirements for national and alliance security and assistance for Ukraine depend on the same factor: the ability of the German security and defence industry to deliver – an ability that is potentially vast. We need to enable the industry to increase its capacities significantly – in order to provide the Bundeswehr with new equipment, to kit out our alliance partners and to continue support for Ukraine. On this condition, in the current critical situation the Bundeswehr's capabilities can and should temporarily take a back seat to Ukraine's ability to endure. The survival of Ukraine is in Germany's security policy interests.

At the same time, we are aware of the fact that in this conflict, Russia has repeatedly employed the threat of nuclear escalation, and hopes to hold Germany in particular hostage and deter us from supporting Ukraine by restricting gas supplies. However, we should not allow ourselves to be intimidated by such attempts at blackmail. It is in our interests to ensure that this extortion fails, as we otherwise provide Russia with a blueprint for future conflicts. Accepting threats such as these makes future blackmail attempts more likely – with the potential for dramatic consequences.

We are aware of the implications of our proposal:

- **Firstly**, a decision such as this should always be taken in consultation with our partners, in order to make clear that this is not a unilateral move on Germany's part. We observe a broad openness towards such an approach among our allies.
- **Secondly**, any cutbacks can only be temporary and must therefore be accompanied by a reliable plan for making up the shortfalls in capabilities.
- **Thirdly**, it calls for the activation of the German defence industry along with a fundamental reform of the interplay between industry, trade unions, policy makers and armed forces, not only at national but also European level. Only with increased transparency, reliability and planning ability can the resulting gaps be filled and future requirements met. With the *Bundeswehrbeschaffungsbeschleunigungsgesetz*, or Act Accelerating

Procurement for the Bundeswehr, the government coalition has taken the first step towards this. Further steps must, and will, follow.

Our current peacetime structures and processes are not yet equipped to deal with an influx of large amounts of equipment, from tanks to ships, which makes providing material to Ukraine more difficult. That is why we need to make changes that enable us to close capability gaps within a reasonable period of time. The watershed moment must also be reflected in arms production. A national arms summit would be a first step in this respect. Activating our economic potential and supporting Ukraine are thus interdependent: they must go hand in hand.

At this watershed moment Germany faces historical decisions. In the past six months, the Federal Government has made many such decisions. We should continue along this path. Our children and grandchildren will ask us one day what we did back then to defend the UN Charter and the peaceful world order. Our proposal is one component in advancing our support for Ukraine.

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/mehr-deutsche-waffen-fuer-die-ukraine-so-geht-s-meinung-a-3a08af51-3b65-47b1-8bb6-a0756575a08d>