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Sebastian Hartmann

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Lessons from Ukraine

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,
NATO is and will remain the foundation of transatlantic security. Supported by the individual nations, we have agreed as a collective to assist and protect one another – for peace and freedom, for the preservation of our democracies. I am therefore very pleased to be here with you today at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's 72nd Annual Session, because nowhere is democracy more visible than in the work of our parliaments.

The importance of this work is also evident in the fact that the recommendations contained in NATO Parliamentary Assembly resolutions are regularly reflected in summit documents. In this way, the Assembly has underlined its influence in support of closer cooperation with Ukraine. The Parliamentary Assembly shows that NATO as a whole is mindful of the parliamentary contribution and values democratic participation. It is thus an important link between NATO and the parliaments of its Member States.

At this year's annual meeting, the focus will once more be on a number of key issues: how to deal with hybrid threats, protecting critical infrastructure, strengthening European defence within NATO and the current situation in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

Today I would like to discuss with you what we are learning from Ukraine.

I will address four topics: firstly, innovation and industry; secondly, lessons for NATO; thirdly, lessons for the Bundeswehr; and fourthly, the importance of society and resilience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
every day, the Ukrainians are fighting for their sovereign state to be allowed to independently decide its external relations, including the right to determine its allies and strategic relations without outside influence. It is clear that a sovereign Ukraine is also vital for the European security architecture as a whole. Therefore, we must continue to make every effort to support Ukraine in its fight. Especially now, as we are approaching winter and Russia is again targeting the lifelines of the Ukrainian people with its attacks.

What can we learn from Ukraine?

There are two easy but equally dangerous answers to this question. One is that Ukraine shows us what the wars of the future will look like and that we should simply copy its approach. The other is that Ukraine is a special case and that its experience has little relevance for us.

Neither is correct. We must learn from Ukraine, but we must also understand the limits of what can be transferred to our own circumstances.

But what can we learn from Ukraine? I would first like to address the importance of innovation and how we can drive it forward with our industry.

Industry

Ukraine is showing us that, contrary to all Russian propaganda, the Russian armed forces are still a conventionally manageable military adversary. This requires the readiness and capabilities needed to mount a defence, however. Ukraine's firm determination to defend itself should serve as a model for all of us – for our countries, armed forces and societies.

What is new, however, is the speed at which capability requirements change and innovation cycles are thus shortened. The enormous differences between the drones used at the beginning of the war and the ones used today show the importance of flexibility and creativity in planning as well as openness to innovation.

Innovation, ladies and gentlemen, is an essential driver of Ukraine's defence capability and sustainability. Innovation at speed means responding quickly and continuously to new developments and acting proactively wherever possible. The Ukrainian “Brave One” platform exemplifies how an innovative ecosystem can be created.

The experience of Ukrainian soldiers must become a source of innovation for us. Ideas must be allowed to emerge from below, from the people who encounter operational problems every day. We must give them room to experiment, test, fail and try again.

Innovation means questioning and reviewing how open we are to new ideas, technologies and procedures, how we encourage soldiers to contribute ideas and whether we offer space and opportunities for trying out ideas before quickly fielding them to the rest of the force.

Innovation at scale, on the other hand, is the ability to quickly transition successful improvised solutions and prototypes to mass production. This can create a quantitative counterweight that ensures survival.

This war demonstrates the enormous quantities of materiel – be it ammunition, drones or air defence missiles – that need to be provided and kept track of and the logistic efforts required to supply the combat units.

Russia is significantly increasing its arsenal of long-range missiles. Each month, it can produce more than 200 ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. Our incoming Chief of Defence Christian Freuding recently described the Russian production capacity regarding jet powered drones. It was up to 2,800 in August from 350 in June. What's more: A significant amount is not used for the war in Ukraine.

A long war is therefore not only a military contest. It is an industrial contest.

We have to consider the entire chain of development, production, transport and employment in a whole-of-government approach. First and foremost, of course, that involves industry – but also infrastructure operators and of course the public.

Ukraine has repeatedly stressed that its industry has large capacities and that further investment is needed. In response, the German Federal Government is promoting joint ventures of the German and Ukrainian defence industry in the context of maintenance and repair facilities for Ukrainian defence materiel. More than 1.3 billion euros have been invested in these cooperation projects. With these investments, we not only help Ukraine in its national defence but also strengthen our defence capabilities through increased defence industrial capacities and the exchange of know-how.

The buildup of capabilities within NATO, the consumption of materiel in a war like the one in Ukraine and the necessary capacity for innovation all demand an industry that can meet these requirements and sustain them over the course of a war. This means that industrial capacities must be increased or at least kept available.

An important step has been taken with the increase in defence spending. Another step can be taken in the form of clear demand signals to industry about the purchase volumes to expect over the

coming years, which will provide planning predictability for investments.

This predictability must extend all the way down to individual suppliers. Long-term purchase guarantees should incentivise industry not only to deliver quickly but also to remain innovative.

More money in the same system will not automatically produce better results. We need procurement procedures that are capable of translating urgency into action.

That is why this year’s Defence Industry Forum on the margins of the Ankara Summit was a particular focus.

NATO

What lessons does NATO draw from Ukraine's brave struggle to defend itself? Russia is creating the conditions for a military attack on NATO states and is already taking actions against the Alliance member states at increasing risk to itself. NATO will orient its deterrence posture and the capabilities required for it accordingly.

One important lesson is that the battlefield is becoming increasingly transparent. Drones, satellites, commercial sensors and open-source data make it possible to detect military movements and concentrations of forces much earlier than before. The time between detection and engagement is shrinking.

This changes the way we must think about military capabilities. No individual system can win a war on its own. Future operations will require the close interaction of conventional forces, unmanned systems, electronic warfare, air defence and digital capabilities.

It is not a question of tanks or drones. It is tanks and drones, infantry and unmanned systems, artillery and electronic warfare – all working together.

At the same time, we must recognise that nobody will be able to intercept every drone or ballistic missile. Not only would the required resources go beyond what is feasible, but air defence systems simply cannot provide 100 per cent protection.

One way to counter this threat is to take established preventive measures that have been applied in the military for centuries: disperse, harden, camouflage, conceal and deceive.

A force that cannot survive an attack that gets through its defences has not been adequately protected.

Another lesson is that the rear is part of the front. The war in Ukraine demonstrates that attacks on logistics, energy infrastructure, industrial facilities and transport networks can have a direct impact on military operations.

For NATO, this means that we must not only be able to defend our forces at the front, but also protect the systems and infrastructure that sustain them.

Germany has an important role to play in this regard due to its geographical position in the heart of Europe. As a kind of turntable or logistics hub, a lot of material and personnel must pass through Germany in case of a crisis, ensuring the smooth execution of NATO Defence Plans.

Bridges, railways, roads, ports and energy infrastructure are therefore not merely civilian assets. They are also essential components of our military readiness. Our Operation Plan Germany allows for the necessary civil-military coordination and plays a key role regarding total defence.

Within NATO, the defence planning process (NDPP) is the central means of shaping capability building. At present, the negotiation of the Political Guidance will initiate the next planning cycle and define the framework.

We are working on „A stronger Europe in a stronger NATO“. With regard to the NDPP; this means that Europeans and Canada will provide 60 percent of conventional capabilities in NATO Germany alone will provide the second largest capability package after the United States.

It remains important that the Allies coordinate their capability development, including for the coming years. At the same time, these current times require new ways to achieve accelerated

implementation of capability goals and incorporate innovative approaches.

One example of this is the currently discussed option of “ahead-of-cycle acquisition”. What matters is that we find a pragmatic approach that balances long-term capability development and fast, dynamic approaches as well as the appropriate so-called “high-low mix”, which weighs low-cost, commercially available capabilities against expensive individual and custom solutions, for the Fight Tonight concept.

We must also take a closer look at dependencies. The war has shown how important access to space-based services, communications, intelligence and software has become. If essential capabilities depend on a single provider or a single country, that dependence can become a strategic vulnerability at the worst possible moment.

This does not mean that we should turn away from our American partners. Transatlantic cooperation remains indispensable. But we must be clear about where we need our own capabilities, where we can cooperate and where we must reduce dangerous dependencies.

The principle should be straightforward: where capabilities can be delivered quickly, we should procure them. Where the development takes longer and the strategic importance is high, we must build and maintain European capacity.

Finally, Ukraine teaches us that Russia is not only waging a war of aggression against Ukraine. It is also conducting a broader campaign against the countries of the Alliance: through cyberattacks, sabotage, disinformation and other hybrid activities.

These activities are intended to undermine our security, weaken public trust and divide our societies and our Alliance.

Unity, therefore, is not simply a political aspiration. It is a military asset. Our deterrence depends on the conviction that we will stand together and that no adversary can divide us.

Bundeswehr

What lessons does the Bundeswehr take away from Ukraine's defence against the Russian attack? You have heard from our Chief of Defence Carsten Breuer yesterday about our new Overall Concept of Military Defence, the Military Strategy of the Bundeswehr, the Defence Planning Guidance, and the Capability Profile of the Bundeswehr.

More concretely, we have recently set up a Bundeswehr Innovation Center to bring together the Armed Forces and industry. Just this minute, the Director Christian Bock is speaking in front of the NATO PA Science and Technology Committee.

The first drone regiment of the German Army is currently being established in the Bundeswehr. It will be ready to assume its task next year. There will also be a counter-drone company and an electronic warfare company. A dedicated testing and trial company will try out new systems and guide their further development.

The German Army will also once again have an army air defence corps. In Ukraine, army operations on the ground are increasingly endangered by new and massive threats from the air. Rockets and drones are used to engage classic air assets, such as aircraft and helicopters, not just in Ukraine but also in the Middle East.

These developments underline that we must think in terms of integrated capability packages. Drones, electronic warfare, air defence, artillery, armour and infantry must complement one another. We must avoid developing individual capabilities in isolation.

Ukraine is also showing us how important space has become for civil-military cooperation in times of crisis and war. The German government is devoting great attention to space as a strategic dimension. One year ago, our Defence Minister and Foreign Minister presented the first national Space Safety and Security Strategy.

We are investing 35 billion Europe in our space security infrastructure until 2030. One central aspect is the Bundeswehr's Space Command that aligns all military competencies to secure our systems and defend our ability to act in space.

We are pursuing a balance between continuity and the consistent modernization of our capabilities across all domains. Our current priority is given to systems that are robust, interoperable with our partners, and—above all—rapidly available.

To this end, we are procuring, for example, the F-35, the world's most advanced combat aircraft, and the Blue Whale, one of the first large unmanned underwater vehicles. Simultaneously, we are digitizing our land forces through the D-LBO (Digitalization of Land-Based Operations) project.

At the same time, it is also clear that no two wars are the same. The military defence of Ukraine takes place primarily on land and, in operational terms, is fought on an interior line. This war holds many lessons, though not equally for all domains.

As instructive as the Ukrainian strategies for protecting land-based logistics against drone attacks are, for example, we must find our own ways to protect our resupply routes across the Baltic Sea to supply our forces in the Baltic region.

However eye-opening the Ukrainian innovation in unmanned combat in the Black Sea is, we must employ a different strategy. The same is true with regard to public resilience, a system of early warning and information as well as a well-developed network of civilian rescue services and disaster control, which are also indispensable.

Society and Resilience

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is one further lesson from Ukraine that deserves our particular attention: resilience is a whole-of-society capability.

Every day, the Ukrainian people show us what true resilience looks like. While soldiers fight for freedom on the front lines, civilians keep the entire nation and its essential systems running. Hospitals remain open, trains continue to operate and public institutions maintain essential services – even under constant attack.

This is not simply a question of courage. It is also a question of preparation, organisation and responsibility.

Every day, Russia is also attacking critical and especially energy infrastructure. While we should increasingly prepare for such attacks, we have already witnessed sabotage attacks that have been initiated by Russian sources.

More generally speaking, we are witnessing hybrid attacks against NATO Allies on a daily basis, including cyberattacks, disinformation and other measures.

The drone attack in Leipzig showed that these attacks have reached a new level. We therefore need to think of security in an encompassing way.

Defence is an all-of-society task.

The armed forces can only fulfil their mission if energy supplies remain secure, communications continue to function, fuel and ammunition can be transported and civilian authorities are able to perform their tasks.

Warning and communication systems need to work. Emergency plans need to be practised and exercised, not merely written down. Every citizen should know what to do in different scenarios.

We must also recognise that resilience is about public trust. Disinformation thrives where people lose confidence in their institutions, where societies become divided and where there is a gap between what political leaders say publicly and what they know privately.

We must therefore communicate honestly, explain difficult decisions and make clear what we know – and what we do not know. Media literacy, effective communication and cooperation across government and society are important elements of our defence.

Resilience is also deterrence. An adversary that expects a divided and panicked society will calculate differently from one that expects a prepared and determined population.

And resilience requires people. It requires trained personnel, functioning civil protection structures, reliable emergency services and citizens who understand that security is a shared responsibility.

The Ukrainian example demonstrates that military strength and societal resilience cannot be separated. They reinforce one another.

We must therefore develop a comprehensive approach to security that brings together the armed forces, government, industry, infrastructure operators and society as a whole.

Conclusion

As I wrap up, I would like to return to our support for Ukraine. I have outlined what Ukraine needs in this war and what we can learn from Ukraine in turn – in terms of innovation and industry, as well as within NATO and the Bundeswehr and with regard to the resilience of our societies.

Four areas, but one common message: we must be able to innovate faster, produce at scale, defend ourselves across all domains and ensure that our societies remain resilient.

But one thing is clear: Our support needs to extend further. We must also contribute to ensuring that Ukraine can permanently enjoy freedom, security and self-determination after the war. This also includes economic recovery, social stability and Ukraine's European integration.

And finally, please accept my sincere thanks. The German Government appreciates the work of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and thanks the members of the Defence and Security Committee for their work in this important format. I look forward to further discussions with you in the course of today's event.

Thank you very much for your attention.