

European security

Now is the time for Europe to show strength, not division, argues Sanna Marin

Finland's former leader makes the case for stumping up tens of billions more for Ukraine

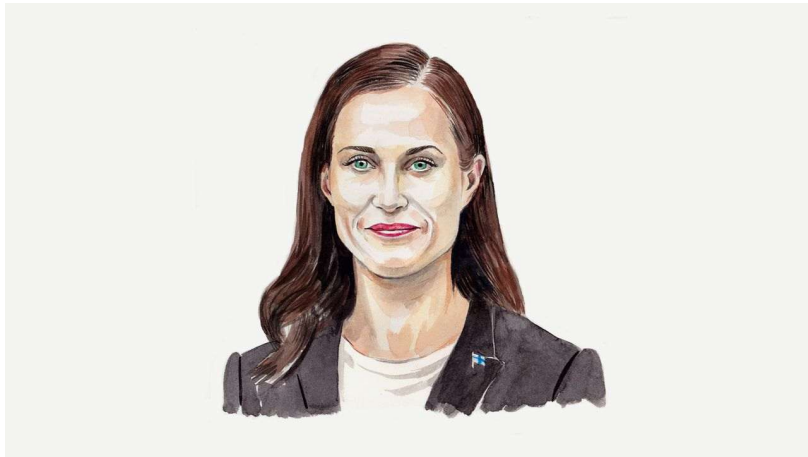


Illustration: Dan Williams

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ALL WARS end, but how they end determines the shape of the peace that follows—and whether it will last. Now, as America has taken the initiative on [ending Russia's war against Ukraine](#), European leaders must choose between showing strength as the process unfolds and facing the perils of relinquishing responsibility for their own security.

The reality of the peace talks will reflect the reality on the battlefield. Russia has little reason to negotiate in good faith if it believes it can succeed militarily. A stronger Ukraine makes Russia far more likely to give up its war of aggression. And even after a settlement is reached, both Ukraine and [the rest of Europe](#) will remain permanently vulnerable to future aggression if they do not have credible deterrence of their own. The implication is clear: if Europe is serious about playing a key role in the peace negotiations, decisively and immediately increasing military support for Ukraine is by far the most effective way to do so.

To start, Europe must rid itself of the dangerous illusion that it is weak—and stop acting like it. Europe's NATO members have a combined GDP of \$23trn, ten times that of Russia. Nevertheless, their lack of decisive action so far means that Russia and its impoverished allies still spend around 40% more on destroying Ukraine than the combined West spends on helping Ukraine defend itself.

However, this also means the cost of putting Ukraine on an equal footing with Russia is lower than one might think. In the past six months Russia has been humiliated in Syria, failed to dislodge three Ukrainian brigades from the Kursk region, and taken more than 200,000 casualties in advancing roughly the distance from central London to Heathrow airport. This means that its “consistent advances” on the battlefield during the past year have been tiny, and have come at a cost of more than 4,000 Russian casualties per kilometre.

According to new research by the Tony Blair Institute, an additional \$40bn per year in military support for Ukraine—just 0.2% of the GDP of European NATO members—would probably be enough to match Russia's resources on the battlefield. Given its extreme losses and teetering economy, this would eventually put Russia in a situation where continuing its war would lead to military and economic disaster. That is a good starting point for bringing Russia to the negotiating table on terms favourable to Ukraine and Europe.

It is easy to get caught up in the politics of funding in an era of unaffordability. But this is a mistake. The EU was able to raise \$840bn-worth of bonds for economic recovery after covid-19. Similarly huge sums

were raised to shore up the European economy in the wake of the global financial crisis. The challenge we face now is far greater, and the idea that we cannot muster the political will to meet it is a self-imposed limitation.

This is not just a matter of solidarity for Ukraine. It is in Europe's self-interest. There is no trade-off between investing in the defence of Europe as a whole and investing in the defence of Ukraine—they are one and the same. With or without NATO, Ukraine is indivisibly part of the European security architecture.

More broadly, the steps individual European countries must take to strengthen Ukraine's position against Russia are the same steps needed to ensure their own security, both individually and collectively. In the short term, military capabilities are determined by the hardware you have available now. In the long term, however, they depend on industrial and technological capacity. Ambitious investments in our defence industry to support Ukraine now will also secure all of Europe in the future.

Ukraine itself can and should play a critical role in this. After three years of hard-won experimentation and learning, it possesses some of the world's most advanced defence technology, especially in the field of drones, AI and electronic warfare. It has also shown an impressive ability to scale up traditional defence-industrial capabilities much faster than the rest of Europe. Simply buying materiel directly from the Ukrainian defence industry, for use by the Ukrainian armed forces—an approach the Danes have pioneered—is one of the fastest and cheapest ways to further scale up European defence-industrial capacity.

A dramatic increase in the continent's defence capabilities is also the best way to fend off doubts in America about NATO's usefulness. It is entirely reasonable for American taxpayers to question why they should shoulder more of the cost of European security than Europe itself. Given the clear message from Washington, it is simply unrealistic not to strengthen Europe's own defence capabilities. We can no longer rely on someone else coming to our aid, and must be able to stand on our own. This requires large joint financial investments, but it is equally important to increase citizens' understanding of the changed security environment and to strengthen our will to defend our values and the rules-based international order.

By acting decisively now, Europe can ensure that it emerges from the war, together with Ukraine, stronger and more secure than it was in 2022. Failing to do so would mean abdicating responsibility for its own security and no longer having a say in its own future. That ought to be an astonishingly simple choice for European leaders to get right. ■

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