



under discussion

NATO. The Indispensable Alliance

“NATO’s Essential Core Is Unconditional Reliability”

An Interview with Ambassador Géza Andreas von Geyr

In International Reports, Germany's Ambassador to NATO, Géza Andreas von Geyr, talks about military deterrence against Russia, the possible return of Donald Trump, and steps towards stronger European pillars in the Alliance.

International Reports (IR): Ambassador, NATO turns 75 this year. If you were invited to speak at the 75th anniversary festivities, what key achievements would you emphasise?

Géza Andreas von Geyr: 75 years of NATO mean 75 years of peace

and freedom for the countries NATO has protected and continues to protect. That means 75 years of peace and freedom in the Atlantic region and in Europe, a continent that had witnessed wars for many centuries. This was also made possible by the US decision to remain engaged in and on behalf of Europe after the Second World War and to support European integration by providing security – in the interest of both sides.

IR: However, there are growing doubts as to whether the US will continue to thus define its interests and remain as active in Europe in future, where the prospect of a second presidential term for Donald Trump is already causing uncertainty. This uncertainty peaked a few weeks ago when Trump questioned the guarantee of assistance to “delinquent” NATO Allies. How are such statements being received at NATO?

von Geyr: NATO has an essential core, and that is unconditional reli-

ability. When push comes to shove, we all stand together: an attack on one is an attack on all. That is the internal character of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. That is solid, and it must not be frivolously questioned by anyone. Any country that does so weakens the Alliance, and thus also itself.

At the same time, everyone knows that the European NATO countries must shoulder more of the joint defence burden for the Atlantic area. Europeans have been doing this for several years, but it's a process. The NATO Summit in the summer will show that this process has gained strong momentum and substance, and it's on a good trajectory. This is the decisive message that must reach the American public: Europeans are becoming increasingly relevant within NATO and thus also as security partners for the US. The Alliance remains central for the security requirements of the foreseeable future, and this is in the fundamental interest of both sides.

IR: How can you tell that the process has accelerated?

von Geyr: European defence capability is manifested in at least

three different areas: the first is the European Union. A whole lot of work has been done on structural issues and on very specific projects and initiatives, some of which are highly funded: one is PESCO, Permanent Structured Cooperation in defence policy, but there are also new, far-reaching funding instruments for armament industry policy.

The second pillar is the Europeans in the Alliance. The European NATO countries are working more and more closely together to develop, purchase and coordinate certain capabilities, and they are looking more closely at common standards and usability. A very specific example is the European Sky Shield Initiative to enhance joint air defence – urgent capability gaps are currently being filled in a joint initiative involving 21 European Allies.

The third area is the large number and the dense network of bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation among Europeans, such as German-French and German-Dutch cooperation and Benelux cooperation in security policy. Here, too, the focus is on highly specific joint planning, development and action on the part of Europeans, granting the Alliance strength and clout from which everyone benefits.



On air: Russian President Vladimir Putin shares his perspective in an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson. Russian propaganda also serves to cover up failures in Ukraine, says German NATO Ambassador Géza Andreas von Geyr. [Photo: © Gavriil Grigorov, Russian Look, picture alliance.](#)

So Europeans are strengthening their defence capability and security policy cooperation at various levels. The increase in defence spending by virtually all European countries shows how well this is progressing. The trend is clear, and it is good and important for Europe and for the United States, since the latter also needs strong, reliable, stable security policy partners. The developments in the security area are too great for anyone to face alone – and I don't see the US finding any more stable partners than us Europeans.

IR: You have been the German Ambassador to NATO since August 2023. Based on your impressions so far, perhaps including your impressions of day-to-day business in Brussels, could you name one NATO strength and one weakness?

von Geyr: There are now 32 countries in NATO. These are all proud nation states with long, impressive histories. They have joined together because of their own security interests and are organising their defence in an efficient alliance – the strongest military alliance there is. That is a huge achievement and requires a great deal of daily coordination and focus. It is an ongoing and highly complex process, far different from a single country with a single, fixed decision-making structure. So every day NATO must take care that this complexity does not give rise to complications that overwhelm the coordination processes. Every day, we need to reconsider what is truly necessary, what can be done and what can be simplified, whether decisions need to be made faster and whether there can be working compromises. This constant joint adaptation to current events and requirements, the exploration of options and necessities among Allies, is our daily task in creating good German NATO policy at my level in the North Atlantic Council and in the many subcommittees.

IR: NATO will probably have to wait in vain for any congratulations from Moscow on its 75th anniversary. Before working for the Alliance, you were the German Ambassador to Russia. We are familiar with the Russian government's complaints about NATO's eastward "expansion" and with the idea that it is a threat to Russia and that the war in Ukraine was a sort of self-defence measure. Did you often hear these lines of argument in personal conversations during your time in Moscow?

von Geyr: I was confronted with these lines of argument from my first day in Moscow, although we need to distinguish between the time prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and afterwards. For many years, the idea was that NATO was expanding of its own accord, supposedly to encircle and weaken Russia. But, of course, the Kremlin always knew that NATO was not forcing anyone's hand; instead states were seeking the protection of NATO for their own security policy considerations. At issue was the principle of freedom to choose one's own alliances, a principle of international law that applies to everyone – even if it runs counter to Moscow's aspirations for dominance, the worst form of which we are witnessing in the war against Ukraine.

When people in Russia began to realise after the beginning of the war of aggression that Ukraine would not be quickly overrun, another justification was constructed: NATO is waging war against the Russian Federation in the hope of destroying it. Russia has to defend itself, as it did against Nazi Germany after 1941. This war is being fought in Ukraine. This propaganda variant, which has been incessantly proclaimed since the summer of 2022 and attempts a role reversal, is intended to whitewash defeats in Ukraine vis-à-vis the Russian public. The size of the supposed enemy – that is, of NATO – is to give the conflict an epochal dimension. Anti-Americanism, anti-colonialism and anti-liberalism are added to attract countries in the Global South to the Russian side.

There is no need to explain that both arguments are falsely constructed, but we must deal with them and with the great danger they pose: the Kremlin is dead set on this huge fundamental conflict with the West – and, from its perspective, the security policy component of the West is primarily NATO.

IR: Did you have the impression that those who talked to you in Russia actually considered these lines of argument to be true?

von Geyr: Do the Russians themselves believe what they are saying?

I think that those who are truly familiar with the material certainly do not. But Russia has developed into a dictatorship in recent years. It keeps the media rigorously under control, no longer tolerates attempts to establish the truth beyond the official party line, no longer accepts any diversity of opinion and thus no longer accepts the formulation of independent ideas. So I think it is almost pointless to ask whether the people there believe it or not. The power to convince is no longer relevant. The power to assert is all that matters now.

IR: There is a great deal of talk about “victory” and “defeat” in conjunction with the Russian attack on Ukraine. But it’s not always clear exactly what is meant. What do you think would constitute a Russian victory? And what would such a scenario mean for NATO?

von Geyr: There is a good reason why nobody clearly defines the

terms “victory” and “defeat”. Let me emphasise the one constant in our policy: the principle of sovereignty and integrity for Ukraine as a state. This sovereignty has been brutally violated by Russia’s war of aggression. Russia has attempted to use military means to appropriate territory. This attempt must not succeed, nor will it. This means that the Russian Federation must leave the territories that do not belong to it under international law.

Otherwise we would be allowing the Kremlin to change the fundamental principles of international law and state interactions in Europe according to its wishes – back to “might makes right”. Moscow seeks dominance over its sovereign neighbours and therefore veto rights over their foreign policy options. These principles of dominance

reflect 19th-century policy and have no place in a modern order based on peace and security. Nor do they comply with the prescriptions of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, one of the guardians of which, as a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia should actually be. That is why it is also in our vital interest that Russia does not succeed. Our free way of life and the security of European countries and the Atlantic region are fundamentally based on the idea that the system of law we have agreed upon applies to everyone.

IR: How great do you think is the risk that Russian ambitions are not limited to Ukraine, but could extend to NATO members such as the Baltic states if Russia were to be successful in Ukraine?

von Geyr: The war against Ukraine that started in 2022 was not Moscow's first step. There was the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the war against Georgia in 2008 – and the result was the creation of two entities that nobody recognises except for Moscow. There was Russian support in stabilising the Lukashenko regime in Belarus, as well as attempts to influence several elections in Europe. The pattern is clear: Russia strives for control and dominance in its neighbourhood – and is prepared to use any means. The Kremlin repeatedly underscores this idea with both clear and ambiguous threats to various states, including NATO Allies. These threats must be taken seriously. Given developments within Russia since the outbreak of the war, and even before then, and its conduct towards the outer world, such as its cooperation with Iran and North Korea, it will scarcely be possible to change the course of the current Russian state power. So it is understandable that even NATO members and partners feel insecure. And it is crucial that as NATO we do all we can to prepare ourselves to use deterrence to thwart whatever someone in the Kremlin may be dreaming up and be in a position to defend ourselves at all times. And it is central that we, as states, provide as much bilateral support to Ukraine as we can over the long term so that it can wage its legitimate defensive war and so that we do not see more of this type of aggression on the part of Russia.

IR: At the beginning you pointed out that defence spending has gone up for European NATO states. But there are still those who say that we currently do not have the capabilities we would need to counter a Russian threat. Where do you think armament cooperation could be improved – not so much financially, but in terms of how it is organised?

von Geyr: Armament doesn't work without money. In Germany, we have the 100-billion-euro special fund for the Bundeswehr. We must use it well. And we need sufficient resources for the period afterwards. That's one thing. The other is the question of how Europe will organise itself in the field of armaments. Much has already been done. Five or six years ago, nobody would have thought that the European Union would have been where it now is in the areas of defence capabilities and of specific member state contributions to armaments-related measures. These efforts



International exercise led by the Finnish Navy: Finland's accession to NATO strengthens the Alliance. The same applies to Sweden. Photo: © Vesa Moilanen, Lehtikuva, picture alliance.

can and must intensify, but the road is clearly marked and it is a good one in my view. Europeans in NATO are also doing a great deal – I have already mentioned the European Sky Shield Initiative. The next step will depend on combining the productivity-promoting capabilities of NATO and the EU in an optimal way, especially when it comes to supporting the armaments industry, and maximising cooperation and coordination. That's where I see the most potential for optimisation. We have European armaments industries that are structured very differently. In some countries, they have a strong market economy focus, while in others the state owns large shares in armament companies. But they all need planning certainty and support. The ultimate concern is identifying gaps and investing accordingly. The path is clearly mapped out.



IR: Speaking of cooperation and a joint approach, we don't always get the impression that NATO members are forging ahead together on central questions. In the process of accepting Finland and Sweden, Hungary and Turkey hesitated for a long time, for instance. There are other questions in which these countries seem to be "problematic" Allies, and not just from a German perspective. Can you explain why they are still important Allies?

von Geyr: Let me first address the issue of Finland and Sweden that you mentioned. In essence, we are concerned with one single question: are Finland and Sweden an asset to NATO security? The answer is absolutely clear, and everyone in the Alliance would give you the same answer: yes, both enhance the Alliance's

security. Some partners have boosted the Alliance in other ways. But, as is so often the case, you have to focus on the core issue. No one is naive. Naturally, each country has its own domestic policy – including Germany. But that should not be a reason to delay fundamental decisions that affect our joint security.

Now to your main question: the Alliance is made up of members who come together to jointly ensure our security. Each member contributes to the security of the entire Alliance. You explicitly mentioned Turkey and Hungary: Turkey occupies a geographical position that is incredibly important for NATO. It plays a central role on the Black Sea. For this reason, and for others, Turkey has been a vital partner in the Alliance for decades and conversely NATO is doubtlessly equally important for Ankara.

It's similar for Hungary. And I am certain that Hungary has no doubt that its security is best guaranteed under the collective protection of NATO, which demands reliability. I see no alternative, especially given the country's history. Incidentally, Hungary's behaviour as a partner in security policy in the Alliance is very different from its conduct in the EU. We see Hungary as a solid Ally in the many matters of daily interaction – and there are countless issues besides Sweden's accession to NATO. This makes Hungary's occasional marked differences of opinion on some key political assessments and issues all the more difficult to understand.

IR: In its 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO affirms that it will protect the Alliance, prevent and combat crises, and pursue cooperative security by working with partner states that are not part of NATO. That's quite a number of tasks. Do NATO and its members have the resources to implement this approach?

von Geyr: The issue of Russia is certainly the dominant one at the

moment, and it is likely to remain so in the coming years. That is where the Alliance is orienting itself. At the same time, all the tasks you have mentioned have their importance. NATO cannot afford to abandon what has been called the 360-degree approach to security.

You mentioned NATO's partnership policy, which is a very important component of establishing and deepening the Alliance's connections in its neighbourhood and far beyond – and, incidentally, of convincing other states of our position with respect to Ukraine and countering the Kremlin's attempts to promote Russian arguments among the people in these states. Here, NATO's partnership policy also complements its deterrence policy toward Russia.

The volatile events in Kosovo last year reminded us that stability in the Western Balkans has not yet reached a level at which we can stop worrying – on the contrary, NATO is currently increasing its presence there. The focus on the major threat from Russia has priority. But that doesn't mean that other issues are entirely subordinate.

IR: You mentioned Russia as the dominant topic at the moment. What other challenges do you see for the immediate and mid-term future that have not yet received the attention they deserve in public discourse?

von Geyr: I see three main challenges: the first is the question of

tempo – the time factor. Will we be able to introduce the necessary tempo to the Alliance’s adaptation of defence and deterrence capabilities? That will require enormous effort.

The second is the challenge of convincing people of the necessity of our security policy. This will require effort on the part of everyone. This applies to Germany just as much as to the other NATO countries. The changes engendered by the *Zeitenwende* and its far-reaching implementation must be supported by the conviction of the people. To this end, they must be able to understand that the global situation and the situation in the Euro-Atlantic area unfortunately call for the necessary investments in security-related areas and thus cutbacks in others. This will take a lot of persuasion.

The third issue is the spectrum of dangers emanating from the information area related to the manipulation of truth: what if disinformation develops and is technically perfected in such a way that the truthfulness of a statement or an image cannot be ascertained with certainty? I believe that this could be the decisive question that will affect us, and our security, in the future.

The interview was conducted by Sören Soika and Fabian Wagener – translated from German.

Dr Géza Andreas von Geyr has served as Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to NATO since August 2023. His previous positions include Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Russian Federation; Political Director for Security and Defence Policy, Federal Ministry of Defence; Vice President of the Federal Intelligence Service; and Head of Division in the Foreign, Security and Development Policy Directorate-General at the Federal Chancellery.