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# The Transformation of the European Security Architecture as an Outcome of the Russian Aggression against Ukraine

In the post-Cold War era European security rested on the foundations of cooperative security along the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. This setup did not only provide indivisible security for all but was also underpinned by several arms control as well as confidence and security building measures that served sustaining stability well. On the one hand a politically and economically victorious Western alliance, centred predominantly around NATO and the European Union began to fill the strategic vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe, while on the other hand the former Soviet empire and Eastern block fell apart, leaving a politically vulnerable and economically weak Russian Federation behind. The Cold War, characterised by a high-risk but stable military confrontation was succeeded by a low-risk, but less stable security environment, gradually giving way to a reorganisation of the European security architecture that eventually lasted until 2022, when it has irreparably been degraded by the resurgent Russian quest to restore its lost great power status.

No one should have been surprised that the ‘siloviki’ elite of Russia under Vladimir Putin did not welcome these changes and did not embrace the loss of the Russian sphere of influence that many in Europe hoped belonged to the past. By 2007 the latest, when Putin, speaking at the Munich Security Conference, expressed his concerns and challenged the expansion of Euro-Atlantic institutions in Europe, it should have been clear that a resurgent Russia could pose a serious military challenge to this new order. Meanwhile, both arms control regimes between the United States and Russia, as well as bi- and multilateral confidence and security building measures – the ABM, INF, CFE, Open Skies treaties for example – were rendered dysfunctional by the parties for various reasons.

Georgia’s and Ukraine’s drifting towards NATO and the EU by 2008 meant the milestone where Russian political and economic power proved ineffective in keeping these countries anchored to Moscow, therefore Russia relied on the use of military power, first against Georgia in 2008, then against Ukraine in 2014. However, most European countries seemed to hope that the changing nature of the status quo can be denied, and Russia will be satisfied with its gains at the detriment of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine. But the lack of European agility coupled with Russian assertiveness led to risk-miscalculations: European countries underestimated Russia’s sustained willingness to use military force to pursue its strategic goals, while Russia underestimated

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Ukraine's ability to resist armed aggression, as well as the West's willingness to take costs for preserving Ukraine's sovereignty, what is also often seen as a guardian of European security.

Russia's 2022 escalation of its aggression against Ukraine, however, was not only a military miscalculation, but led to the irreparable degradation of the existing security architecture. Central and Eastern European countries are now building 'a new military Iron Curtain' – a military deterrent that now includes formerly non-aligned Sweden and Finland as well. European countries in the 2020s do not define their security together with Russia – but against Russia.