It was the first gathering of the "Ukraine Defense Consultative Group"—in fact, a new war coalition. The United States was in the driver's seat with regard to initiative, political clout, and quantity and quality of current and future arms supplies, but the help of the other participants was essential as well. In Ramstein, the free world of which President Biden had spoken in Warsaw the previous month had come together. Further developments in the war and in the world at large depended on the ability of that group to remain united. It achieved that goal and increased its membership to over fifty countries by the fall of 2022. The military supplies provided by the members of the group allowed Ukraine to regain initiative at the battlefield in September of that year.[18]

The British Charge

In June 2022 the Ukrainian edition of *Forbes* published a list of twenty friends of Ukraine—the countries that had contributed most to its defense. The United States was the unchallenged leader, with its commitment of $46 billion (0.22 percent of its GDP) for that purpose. But the list also took note of visits of national leaders to Kyiv and other forms of support, including participation in sanctions against Russia, which put Poland one line above the United States and made it the unrivaled champion, scoring 97 of 100 possible points. In terms of share of GDP dedicated to assistance to Ukraine, the leader was Estonia, with 0.81 percent of its GDP, followed by Latvia with 0.72 percent and Poland with 0.26 percent. The United Kingdom stood at 0.18 percent, while France contributed 0.08 percent, Germany 0.06 percent, and Italy 0.03 percent of its GDP.[19]

European assistance to Ukraine measured in percentage of GDP was quite revealing of the divisions in the Western bloc with regard to the war in Ukraine, despite unprecedented solidarity among European capitals in condemning Putin's unprovoked aggression against a sovereign country. The Baltic states, formerly Soviet republics that had joined the EU and NATO but still felt threatened by Russia, were

concerned that if Putin won in Ukraine, they would be next. Accordingly, they formed the most pro-Ukrainian group in Europe. Their position was best expressed by Prime Minister Kaja Kallas of Estonia, who declared in her speech in Berlin that gas might be expensive, but freedom is priceless. "It's up to every government to decide how much of the burden its people are ready to carry. But it is equally necessary we get the message through to our people—what is our neighbor's problem today will be our problem tomorrow. We are in danger when our neighbor's house is on fire."[20]

Equally eager to support Ukraine was a group of former East European satellites of the USSR, which was led by Poland and included Slovenia and the Czech Republic. Although members of the EU and NATO, they were concerned about the possibility of Russian troops showing up on their borders. They not only marshaled their diplomatic, economic, and military resources to help Ukraine defend itself but also took in most of the Ukrainian refugees—more than 3.5 million were welcomed, housed, and fed in Poland alone. The only exception to that group had been Hungary, led by its strongman, Viktor Orban, who modeled his illiberal populist regime on the one built by Vladimir Putin, perhaps his closest political ally. Besides Orban's political sympathies for Moscow, hard-nosed calculation was involved: dependent on Russia for the lion's share of Hungary's energy supply, Orban gave only limited support to the anti-Russian coalition, arguing against supplying weapons to Kyiv and against the sanctions regime imposed by the collective West.[21]

The countries of "Old Europe," not immediately threatened by invasion, split into two groups. In a class by itself was the United Kingdom, which had left the European Union but was now very decisively reinserting itself into European politics. London emerged as the leader of the pro-Ukrainian European front, committing more money to the Ukrainian cause than any other country except the United States—more than $5 billion as of June 2022. Germany, France, and Italy were lower down on that list. Their leaders were reluctant to introduce sanctions against Russia and not eager to provide much military assistance.

Swedish governments to become members of NATO in 2022. In 2017 both countries had joined the UK-led Expeditionary Force, a NATO-allied grouping of north European countries that also included Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, and the Baltic states. The Expeditionary Force became a European army in the making—the armed force that France had talked about but Britain was actively creating. In March, Johnson invited the leaders of the Expeditionary Force countries to London, where President Zelensky addressed them by video link, asking for military assistance.

Johnson also engaged the East European countries, trying to create a pan-European structure that would include Ukraine under London's auspices. In February, less than a week before the invasion, London, Warsaw, and Kyiv announced the creation of a British-Polish-Ukrainian military initiative that the Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, called a "tripartite format of cooperation." According to reports in the Italian media, during his April visit to Kyiv Johnson proposed to Zelensky the creation of a potential rival to the European Union—a UK-led European Commonwealth including Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine. Clearly, for Johnson, Brexit did not mean abandoning European politics. He was planning a power center alternative to Brussels and challenging the legitimacy of a policy toward Russia made in Paris and Berlin, which favored the economic concerns of the old Europe over the security concerns of the new one.[26]

German Fears

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a major blow to the policy, advocated by the long-serving and recently retired chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, of encouraging economic cooperation with Russia not just to solve Germany's and Europe's energy problems but also to turn Russia into a reliable economic and political ally. Merkel's policies toward Russia were rarely criticized in Germany during her long tenure, which lasted from November 2005 until December 2021. She helped to negotiate the Minsk II agreements that ended the active phase of the Russo-

Ukrainian war in the Donbas in February 2015 and played an important role in imposing and maintaining German and thus European sanctions on Russia after Putin's annexation of the Crimea.

Merkel was also instrumental in providing political backing for the construction of Nord Stream II, the gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, more specifically to the settlement called Lubmin in her Bundestag constituency. This project, undertaken after the imposition of sanctions, was criticized abroad but perceived largely positively at home. When Merkel left office in December 2021 to general accolades celebrating her numerous political achievements, there was little reason to believe that Nord Stream II would not become operational. Even American opposition had ceased after Biden replaced Trump in the White House. Germany was about to further increase its dependence on Russian gas, and it was believed that Russia's need for Western revenue would make Putin more friendly toward collective Europe.[27]

Although there were dark clouds on the horizon, with the United States and the United Kingdom warning the world about imminent Russian aggression against Ukraine, many in Germany believed that the problem could be solved with concessions to Russia. In January, a German naval officer, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach, was caught on tape suggesting that the Crimea would stay Russian anyway, and that Putin only wanted some show of respect. "It is easy to give him the respect he really demands—and probably also deserves," stated Schönbach, after exclaiming: "And, my God, giving someone respect is low cost, even no cost." The tapes became public and went viral, forcing Schönbach's resignation. But his words reflected the thinking of the German political, military, and business elite at the time.[28]

The sixty-three-year-old Social Democrat Olaf Scholz, who replaced Angela Merkel as chancellor in December 2021, was immediately faced with the international crisis caused by Putin's demand that NATO's borders be shifted westward and his concentration of Russian troops on Ukraine's borders. What only a few months earlier had seemed a wise policy toward Russia conducted by Merkel was now increasingly perceived as the appeasement of an aggressor. The international cli-

mate changed, and Nord Stream II suddenly found itself in hot water: Germany's allies, the United States in particular, wanted the German government to stop the certification of the controversial pipeline.

In February, Scholz visited Washington and apparently agreed with Biden to cancel Nord Stream II certification if Putin went to war. "If there is military aggression against Ukraine, tough, mutually agreed and far-reaching sanctions will be imposed. It will be extremely costly for Russia to take such a step," declared Scholz at a joint press conference with his American counterpart. He then flew to Moscow to convince Putin not to go to war, assuring Putin that Ukraine had no chance of being admitted to NATO for the next thirty years. Rebuffed there, Scholz made a stop in Kyiv on his way back to Germany. Zelensky was quick to remind him that Nord Stream II was a Russian geopolitical weapon, and his visit produced little public enthusiasm in the Ukrainian capital. While the United States, the United Kingdom, and the East Europeans were already helping Ukraine with weapons, Germany offered 5,000 helmets. The mayor of Kyiv, Vitalii Klychko, a former professional boxer and multiple heavyweight champion, who had lived in Germany and still had celebrity status there, quipped that Germany's next delivery to Ukraine would consist of pillows.[29]

The start of all-out warfare on February 24 took Scholz and the German political elite completely by surprise. "We have woken up in a different world," stated Scholz's foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock. On February 27, in an unprecedented Sunday session of the Bundestag, Scholz declared a major shift in German foreign policy: on the previous day the government had approved a shipment of 1,000 anti-tank and 500 surface-to-air missiles to Ukraine. The requests of Estonia and the Netherlands to transfer some of the German weaponry in their possession to Ukraine, previously declined, were now granted. But most striking was the decision to allocate €100 billion toward Germany's defense and raise the country's military expenditure to more than 2 percent of GDP, a NATO requirement that Germany had heretofore ignored.

Scholz defined the change in his government's policy on two levels. The first was moral and ethical. Ukraine, he argued, had fallen

victim to unprovoked aggression, and Germany would stand by it. The second level was geopolitical. "In attacking Ukraine, Putin doesn't just want to eradicate a country from the world map; he is destroying the European security structure we have had in place since Helsinki," said the chancellor. He was referring to the Final Act or Helsinki Accords of 1975, which recognized the post–World War II international borders, including those of the two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Ukraine had joined the accords, along with other post-Soviet countries, in 1992. Thus, according to Scholz, the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity was an attack on the integrity and security of all European states, including the present-day Federal Republic of Germany, reunified in 1990.

Putin, argued Scholz, wanted to "create a new order in Europe, and he has no qualms about using military capabilities to achieve it." The chancellor blamed the war on an individual rather than a country or a nation. "It was Putin who chose this war, not the Russian people, so we must see clearly that this is Putin's war," Scholz told the Bundestag. While Germans of his generation would never question their nation's responsibility for "Hitler's war," Scholz was not about to apply the same standard to the Russians—accusing Russians as a people of aggression had been a taboo in post–World War II Germany—even though polling data would soon demonstrate the Russian population's strong support for their government's "special military operation" in Ukraine. Scholz also warned the public about the need to avoid another world war. The German government was joining the transatlantic wartime alliance but doing so late, reluctantly, and with multiple qualifications.[30]

Despite proclaiming this paradigm shift in foreign policy, Scholz and his government failed to recapture the initiative on the European scene, where the agenda was now being set by the United States, Britain, and the East European countries, all insisting on greater support for Ukraine. Some members of Scholz's government as well as key figures in the Bundestag were of the same persuasion, but Scholz was reluctant to take their advice. In May 2022, a German political scientist

summarized his strategy as one that "for the most part, rather hesitantly carries out what allies have already done (such as embargoes and arms deliveries)."[31]

In mid-March, when Volodymyr Zelensky was invited to address the Bundestag by video link from Kyiv, he did not pull his punches but addressed his critique to the previous German government. Zelensky accused Scholz's predecessors of blocking Ukraine's accession to NATO and the EU, funding Russian aggression by means of gas deals with Moscow, and delaying sanctions against the aggressor. The German government had built a new Berlin Wall in Europe, said Zelensky, leaving his country on the wrong side of it. He then appealed to the new leader: "Chancellor Scholz! Tear down this wall. Give Germany the leadership you deserve. And what your descendants will be proud of. Support us. Support peace. Support every Ukrainian. Stop the war. Help us stop it." The address began and ended with a standing ovation by the German parliamentarians, but Scholz's change of rhetoric produced little change in policy: the German government promised military assistance without delivering it.[32]

Zelensky kept up the pressure on Berlin. In early April, after the corpses of civilians murdered by Russian soldiers were discovered in Bucha, Zelensky made a point of publicly inviting Angela Merkel and the former French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, "to visit Bucha and see what the policy of concessions to Russia has led to over the past 14 years. See with your own eyes the tortured and slain Ukrainians." He then reminded the audience about the anniversary of the NATO Bucharest summit of 2008, where the two European leaders, now out of office, had blocked Ukraine's accession to the alliance, perpetuating what the Ukrainian president called "the gray zone, where Moscow thinks it's allowed to do anything. Even the most terrible war crimes."[33]

Soon after Boris Johnson's visit to Kyiv, Zelensky turned down an offer from President Frank-Walter Steinmeier of Germany to visit the Ukrainian capital. Ukrainian officials cited the image of Steinmeier as a supporter of Russia, prevalent in Ukraine, as the reason. Earlier in his career, Steinmeier had served as chief of staff to Chancellor

Gerhard Schröder, who, after ending his political career, became the chief lobbyist of Russian natural gas projects in Germany. But more important to Ukrainians was the role Steinmeier had played as foreign minister in Angela Merkel's government, proposing the "Steinmeier formula" for the implementation of the 2015 Minsk agreements, negotiated with Merkel's help, that were generally believed in Ukraine to have favored Russia.[34]

Zelensky's naming and shaming of Germany seemed to go nowhere as Scholz resisted pressure from abroad and from his own public. Half the nation believed in late May that Germany was not doing enough to support Ukraine, and many ministers in Scholz's own governing coalition were frustrated by German promises made but not kept to supply Ukraine with heavy weapons. Johann Wadephul of the opposition Christian Democratic Union accused the chancellor of "trying to substitute actual deliveries with announcements." The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, expressed his government's frustration with Scholz when he stated: "There are countries from which we are awaiting deliveries, and other countries for which we have grown tired of waiting. Germany belongs to the second group."[35]

Scholz never explained the reason for his delaying tactics. He was clearly playing for time, hoping that the war would somehow end without Germany being obliged to deliver the heavy weapons he had promised. There were at least two reasons for his maneuvering, both having to do with Russia. The first was historical and psychological: since World War II, the Germans had felt guilty about their war crimes against *die Russen*, even though Hitler's war in the east had been waged overwhelmingly against Ukrainians and Belarusians on their territory, and wanted to avoid repeating anything that might be construed as aggression against "Russia," broadly defined. The second reason was economic: 55 percent of the natural gas consumed in Germany was purchased from Russia.[36]

Accordingly, Olaf Scholz presented himself first and foremost as a peacemaker, a potential mediator in future peace talks rather than an uncompromising supporter of Ukraine—the role assumed by Wash-

ington and London and championed by the leaders of the Baltic and East European states.

The Peacemakers

No other European leader worked as long and as hard to claim the laurels of peacemaker in the newest iteration of the Russo-Ukrainian war as the French president, Emmanuel Macron. Back in December 2019 he had served as host of the first and only meeting between Putin and Zelensky, which ended on a positive note but brought few positive results. In February 2022 Macron was one of the last high-profile Western visitors to Moscow and Kyiv, trying to broker a deal that would prevent the war.[37]

Macron had never given up on the idea, long championed in Paris, of integrating Russia into Europe as a counterbalance to the United States and Germany. It had all but materialized on François Mitterrand's watch in the Gorbachev era, only to slip away with the collapse of the USSR. Macron now hoped to create a new security structure in Europe that would include Russia and diminish the American role in guaranteeing European security. "Macron's goal is to initiate a dialogue on NATO's role in Europe and Ukraine, and potentially a new treaty on arms control, some sort of Helsinki Accords 2.0," argued Carole Grimaud Potter of the Center for Russia and Eastern Europe Research in Geneva a few days before Putin's invasion. "He knows it will take time, and that NATO and the EU will have to give in to some of Russia's demands, [since Russia] wants to guarantee its security and restore the might it lost when the USSR disappeared."[38]

In late May, Macron joined Scholz in trying to convince Putin to end the war. In a three-way telephone conversation they asked Putin for a ceasefire, withdrawal of Russian troops, and opening of direct negotiations with Zelensky. Nothing came of that initiative, as Putin complained about Western arms supplies to Ukraine. But Putin promised Macron and Scholz to resolve the massive food shortage he had created by blocking the Ukrainian Black Sea ports and occupying those on the