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# **“Divided We Fall”:**

**Ukraine, Russia, and the Future of the West  
Debrief from the 2025 Warsaw Security Forum**

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## Key WSF 25 conference take aways

**Ukraine – dynamics of the war.** The Forum highlighted how far Ukraine has moved from dependency to innovation. By creating momentum and optionality with new capabilities, Kyiv has fundamentally changed the character of the war.

- Ever shorter drone technology cycles and new developments like the Flamingo missile programme are increasing the ability to take the war deep into Russian territory.
- Ukraine's frontline experience has given it an indispensable role in shaping NATO's approach to persistent drone provocations and technological innovation.
- Russia demonstrates resolve and has ability to escalate at high cost, despite very limited effective military gains and mounting pressure eg. on gasoline supply; Moscow is prepared to accept growing dependency on China to sustain its effort.
- Despite formidable successes, Western support remains decisive in sustaining Ukraine's resilience.

**Europe – struggle for support.** Europe is visibly stepping up, but still shows little notion of stepping in. Initiatives such as SAFE and the debate on a reparation loan point to a growing capacity to mobilise financial resources. Yet a broad-based approach to resilience – from industrial scale-up to societal preparedness – remains slow to unfold.

- The SAFE facility is by now subscribed to in full, negotiations to extend the facility to countries outside the EU are progressing.
- The reparation loan devised by the Commission has gained traction and could provide substantial support – potentially in the order of €140bn – if translated into timely delivery; strongly backed by Germany and constructed as de facto new debt of the EU, we do not expect the ECB to maintain its earlier resistance.
- Europe's fragmented defence industry limits absorption capacity; new factories and production pipelines are required for SAFE funds to deliver.
- Rising defence budgets risk legitimacy unless they create visible benefits, with debates on conscription exposing sharp East–West divergences.
- Energy is being reframed as a security issue, with nuclear momentum building further but Germany remaining the exception.

**The West – resolve and restraint.** On the Western side, the major uncertainty lies with how the United States may or may not deliver on the Trump administration's announced U-turn towards Russia.

- Partners such as Australia, Japan, and Canada underline that Ukraine must be seen as part of a global confrontation with Russia and China.
- The debate on German Taurus missiles is symbolic of continuing hesitation among Western allies on the provision of long-range strike capabilities.
- Although debated, no real traction for a joint aerial shield (no-fly zone) over Ukraine.
- Divisions persist over oil sanctions, though identified as one of the strongest remaining levers, with calls for a G7-driven initiative targeting refineries worldwide.
- NATO's centrality in the European security architecture highlights the continuing gap between rhetoric on EU strategic autonomy and current reality.

## Introduction

Sunday's pro-European electoral victory in Moldova set the tone for the Warsaw Security Forum 2025, which opened in a mood of cautious optimism - even small states can resist Russian pressure when political will is firm. In that vein, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy portrayed Ukraine as Europe's shield: by holding Russia at bay, Kyiv prevents a conflict - not peripheral but central to the future of Western security - from engulfing the continent.

This was echoed by representatives from Japan and Taiwan, who urged the West to treat Ukraine as part of a global struggle against China and Russia, with direct implications for how conflict dynamics might unfold around Taiwan. As Polish PM Donald Tusk reminded (in Polish) the forum, this war is not about sentimentality or "loving Ukraine," but about survival. Western unity, he argued, is not a moral luxury but a precondition for security, safety, and freedom.

Beneath the unequivocal and confident rhetoric, however, ran a current of urgency and doubt. European leaders acknowledged that declarations of resolve must be matched by accelerated weapons deliveries, expanded industrial output, and renewed societal resilience. Germany's defence minister Pistorius admitted that war fatigue is gaining traction in his country's society, even as he pledged that support would endure. Japan, a steady supporter of the Ukrainian struggle as well, is facing the same domestic challenge. This tension between optimism and unease defined the Warsaw mood.

Ukraine itself however has become a symbol of transformation. Having once depended on Western-supplied systems, it is now a reference point for battlefield innovation, integrating unmanned systems (UAS) and digital tools that NATO is eager to learn from. Its defence industry increasingly partners with European firms, and it has managed to develop and expand its military capabilities under war conditions whilst Western resources are depleted, new investment is slow to come and Western defences are lacking the capabilities to respond effectively and efficiently to Russian drone warfare.

## Is Ukraine Winning?

As the war approaches its fourth year, casualties on both sides are ever mounting. Zelenskyy's reluctance to mobilise the younger generation below 25 recalls a historic precedent set by President Roosevelt, who withheld divisions requested by his generals in order to safeguard America's capacity to expand military production. Being a fast innovator, with stellar drone technology turnarounds of less than 30 days, Ukraine has steadily reduced its dependence on manpower, with an estimated 70–80 percent of frontline casualties now caused by unmanned systems.

Russia in turn, despite a huge step up in drone production, is still operating in the conventional model of high attrition warfare. The US left Vietnam after the number of fatal

casualties reached 58k, Russia left Afghanistan with 15k, whilst in Ukraine total Russian casualties are estimated at around 950k, including estimated fatal casualties of 250k, to very little effective gain. Although Russia's vulnerabilities are real, as sanctions erode its economy, Moscow retains the means to escalate. Drafting about 30k per month, Putin is not running out of resources. By turning the attack into a new „Great Patriotic War“, Putin could raise that number by a multiple – though he is unlikely to do so. Since unleashing the war, support has increased in Russian society, the precondition being that the war is kept away from Russians' daily lives. Chinese support through trade and technology remains intact, and to safeguard his power, Putin is willing to accept an ever-increasing dependency on China. Against this backdrop, opposition voices such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky, albeit principally supportive of negotiating with the Kremlin, predict that the war could endure for another six to seven years, whilst General Kellog stated: „Probably, in his heart of hearts, he [Putin] realises he cannot win this war“. So can Ukraine turn the momentum to its favour?

The Ukrainian military record is impressive by all historical comparisons. It managed to deny Russia air superiority early on, it reopened the critical sea export lanes by way of sinking the Russian black sea fleet instead of having to rely on a negotiated fragile agreement with Russia, and it has kept Russian forces tied down along its defence lines in Donbas.

Ukraine has dramatically increased its reach into Russia, striking refineries and terminals that disrupted close to one-fifth of the country's oil processing capacity in late August. Its new homegrown cruise missile, the FP-5 „Flamingo,“ adds further to this capability. First used on 30 August 2025 against targets in Crimea, the Flamingo has a reported range of 3,000 kilometres, a warhead of 1,150 kilograms, and an accuracy of 14 meters, guided by a jamming-resistant satellite system. Current production is limited to about one missile per day, with ambitions to scale up to seven, though both its slow subsonic speed and the uncertain ramp-up of output raise questions about its survivability and scalability.

Yet even with four layers of air defence, 20–25 percent of hostile drones still penetrate Ukrainian skies. This sobering reality highlights both the scale of Russian saturation attacks and the need for scalable, layered counter-UAS systems.

Hence Ukrainian achievements, while remarkable, cannot in themselves decide the outcome. Ukraine's resilience still depends on sustained Western support, as the ongoing debate about the delivery of weaponry enabling Kyiv to launch deep strikes into Russian territory illustrates. U.S. assistance remains decisive, but uncertainty about what exactly is implied by the recent turn of Trumps stance towards Russia remains, despite recent reports of US Himars reaching deep into Russian territory and General Kellog indicating US willingness to lift restrictions on the use of long-range missiles.

The EU and its member states are stepping up, though their ability to match American scale and speed remains in doubt. For now, transatlantic backing underwrites Ukraine's

war effort – even as European leaders insist that they are prepared to shoulder a greater share of the burden.

## **Europe: Is Europe Stepping Up or In?**

In Warsaw, Europe presented itself as more confident and engaged than at any point since the beginning of the war. Leaders delivered strong statements that conveyed determination and a sense of ownership: Europe is no longer on the sidelines but increasingly central to shaping outcomes.

This new posture rests specifically on tangible instruments brought forward by the EU such as SAFE (Security Action for Europe), which has already attracted applications from 19 states as of end of September 2025, while negotiations to extend the facility to non-EU partners such the UK and Norway are progressing. Momentum is also building for a reparation loan backed by frozen Russian assets, potentially creating a game-changing source of funding for Ukraine's needs. After initial resistance from the ECB and member states such as France, the Commission has devised a loan structure that is now receiving strong support from Germany. Effectively designed as an EU loan facility backed by the more than uncertain prospect of Russia at some future point paying for the damage it is creating every day, we expect Bundesbank and ECB to wave this through. Hints in Warsaw suggested that even France may now prove amenable – a prerequisite for bringing Belgium, as Euroclear's host country, on board.

Whilst the reparation loans only target frozen central bank reserves, the surrounding debate sparked a rare moment of contention at the Forum. Zhanna Nemtsova, daughter of the murdered Russian opposition figure Boris Nemzov, pleaded for non-sanctioned Russian private citizens to be exempted – a call that drew a sharp response from former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who underlined that Russia's aggression is already depriving all Europeans of wealth by forcing them to finance a massive military build-up.

Resolve being also a function of capabilities, critical discussions centred around the strengthening of the European industrial space. Airbus executives warned that "SAFE is a fantastic way forward, but speed needs to be there," reflecting a broader fear that Europe's fragmented defence sector cannot absorb funds quickly enough. Participants from Romania and Nordic countries insisted that only new factories, expanded facilities, and production pipelines will translate ambition into capability. They warned that SAFE loans and rising defence budgets will only retain legitimacy if they create visible benefits for societies, such as jobs and local investment, rather than being perceived as funds diverted from hospitals or schools. European guarantees and venture capital, supported by changes in EIB financing guidelines are levers to mobilise private capital and support dual-use innovation only to the extent that predictable demand and long-term contracts

allow smaller firms to commit resources to defence production and deliver technological leadership for Europe and reduce dependence on external suppliers.

Yet behind the ambition, the Warsaw debates revealed that Europe remains divided on some fundamental fault lines that might hinder its further stepping up, and most importantly, its stepping in.

NATO's The Hague Summit Declaration on the 3.5% and 1.5% breakdown in military spending (adopted on 25 June 2025) was often cited throughout the Forum as a great success. Nevertheless, the acceptance of such increases varies greatly among European societies. Western European leaders, confronted with questions about the budgetary tensions this implies, appeared uneasy: they acknowledged the need for explanations and shared the concerns of citizens wary of cuts to social expenditure. By contrast, Baltic states are not only spending more but also maintaining broad societal consensus behind their efforts. This divergence feeds directly into the thorny issue of manpower. Debates on conscription in Germany, the Netherlands, and Romania underscored how politically toxic rearmament remains. Germany aims to reach 200,000 active troops and 260,000 total personnel by 2029, but faces bottlenecks in housing, training, and equipment. Estonia, by contrast, is pushing its defence effort toward 5 percent of GDP and retains public backing for such measures.

Enlargement adds another layer of complexity: how should the EU integrate accession countries, and what strategic posture will follow? Officials from the Baltics and Scandinavia spoke of real momentum, but cautioned that economic cycles and electoral pressures could yet erode Europe's resolve.

Even in sectors where unity of purpose is displayed, actions remain tentative – energy being the clearest example. Speakers including the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi argued that the shift to sustainable sources is no longer just climate policy but a geopolitical imperative. Clément Beaune, France's High Commissioner for Strategy and Planning, reframed ESG as "Energy, Security, Geopolitics" with nuclear energy being an indispensable component to both meet soaring demand driven by digitalisation and artificial intelligence and to reduce dependence on external suppliers. Momentum for nuclear energy is indeed building across Europe – Germany being the notable exception – yet calls for tighter integration of Europe's energy grids and deeper cooperation with neighbouring regions such as North Africa still need to translate into joint European action.

Ultimately, even if all divisions can be overcome, and actions can follow such strong public statements, the question still remains: Does this new posture allow Europe not only to step-up, but also to step in? Former Ukrainian PM Arseniy Yatsenyuk qualified the idea of „European boots on the ground" as "smoke and mirrors". And NATO's former Secretary General Stoltenberg reminded the audience that with more Europeans being in NATO (603 million) than in the EU (448 million), NATO remains the defining framework for



its security. The message was clear: rhetoric about European autonomy sits uneasily alongside the enduring centrality of NATO.

### **“Divided we fall”: From narratives to action, key questions remain**

The Warsaw Security Forum 2025 underscored how far Europe has come in confronting Russia’s war and strengthening its own resilience. Yet the debates also crystallised unresolved questions raised throughout the conference that will define the next phase.

- Are Europeans now truly serious about rearmament, and will it be effective?
- Will the West free itself from the psychological restraints imposed by Putin’s threats and intimidation – and, if so, how will this translate into action?
- Will NATO and the G7 be able to regain traction, or will Russia’s ability to sustain its war effort – with China’s backing – continue to block more determined engagement?
- Can Western leaders recognise the Russian challenge as part of a broader global confrontation, where the lines of conflict from Ukraine to Taiwan increasingly converge?
- Is Europe embracing not only the existential necessity of providing lasting support for the Ukrainian war effort but also the broader challenge of creating an own, independent security structure?
- Will the West pursue new instruments – from monetising frozen Russian assets to enforcing targeted oil sanctions at the refinery level – that could eventually raise the cost of aggression forcing the Kremlin into negotiations?
- And finally, is the West ready to acknowledge that Russia’s information campaigns and cyberattacks amount to a state of war already under way, and that this contest must be confronted with equal determination?

Among the next key dates to watch are the NATO Defence ministers meeting on October 15<sup>th</sup> and the EU Foreign Affairs Council on November 10<sup>th</sup> in Brussels which will allow to take stock of where Europe and the transatlantic alliance stand in view of both the old and the new conflict dynamics Ukraine and the West are facing.



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