

Europe's chance to secure peace in Ukraine

Europe's future security is hanging by a thread. Yet, for many on the continent, the war in Ukraine seems remote. Indeed, walking through the streets of Brussels, one can't even sense there's a war going on. But there is. Russia's aggression has already lasted more than 1,000 days, and despite heavy losses in manpower and equipment, Moscow isn't relenting. Indeed, even as the United States rushes in military supplies ahead of President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration, there's no denying that, at this stage, Ukraine is on the back foot. [...] Hence, this needs to be a wake-up call for the European Union, a warning that it must step up to protect its own interests — no matter what the U.S. decides to do. For many, after almost three years of war, it's now finally sinking in that it's hard to see how exactly Kyiv can liberate all the occupied territories in the short term. [...] However, recent experience clearly shows that simply coming to a cease-fire agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin won't bring peace. After all, a cease-fire had been obtained following 2014's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea and the ensuing war in Donbas, but Russia simply used it to ramp up its forces and stage a full-force invasion in 2022. [...] Nevertheless, we must expect the new Trump administration will attempt to force an end to hostilities one way or another — even at the expense of Ukraine's ability to defend itself. And when it does, both Ukraine and Europe must have a seat at the negotiating table. Additionally, assuming a cease-fire can be achieved at the end of any negotiations, it is unclear how long such a peace would last. Thus, wherever the possible line of demarcation between an independent and an occupied Ukraine may end up falling, it must be unambiguously defended by more than just Ukrainian military forces. Anything short of that would mean Russia will resume its attack with the same goal in mind — sooner or later. That is why Ukraine's new Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrii Sybiha recently requested full NATO membership as the only serious security guarantee for his country. With this request, he's essentially stating the obvious: Without the West's presence in Ukraine after hostilities end, there will be no peace. With Trump entering the White House, however, the possibility that Ukraine will be invited to join seems remote. The same argument France and Germany used to deny Ukraine NATO membership back in 2008 is being repeated today: The belief that Putin would start a nuclear war in order to fulfil his dream of creating a new Russian empire, and that peace can be maintained through appeasement. But the past 1,000 days are proof this isn't true. Appeasement doesn't lead to peace, and Putin will continue with his aggression until stopped. [...] But if the U.S. and other NATO allies aren't ready to support Ukraine's membership bid, is there any other plausible alternative to try and end hostilities, secure peace, avert the country's full destruction and prevent the war from possibly spreading? Yes, a coalition of willing NATO allies could physically step in and help secure a future demarcation zone between an independent Ukraine and a Russian-occupied one. [...] The incoming Trump administration will likely be unwilling to take the lead, and the United Nations Security Council is effectively paralyzed by China's and Russia's vetoes, which leaves Europe to take charge of securing peace in Europe. [...] So, it is now up to NATO's European leaders to engage with the Trump administration in all negotiations about any kind of a cease-fire deal in Ukraine, and to make sure Kyiv has a say. And if European NATO allies are also prepared to physically help guarantee any peace deal, then there's hope for an independent Ukraine, as well as continued peace for the rest of the continent. It is Europe's moment to come into its own.

(Politico, 6 gennaio 2025)

TRADUZIONE SCRITTA DALL'INGLESE ALL'ITALIANO: TRACCIA N. 2

Russia's hybrid warfare could cause 'substantial' casualties, senior NATO official says

Moscow's campaign of hybrid warfare against NATO countries is getting close to the point of causing "substantial" casualties, a senior official at the defense alliance warned.

"What really worries me is that one of these attacks ... will break through in a big way," James Appathurai, the military alliance's deputy assistant secretary general and head of hybrid and cyber threats, told Sky News in an interview published Sunday.

"There is a real prospect of one of these attacks causing substantial numbers of casualties or very substantial economic damage," Appathurai said.

Since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has ramped up its campaign of so-called hybrid attacks — such as arson, cyber and information campaigns, or sabotage — throughout Europe.

Recent examples include the alleged cutting of energy and communications cables in the Baltic Sea, which German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius described as "sabotage." In that case, as in many other examples of hybrid attacks, it is difficult for governments to quickly and definitively attribute the attacks to Moscow.

Pistorius warned earlier this month about the threat Russian President Vladimir Putin poses. "Putin is engaging in hybrid attacks, and Germany is particularly in focus," Pistorius said in an interview with the Funke media group.

"He knows us well; Putin knows how to make pinpricks in us," Pistorius said. "Ignoring this threat because it makes us uncomfortable will not make it smaller but rather larger," he added.

Nordic countries have been on high alert due to warnings from European intelligence agencies about potential Russian sabotage of power cables, wind turbines and gas pipelines.

The number of these types of attacks has reached a level that would previously have been considered "utterly unacceptable," NATO's Appathurai said. "We can definitely count dozens. Up to 100 for sure. But then there's a lot of foiled plots," he said.

Andriy Yermak, head of Ukraine's presidential office, warned on Sunday that Russia may escalate its hybrid warfare tactics beyond sabotage of European infrastructure.

"It is worth considering the risks of hybrid threats appearing on the borders," Yermak wrote in a post on Telegram. "The shadow fleet that sabotages cables may not be the only such threat from the Russian Federation."

NATO is updating its strategy on hybrid warfare, first written in 2015, so it can be clearer about what type of attacks would trigger a full-scale military response.

"What we need to do now is be clearer among ourselves and then decide how we communicate that also to the Russians, that there are no-go areas," Appathurai said.

(Politico, 29 dicembre 2024)

Nato official takes aim at 'stupid' arms investing stance.

Western rating agencies, banks and pension funds are being "stupid" in shunning defence investments, one of Nato's most senior officials has warned, as he called on financial institutions to adapt to rising security threats. Admiral Rob Bauer, chair of the alliance's military committee, pictured, told the Financial Times a failure by investors to understand their role in "collective defence" meant they risked missing out on significant government funding in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. [...] Bauer's plea comes as European governments scramble to increase their military procurement and production to keep arming Ukraine, and just weeks before the inauguration of president elect Donald Trump, who has demanded Europe rely less on the US for its security. "This is about the rebalancing of power between China and the US. If tectonic plates shift, you have earthquakes. If the plates of geopolitical power shift, you have wars," he said. "I don't think there will be world wars per se, but regional wars, as we see now, are probably part of our near future." Shares in many large European defence companies, including Germany's Rheinmetall and Norway's Kongsberg Gruppen, have surged in the past year as government orders for tanks, missiles and artillery have swelled and investors bet that Nato rearmament will boost earnings for years to come. But some European banks are still reluctant to lend to arms makers to help them scale up production. The issue is particularly acute for smaller producers crucial to the wider supply chain. While venture capital investments in defence start-ups in Nato countries have risen fourfold since 2019, several institutional funds in Europe are still barred from investing in armaments based on environmental, social and governance concerns. The EU common budget also has a prohibition relating to direct investments in defence. Bauer, a Dutch naval officer who steps down from Nato this month after a three-year term, said those policies were obsolete. "There are still pension funds and banks that say it is not ethical to invest in defence capabilities because they kill people," he said. "And then there is the issue of sustainability goals, and to them I say, go and visit Gaza. Go and visit Ukraine. Go and visit Yemen. Go and visit Syria and have a look. You will see what war does. Investing in defence for deterrence purposes is actually the best sustainability measure." [...] Bauer also pointed out that some eastern Nato members "are being given a lower [sovereign] rating because they're closer to Russia, closer to the threat. One would assume that if you're part of Nato, you will get a bonus, instead of being punished." When S&P Global Ratings downgraded Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia in May last year, it cited the economic impact of the war in Ukraine on the three Baltic states. [...] Nato has launched its own fund to invest in defence start-ups, while the EIB, which is governed by all EU member states, is under pressure from some capitals to expand its lending to defence projects. [...] "This whole idea that money is disconnected from security is a concern, because economies thrive only in a stable and secure country. And that stability and that security has been guaranteed for 75 years by Nato. Defence is not a cost. It's an investment. [...].