

# The Future of the Tank in the Age of Drones



The debate has intensified: Drones are reshaping the battlefield, traditional systems appear vulnerable and the role of the main battle tank is increasingly being called into question. In European countries, especially, the Leopard 2 is at the centre of this discussion. However, the conclusion that “tanks are obsolete” falls short. The reality is more complex: Modern battlefields are evolving into highly networked, sensor driven environments where visibility, reaction speed and information superiority are crucial. The central question is not whether tanks like the Leopard have a future, but rather: How must it evolve to survive in an ever-changing environment?



In the first year and a half of the Russian invasion alone, Ukraine has lost at least 930 main battle tanks. These heavy losses are putting immense pressure on armored platforms like the Leopard to adapt. The widespread use of drones has fundamentally changed the transparency and dynamics of the battlefield. Movements are detected nearly in real time, targets are identified more quickly, and they are effectively engaged. Affordable and scalable systems are constantly creating new and serious threats, because even the best armour has vulnerabilities.

The increased use of sensors within the vehicle – such as optical systems, infrared sensors, or radar – supports the crew in their mission but at the same time makes a tank easier to detect, thereby further increasing its vulnerability, for example by surprise attacks from the air or from long range. Especially in the “hybrid death zone” – particularly dangerous frontline sectors or strategic zones where modern, often automated weapon systems are combined with asymmetric tactics – the risk to conventional tank systems is enormous, as evidenced by the numerous destroyed vehicles in eastern Ukraine.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is the loss of relative invisibility. What used to be offset by terrain, camouflage or movement is now increasingly negated by enemy sensors and networked systems. This gives rise to several