

RE-THINKING THE FUTURE OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION – AVENUES FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY WORKSHOP SUMMARY

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Background

The workshop on February 14, 2024 brought together researchers and policy analysts from universities, research institutions and think tanks of multiple European countries to discuss current peace and security dynamics in the Baltic Sea region and to draw conclusions for future research and policy on the issue.

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Roundtable “Pathways to effective cooperation in times of war”

The first roundtable focused on the repercussions of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine for peace and security in the Baltic Sea region. It discussed possible policy implications from the perspective of Baltic and Nordic countries as well as for regional security organizations such as NATO, EU, and the OSCE. The roundtable emphasized that clarifying the meaning and purpose of ‘cooperation’ with or without Russia will be essential for maintaining peace and security in the Baltic Sea region. As Russia will continue to pose a threat to the region, risk escalation, unintended consequences, and long-term goals will affect policy choices. The workshop identified several relevant issues in this regard:

- Uncertainty and the difficulties of proper risk assessment provide a significant challenge to policy formulation;
- Identifying areas of continuing cooperation with Russia (such as at sea or in the Arctic) and clarifying the relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics is necessary for defining strategies in dealing with Russia;
- US foreign policy is an important factor in defining peace and security in the Baltic Sea region in times of war, while Germany needs to live up more to its responsibilities in the region;

- European states need to come to an agreement whether cooperation or confrontation with Russia is an effective response and whether they aim only for meaningful deterrence or deem de-escalation possible.

Roundtable “New Challenges and their Transformation of Peace and Security”

The second roundtable focused on the relevance of transnational security threats and how their interconnectedness confronts both policy and research with the need to reconceptualize peace and security in the Baltic Sea region and beyond. The roundtable emphasized that these global entanglements are becoming increasingly relevant in different areas of analysis ranging from overlapping policy fields (e.g. energy and climate) and the linkages between traditional and human security threats to the interconnections of natural and built environments with social environments. The workshop concluded that taking these global entanglements seriously has several implications:

- As traditional boundaries between policy fields and, therefore, also between academic disciplines blur, silo thinking becomes increasingly ill-suited in responding to contemporary security dynamics in the Baltic Sea region and elsewhere;
- While Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine demonstrates the resurgence of state-led military security in Europe, the global entanglements discussed during the roundtable emphasizes the linkages between private and public spheres of security;
- In light of increasing contestation of the liberal international order, the rise of alternative orders (BRICS, the ‘Global South’), and rivalry on regional and global levels, questions how to achieve and maintain sustainable peace as well as functioning peace and security orders become more important.

Topics for future collaboration

Workshop participants used the final plenary session to identify overarching themes and issues that had shaped the debates during the workshop as well as issues relevant for future collaborations.

Lessons from the Baltic Sea region

The workshop started from the premise that the Baltic Sea region is currently particularly affected by the repercussions of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. Discussions emphasized that the Baltic Sea is one of the most densely integrated regions in Europe and plays a key role in the European peace and security architecture. Future research on the region could among others address the following questions:

- In how far do socio-economic conditions in Baltic states (e.g. minority issues) shape regional and European security dynamics?
- What can we learn from studying Kaliningrad as a micro-cosmos of relations to Russia, the effects of (non-)cooperation, and the entanglements of global and regional security issues in the Baltic Sea region?
- What can we learn from comparative analyses of the security relevance of different maritime regions, such as Baltic Sea, North Sea, Barents Sea and others?
- What makes the Baltic Sea distinct as an object of analysis?

Ukraine and the future of European peace and security

How and when Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will end remains a key question for the future of peace and security in Europe and the Baltic Sea region. Uncertainty, in particular the heightened uncertainty about Russia's future actions, is a key issue of interest here, leading to questions such as:

- How can and should effective European responses to the war against Ukraine be designed in light of the political realities?
- How to deter an irrational actor?
- What is the role of the US in the future maintenance of peace and security in the region?
- What is the role of Eastern and Baltic states for developing meaningful approaches to European security and how does that change relations between Western and Eastern European states?
- How could pathways to achieving sustainable peace in a (very distant) future for a Europe that includes Ukraine look like? Especially in view of the likelihood of continuing tensions with Russia?

Peace and security in a world of global entanglements

Discussions at the workshop highlighted that we live in an era of global entanglements. The 'polycrisis' resulting from new and unpredictable risks and their cascading effects, but also from overlapping policy fields, makes it increasingly difficult to define and address security risks. Follow-up questions raised at the workshop included:

- How can we understand and assess the security situation we are in? And what responses can we draw from these assessments?
- How can we deal with the normalization of crisis?
- What are implications of blurring boundaries and entanglements of security risks for policy and research and how can we further dialogue between policy-makers and academics?

Rethinking and reconceptualizing cooperation

A key question discussed the workshop debated is how, if at all, cooperation works during and after war. As old concepts ('cooperative security' etc.) are no longer applicable, new reference

systems are needed. Workshop participants had different views on the extent to which cooperation is still a viable strategy for peace and security in Europe and the Baltic Sea region, including Russia, but agreed on the crucial relevance of the topic for better understanding current security dynamics. Future debates in this regard could focus on questions such as:

- How can we disentangle notions of cooperation, coordination, interaction, relationships etc.?
- What forms of social and material infrastructures for cooperation do we need?
- Can we identify pathways to cooperation in European (or Baltic Sea) security?
- How can we take into account unintended consequences from both cooperation and escalation in developing responses to European and Baltic Sea security threats?