

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE'S DEFENSE: NATO OR AN EU ARMY?

For some time, Europeans have been dreaming of developing their own security and defense policy, backed up by a European military independent from the US, which Western Europe had to rely on during the Cold War. Europe did succeed in developing the Common Defense and Security Policy (CDSP), which focused on crisis management and peace operations based on soft power (although not as effective globally as expected), simultaneously enhancing Europe's military capabilities. However, Russian military activities in Ukraine – in particular Crimea – and its use of hybrid warfare tactics, altered the security paradigm in Europe. NATO, with robust US presence and influence, emerged as the core asset in countering and challenging the Russian threat once again. As a result, the vision of a European military has been deferred indefinitely.

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Since the beginning of the post-Cold War era, the EU has been working to develop its own security and defense policy and establish its own military independent of the US. The Union agreed on a common policy that took into consideration good relations with Russia, and asked the US to reduce its military assets in Europe and withdraw tactical nuclear weapons located in five states, including Turkey. The Union felt it was ready to decouple from the US and NATO to some extent, and become a global player on its own.

However, the conflict in Ukraine demonstrated that despite the ambitions of some members and the concrete steps that were taken, the EU has not succeeded in developing effective security and defense policies with global impact. The major cause of this failure has been the inherent difficulty in reaching consensus among the 27 member states, who often pursue different agendas. Specifically, the significant variance in members' positions on foreign and security policies hinders reaching consensus in the Union.

This variance has also prevented the EU from establishing and deploying a robust and strong European military. During the EU's most recent undertaking in the Central African Republic in 2014, it failed to intervene and resolve the problem without involving non-European states and in the end, asked other nations for support – in particular the US, Turkey, and Canada. Despite the EU's eager aspirations to acquire critical capabilities as the US provides in the North Atlantic Alliance, the EU also failed to develop and launch projects independent from non-European states.

The start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 and Russia's deployment of hybrid warfare strategies altered Europe's security perception and reinforced the transatlantic bond, which had been on the decline since the end of the Cold War. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, which resulted in a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity, as well as its hostile efforts in Eastern Europe, alarmed European states. This prompted them to urge NATO to take a tougher military stance on European security. The new NATO, shaped by the Readiness Action Plan with heavy participation by the US and non-EU states, assumed responsibility again for European security. At the same time, the European states that had initially been reluctant to invest in defense increased their defense budget to counter the increasing Russian threat. Meanwhile, critics of US nuclear weapons on European territory withdrew their opposition, especially after Russia deployed Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad in October 2016.

The conflict in Ukraine revealed the limits of the EU's power, and for now rendered obsolete the dream of European security and defense policies independent of the

US, and backed by its own globally-effective military. Instead, the North Atlantic Alliance, heavily influenced by and based on the US' military assets – as well as other non-EU states including Canada and Turkey – emerged once again as the main security provider for the EU.

Evolution of the European Military

The Soviet threat to Europe and the US' nuclear umbrella have been the most important factors that shaped and maintained the transatlantic bond throughout the early years of the Cold War. NATO, with its heavy presence of US troops in Europe as part of the US' extended assurance, emerged as the main platform for European security, leaving Europe to focus primarily on economic cooperation under the European Economic Community (EEC). As a result, the Western European Union, founded in 1954 as a defense and military platform, evolved into nothing more than “a European forum for treating defense issues, and an institution, where defense policy integration eager EU members could deposit their endeavors for the introduction of a common European defense.”¹

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Europe's political disagreements with the US on NATO security and military policies – especially nuclear – resulted in suspicion of the US' commitment towards Europe's security. Some states, most prominently France under former French president Charles De Gaulle, questioned the US' assurance by claiming that the Americans would not risk their own territory and population for the sake of Europe. France, as is well known, withdrew from NATO's military structure in 1966, but De Gaulle was not the only European politician who opposed US influence in Europe. Josef Strauss and Willy Brandt of West Germany also called for a stronger Western Europe with more independence from the US in the 1960s.²

European efforts to develop a political and military policy without the US intensified after the latter began to push NATO to accept the “flexible response” strategy,³

¹ Preben Bonnen, *Towards a Common European Security and Defense Policy: The Ways and Means of Making it a Reality*, (Nurnberg: LIT Verlag, 2003), p. 51.

² Jeremi Suri, “The Normative Resilience of NATO,” in *Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges Beyond Deterrence in the 1960s*, Anna Locher, Christian Nuenlist, and Andreas Wenger (eds.), (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 24.

³ Conventional defense at the beginning of an attack, then deliberate escalation to nuclear weapons if the attack cannot be contained.

in lieu of the “massive retaliation” strategy.⁴ Both of these strategies were a result of the launch of *Sputnik* by the Soviets, which enabled them to strike the US continent. Not even NATO’s new consultation and coordination mechanisms to pacify opposition – especially with regards to the control of nuclear weapons – deterred those eager for an independent European security policy.

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In the first decade of the post-Cold War era, the US focused on the former Soviet territories and the Middle East, allowing the EU to emerge as an active player in Europe. The Western European Union emerged as the main tool for Europe’s defense and security ambitions, and the Petersberg tasks of 1992 (which defined the conditions under which the European military could be used) allowed EU troops to be deployed for humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, and tasks

of combat forces in crisis management. Rather than positioning itself as a global player, the EU preferred involvement in regional crises in and around Europe, and opted to intensify dialogue with Russia.

EU ineffectiveness in Bosnia and Kosovo, however, prompted European leaders to focus on developing a common and effective policy. As a result, the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999 and the European Council meeting in Cologne in June 1999 both played an important role in the evolution of the European Security and Defense Policy. Leaders agreed in Cologne that, “the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO.”⁵

However, none of these efforts enabled a common and sound European security and defense policy. Disagreement over European support of the second Iraq invasion urged EU leaders to prepare a document that outlines the vision for a sound EU strategy. Thus emerged the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003,

⁴ Jane E. Stromseth, *Origins of Flexible Response: NATO’s Debate over Strategy in 1960s*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 1.

⁵ “European Council Declaration on Strengthening the Common European Policy on Security and Defense,” *CVCE.eu*, 4 June 1999, http://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/cologne_european_council_declaration_on_the_common_policy_on_security_and_defence_4_june_1999-en-ee393bf3-d96f-46b8-8897-15546a0e1c0d.html

the EU's first security strategy, which set out three broad objectives for Europe: responding to global challenges and regional threats; building security policy around Europe; and establishing a multilateral world order.⁶ The 2008 review of the ESS entitled, "Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy," added cyber security, climate change, and pandemics to the list of threats to the EU. The report highlighted that the Union "must continue to strengthen its efforts on capabilities, as well as mutual collaboration and burden-sharing arrangements," but did not mention anything about a European military.⁷

The Union accepted all functions and roles allocated to the Western European Union in the Lisbon Treaty, which renamed the European Security and Defense Policy as The Common Security and Defence Policy in 2009, expanding the list of Petersberg tasks to include joint disarmament operations, military advice and assistance tasks, and post-conflict stabilization

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tasks. Changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, especially the creation of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the establishment of the European External Action Service, facilitated coordination between states but did not establish a common and sound policy. The Western European Union, which provided the background framework for the creation of The Common Security and Defence Policy, was officially declared defunct in 2011.

The establishment of an independent European military has been on the agenda especially since the Western European Union's acceptance of the Petersberg tasks in 1992. To that end, the 1999 Helsinki Military Headline Goal (MHG) proposed establishing an EU military by 2003 – to be comprised of 15 brigades or 50,000-60,000 troops – which became the cornerstone for the evolution of a European military.

The 2002 Berlin Plus Agreement, designed to preserve NATO's influence in European missions, allowed the EU to use some NATO military assets for EU-led crisis operations, but slowed the evolution of a European military. Operation Concordia in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2003 and EUFOR Althea, the military operation launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004, were

⁶ "A Secure Europe in a Better World," *European Security Strategy*, 12 December 2003, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

⁷ "Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy - Providing Security in a Changing World," *European Council*, 11 December 2008, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/104630.pdf

conducted within the wider framework of Berlin Plus. During this period, France, the most fervent opponent of US and NATO influence in Europe, worked to autonomize the EU and decouple it from Berlin Plus, but was not successful.

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Drawing from its operational experiences, the EU revised its strategy and a new target was set – MHG 2010 – which proposed establishing Battle Groups (BGs), which are high-readiness forces of 1,500 personnel that are deployable within ten days. European BGs reached operational capacity in 2007 with the establishment of 18 BGs. In 2009, the Synchronized Armed Force Europe plan was adopted, which provides cooperation between national armed forces to facilitate synchronization.

However, none of these BG forces have been deployed so far.

Since 2003, the EU has launched nine military and 23 civilian operations under The Common Security and Defence Policy, of which five and 11 missions continue to date, respectively. As the EU’s Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini pointed out, 2,600 civilian and 4,000 military personnel were deployed in these missions as of 2016.⁸ Of these military operations, two are in the Balkans and include a robust portion of non-EU troops, i.e. Turkey, and seven are in Africa with strong French involvement, who see the continent as its backyard. The reluctance of most other EU members to engage in Africa serves as a good example of the ineffectiveness of common EU policy, which are due to divergent interests.

The Ukrainian Crisis and NATO-EU Relations

Barack Obama’s “pivot to Asia” strategy – later renamed “rebalancing to Asia” – was expected to open a new page in transatlantic relations, and the Europeans, who had been reluctant to invest in defense either in NATO or in the EU, seized the opportunity for a security and defense strategy with less or no US influence. The EU had long favored soft power in international politics and expected to improve its relations with Russia, opting to overlook Russia’s threatening steps for the security of Europe as in Georgia in 2008. Repeated calls by US officials and NATO’s Secretary Generals for Europeans to increase their defense expenditure found no

⁸ “Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union: Missions and Operations Annual Report 2016,” *European Union External Service*, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/e_csdp_annual_report1.pdf

reception, despite Russia's increasing investments in modernization and defense in the illusory years of peace that characterized the EU partnership with Russia.

Intense efforts by the EU and NATO to extend membership to Ukraine – which Russia has declared as its red line and viscerally opposes to date – followed by a revolution which led to the overthrowing of Ukraine's former pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich, triggered a violent Russian reaction. Russia illegally annexed Crimea on 18 March 2014 and supported separatists to destabilize eastern Ukraine, through a wide array of military and non-military tools and tactics called hybrid warfare.⁹ The

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change in borders of a European state by force and other hostile activities in Eastern Europe served as a wake-up call for both the EU and NATO; the former to re-evaluate its reluctance to invest in defense, and the latter to re-evaluate its focus on crisis management and partnership while ignoring its core mission of common defense.

Despite significant pressure from the US and NATO's worried Eastern European members, countries enjoying good relations with Russia – notably France, Germany, and Italy – refrained from challenging Russia, trying instead to mitigate the crisis via diplomacy at the onset.¹⁰ Further Russian activities, and especially its annexation of Crimea, soon closed the rift in the Alliance, and NATO once again assumed its traditional role as a preeminent military organization in countering Russian military activities and threats. The Wales Summit served as a turning point for the solidarity and cohesion of the Alliance, as the Allies agreed upon measures to counter the Russian threat. The main outcome of the summit was an emphasis on deterrence, the assurance of Europe, and an agreement on new measures – namely, the Readiness Action Plan, whose purpose was to ensure a swift and robust NATO military force.

The Readiness Action Plan consisted of assurance and adaptation measures. Assurance measures included continuous air, land, and maritime presence and activities in Eastern Europe – specifically in the Baltic countries and Poland – on a rotational basis designed to reassure members of NATO's solidarity and

⁹ M. Seyfettin Erol and Şafak Oğuz, “Hybrid Warfare Studies and Russian Example,” *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, Vol. 9, No.17 (Winter 2015), p. 275.

¹⁰ Şafak Oğuz, “The New NATO: Prepared for Russian Hybrid Warfare?” *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Fall 2016), p. 172.

commitment against Russian aggression. In this context, the Alliance increased its air-policing activities over the Baltic States; enhanced naval patrols in the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean; commenced Airborne Warning and Control System surveillance flights over eastern Allies; deployed ground troops to the eastern members for training and exercises; and conducted hundreds of NATO and national exercises.

Adaptation measures, the second part of the Readiness Action Plan, envisaged major structural and functional changes in NATO's military system. The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force of around 5,000 troops, some of which are deployable within 48 hours, was established for rapid reaction, and the capabilities of the NATO Response Force (set up after the Prague summit in 2002) tripled to around 30,000 troops. Both measures enhanced NATO's military deterrence. Other measures such as the establishment of NATO Force Integration Units and pre-positioning military supplies in Eastern Europe, a new standing Joint Logistic Support Group Headquarters to support deployed forces, and new headquarters in Poland or Romania are intended to enhance the effectiveness of the Alliance.

During the 2016 Warsaw Summit, the decision was taken to establish increased presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland (subsequently in Romania and Bulgaria as well) to demonstrate the Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to trigger immediate Allied response to any aggression. The US and the UK especially, deployed hundreds of troops in Eastern Europe just months after the withdrawal of the last US tank, while the arrival of 2,500 tanks and military vehicles and 3,500 troops in Germany in January 2017 constituted the largest deployment to Europe since the end of the Cold War.¹¹ As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated, the Alliance responded to Russian activities "with the biggest reinforcement of collective defense since the end of the Cold War."¹² The presence of American troops in Eastern Europe symbolized NATO's new determination as it extended assurance to the inhabitants.

Despite hesitation at the beginning of the crisis, Europeans worked toward cooperation within the Alliance and helped NATO exhibit solidarity and cohesion. The EU placed all European assets (troops and weapons) at the disposal of NATO and decided to increase their defense investment, for which previously they had been so reluctant. The Eastern European states in particular welcomed US troops to their territories and expressed deep gratitude: "It's a great day today when we can welcome,

¹¹ John Vandiver, "US Army's last tanks depart from Germany," *Stars and Stripes*, 4 April 2013, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-army-s-last-tanks-depart-from-germany-1.214977#.WP0LJmnyiM8>

¹² Gabriel Samuels, "NATO puts 300,000 ground troops on 'high alert' as tensions with Russia mount," *The Independent*, 7 November 2016.

here in Zagan, American soldiers, who represent the best, the greatest army in the world,” declared the Polish Prime Minister in the welcoming ceremony.¹³

Key members and officials of the Union continued their efforts to urge members to develop a sound common policy and European military despite the crisis. The EU released its Global Strategy in 2016 immediately after the Brexit referendum in order to highlight that the Union aims to play an important role globally, even without Britain: “The EU has always prided itself on its soft power,” as one part of the document stated, “and it will keep doing so, because we are the best in this field.” The document went on to state, though, that “in this fragile world, soft power is not enough and the Union must enhance its credibility in security and defense,” and proposed concrete measures to enhance EU defense capabilities.¹⁴

In four proposals, Mogherini outlined her vision of closer European military cooperation in September 2016: put battle groups into action; invoke Article 44 of the EU founding treaties so as to allow a smaller group of countries to organize military action on behalf of the Union as a whole; create a common headquarters in Brussels to oversee all present and future military and civilian operations; and urge European governments to pool resources for the gigantic investments needed in the defense sector.¹⁵ EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker also advised the Union to focus on closer military and security cooperation, agreeing with Mogherini’s vision of an EU military with a permanent headquarters.¹⁶

On quite the other hand, the Eastern European states, who had strongly urged deployment of NATO and especially US forces because they themselves felt to be under imminent Russian threat, strongly criticized these proposals as in their estimation Europe should focus on bolstering the Transatlantic Alliance to meet the Russian threat instead. Polish Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna, for example, described it as “a very risky idea,” while Latvia’s Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma stated “it is important to check whether this might be duplicating NATO.”¹⁷ Thus, as usual, EU members are divided once again on security and defense issues after the Ukrainian crisis. There is no strong consensus among members that the EU will have deterrent capacity against a Russian threat, especially after Britain’s exit.

¹³ Laura Smith-Spark and Atika Shubert, “Poland welcomes thousands of US troops in NATO show of force,” *CNN International*, 14 January 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/14/europe/poland-us-troops-nato-welcome/>

¹⁴ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy,” *European Union*, https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web.pdf, p. 4.

¹⁵ Chris Johnston, “EU reveals plans for military cooperation following BREXIT vote,” *The Guardian*, 8 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/08/european-union-plans-military-battlegroups-after-brexite-vote>

¹⁶ “Juncker calls for an EU Army,” *Deutsche Welle*, 10 November 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/juncker-calls-for-an-eu-army/a-36337676>

¹⁷ “Poland, Latvia skeptical of proposed EU army,” *Deutsche Welle*, 10 March 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/poland-latvia-skeptical-of-proposed-eu-army/a-18306493>

Conclusion

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis and a resurgent Russian threat changed the security paradigm in Europe and overturned the illusion that the continent will remain strategically stable, as was perceived after the Balkan crisis. After enjoying relative peace and strong economic relations with European states, Russia has shown signs that it intends to continue to destabilize Eastern European members of NATO, mostly through infringements and information warfare (hybrid warfare strategies below the threshold of regular warfare in the Baltics, as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are the three most vulnerable states. Russia justifies its stance by claiming that the Baltics' membership in NATO betrayed the agreement between Russia and the US.

The EU is at a crossroads in deciding which deterrence platform to adopt against the threat of Russian hybrid warfare: a European military under The Common Security and Defence Policy, or NATO, which already fulfills the security task of deterring and dissuading Russia against incursions in Europe. The European military option seems problematic in the short-term, as the Ukrainian crisis revealed the limits and ineffectiveness of the CSDP in providing security for its own continent due to the EU's inability to provide a common, sound, and solid policy against Russia. Recent calls from Mogherini and Juncker for a common policy and a European military did not garner support, but rather opposition from Eastern Europeans who feel under imminent Russian threat and rely on the presence of NATO in their territories – especially on US troops. The possibility of a nuclear confrontation between Russia and NATO only bolstered Eastern Europe's adherence to the Alliance and the US, despite the efforts of major players in the EU to reduce presence of NATO and US influence especially to a minimum.

The EU further lost credibility with the arrival of thousands of US tanks, military vehicles, and troops in Germany and Eastern Europe in February 2017, which was the largest deployment since the end of the Cold War. Britain's impending exit from the EU is also expected to result in considerable diminution of the Union's defense and security capabilities, since Britain numbers among the strongest military powers in the Union. For these reasons, the EU should turn the Ukrainian crisis into an opportunity and should cooperate with NATO rather than competing against it. In particular, the EU should take responsibility for civilian missions in operations, a sphere in which they are regarded as highly successful and competent.