a. SQUIRE

ENDS, WAYS, MEANS

Ceidra Moon Murphy



Former Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz, Zeitenwende speech, Bundestag, Berlin, 27 February 2022.

The UK Ministry of Defence's Support Publication *Parts Kit, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Dismounted Counter Mine Capability* (2008) contains 102 pages detailing the precise and intricate methods that must be followed to disarm landmines. Littered with warnings, the folder of instructions makes explicit the danger these weapons pose and the catastrophe they invite.

The Ottawa Convention of 1997, initially signed by 122 countries, prohibits the use of anti-personnel mines, partially due to their indiscriminate nature and longstanding impacts, which stretch well beyond the wars during which they are laid. According to the UN, it "remains one of the most widely supported disarmament treaties in history and a cornerstone of humanitarian law".[1] Responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have each withdrawn from the Treaty, announcing their respective plans to resume domestic production, acquire mines and potentially plant them along their eastern borders in defence against future Russian aggression.

While Poland and the Nordic-Baltic states have shown greater foresight regarding Russia's intentions, its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 engendered a dramatic shift in the attitudes of Western European leaders, many of whom had underestimated the danger Russia represented to European security. The extent of this miscalculation might be illustrated by the head of Germany's BND (foreign intelligence service), who was visiting Kyiv when the assault began and became stranded in the city amid gridlocked traffic. As part of this new approach, a number of European states have committed to rearmament in the name of deterrence. Three days after the invasion, then-Chancellor Olaf Scholz reversed Germany's post-war aversion to militarism, declaring a *Zeitenwende* (turning point) in which Germany would rebuild its army to protect its "freedom [and] democracy".[2]

Politicians repeatedly deploy moralising language as a camouflage to justify decisions as beyond reproach. National security is consistently described as a government's "first duty and first responsibility", while the funding of military commitments goes unexplained. In the UK, this subterfuge seems at least partially deliberate: a 2023 Parliamentary Enquiry stated that the Ministry of Defence had become "demonstrably less transparent over the past decade" and provided "unacceptably slow" responses which "impeded" the Committee's work.[3] Increased spending as governments embark on rearmament programmes does not equal increased public scrutiny.

Nor does the track record of Western militaries provide confidence that funding will be spent effectively. The limited number of defence companies, combined with the so-called 'revolving door' by which officials move between government jobs and lucrative roles in the defence industry, means companies which fail to deliver are rarely held accountable. "Flawed from the start", the UK's Ajax programme, a £5.5 billion contract, planned to

[1] Paul Heslop and Sonia Pabley, 'The Lasting Promise of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention', United Nations, 29 September 2025. Accessed: https://www.un.org/en/node/235068.
[2] Olaf Scholz, 'Policy Statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin', Federal Government of Germany, 27 February 2022. Accessed: https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/service/archive/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378.
[3] House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Ready for War?', First Report of Session 2023–24, HC 26 (4 February 2024), paras. 31, 33. Accessed: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmdfence/26/report.html.

deliver 589 armoured vehicles which would enter service in 2017.[4] When they finally did enter service in November 2025, their severe noise and vibration caused the soldiers who used them to develop tinnitus, forcing the deployment of the vehicles to be paused. Despite the spend totalling £6.3 billion for inoperable vehicles, there is no indication yet that the UK will stop entering into contracts with General Dynamics, Ajax's supplier.

The lack of a public discourse around rearmament is in part because the debate is confined to a backroom of government officials and policy experts, whose abstract language distances us from the human reality of war and obscures its horrors. This lack also coincides with the first time we encounter Western European populations who have largely never known war anywhere near their countries despite daily news outlets being flooded with its stories. In his recent article 'I Taste Ashes in the Wind', former Governor of California and the Executive Chair of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Jerry Brown, writes of the "peculiar invisibility" the threat of nuclear war suffers.[5] He attributes this phrase to German philosopher Günther Anders' 1956 diagnosis of society's "Apokalypse-Blindheit" (apocalypse blindness), which emerged soon after Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[6] This peculiar invisibility is not a characteristic unique to nuclear war: the Western public are uninformed or else desensitised to war and its effects in general.

We are numb not only to the human cost of war but the economic inefficiency of it and its domestic consequences. Hannah Arendt warned that, in political action, "the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means".[7] Military capability is intended to preserve the governance of the political community, yet the pursuit of security creates costs that outlive the immediate threat, whether through civilian casualties or the long-term financial commitments of military expansion. The question is both whether these means are justifiable, and how states ensure that they remain proportionate to and accountable to the ends they are supposed to serve.

Amid this public ambivalence, the costs of rearmament are substantial. The UK's Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that meeting the government's target of 3.5% of GDP for defence by 2035 would require an additional £40 billion annually—almost two-thirds of the schools budget and more than the budgets of the Home Office and Ministry of Justice combined.[8] Welfare is an obvious target for cuts: in Germany, reforms passed in July 2026 reduced state contributions to health insurance, following Chancellor Friedrich Merz's call for pensions to provide only "basic cover".[9] These measures expose the tension between military security and the preservation of state benefits. Cost-of-living pressures, fuel prices and deteriorating public services are already provoking unrest across Europe. Further diversion of public funds to defence will deepen that discontent and strengthen far-right parties, some of which downplay the Russian threat in favour of accommodation. Unless governments move beyond vague appeals to "the first duty of government" and confront the social costs of rearmament honestly, they risk widening public divisions rather than building the support necessary for sustained military preparedness.

And too, we must consider what these decisions do to the long-term health of our societies and the principles that underpin them. If national security means protecting the lives and freedom of citizens, it must also account for the economic conditions that allow them to live securely, and the morals according to which they conduct themselves. American activist and military analyst Daniel Ellsberg described "living in a society that is preparing a catastrophe", not preparing *for* a catastrophe.[10] The Ottawa Convention represented an attempt to place a limit on military necessity, recognising that the consequences of a specific weapon may exceed the conflict that justified it. But, as we see in European states' responses to Russia, security threats viewed as sufficiently urgent can lead commitments, previously treated as essential constraints, to begin to appear like obstacles to survival. Rearmament may be necessary, but this necessity does not absolve governments of the responsibilities for its consequences, nor the public from sleepwalking into it. Military spending must be judged not only by the capabilities it delivers, but also the costs it imposes on our societies and on the civilians who continue to bear them after the fighting ends.

---

[4] National Audit Office, The Ajax Programme, HC 1142, Session 2021–22 (11 March 2022), 4–12. Accessed: https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/the-ajax-programme/.
[5] Jerry Brown, 'I Taste Ashes in the Wind', *The New York Review of Books*, 8 October 2026: 18–21.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Hannah Arendt, 'A Special Supplement: Reflections on Violence', *The New York Review of Books*, 27 February 1969. Accessed: https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1969/02/27/a-special-supplement-reflections-on-violence/.
[8] Ben Paxton, 'The "Welfare versus Defence" Framing Oversimplifies the Difficult Trade-Offs', Institute for Government, 16 April 2026. Accessed: https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/article/comment/welfare-versus-defence-framing-oversimplifies-difficult-trade-offs.
[9] Friedrich Merz, 'Rede von Bundeskanzler Friedrich Merz beim Jahresempfang des Bundesverbands deutscher Banken e. V. am 20. April 2026 in Berlin', Federal Government of Germany, 20 April 2026. Accessed: https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/newsletter-und-abos/bulletin/bk-bundesverband-banken-2422308.
[10] Daniel Ellsberg, *Truth and Consequence: Reflections on Catastrophe, Civil Resistance, and Hope* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2026).