

Future of Europe

For a True European Defence Union¹

JOLYON HOWORTH

The European Union is experiencing a new dynamic behind its quest for a credible security and defence capacity. New projects and mechanisms suggest a shift in European ambition. This paper assesses the reality of this new dynamic, arguing that the EU needs a clearly articulated grand strategy – outlining the objectives in the Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods, and tailoring those objectives to realistic means. Those means will range from high end assets to purely civilian assets. Defence spending will require structured Europeanisation. Involvement of third countries will require creative legal developments. EU-NATO relations must undergo fundamental revision. If ‘strategic autonomy’, the objective of the *European Global Strategy*, is to become a reality, it will involve the EU progressively assuming leadership within NATO, thereby meeting the calls across the United States for the allies to assume greater responsibility for their own affairs.



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

Introduction

The demand for a consolidated and effective European defence capacity—which, for the purposes of this report, we will name the ‘European Defence Union’ (EDU)—has again risen to the top of the EU agenda. There is a strong new dynamic behind the twenty-five-year quest for a European security and defence policy worthy of the name. The key stimulus to this development has been the radically shifting geostrategic context: the new Russian assertiveness in the Eastern neighbourhood (the annexation of Crimea, destabilisation in Ukraine and pressure in the Baltic Sea); chaos in the Middle East and North Africa; the war against ISIS; the mass movement of migrants across the Mediterranean; Brexit and uncertainty about the future role of the UK in European defence; and the election of Donald Trump as US president, accompanied by disturbing statements from the White House about the US commitment to NATO. These factors, taken together, constitute a sea change across the European chessboard.

The aim of this paper is to assess the reality and seriousness of purpose of this new defence dynamic and to offer concrete policy proposals for the operationalisation of what has long been referred to as the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the Union’s framework for action in the area of security and defence. The paper is divided into four main sections. The first briefly analyses the impasse of the CSDP, the relatively unsuccessful attempts between the mid-1990s and early 2010s to create a credible EU defence capacity capable of dealing ‘autonomously’ with crises such as Bosnia (1992–5), Kosovo (1998–9) or the Libyan civil war (2011). The second will assess the new dynamics underpinning renewed efforts in defence integration as well as the recent operational breakthroughs in this field. The third and main section will reflect on how to operationalise the EDU so as to enable the EU to achieve ‘strategic autonomy’ over time. The fourth and final section will assess the much-discussed process of ‘EU–NATO cooperation’.

¹ The title alludes to F. O. Reho’s *For a New Europeanism* (June 2017), which is available at <https://www.martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/future-europe-new-europeanism.pdf>. This paper was the first publication in the new Martens Centre Future of Europe series and sets out the general framework within which the subsequent papers, starting with the current one, should be read.

The impasse of EU defence policy

There have been two key moments in the story of Europe's attempts since 1945 to forge an integrated, potentially autonomous, security and defence capacity: the project to create a European Defence Community (EDC) in 1950–4 and the launch of the CSDP in the late 1990s. The former was a bold attempt to create an autonomous European armed force that would respond to two imperatives: the ability to counter a conventional attack from a Soviet-led invasion of Western Europe and the need to demonstrate military seriousness of purpose to a US administration that was still keen to extricate itself from a role in the defence of Europe that it found overly constraining. The project failed for four main reasons: French fears of a resurgent Germany in the absence of a firm American framework; the technocratic nature of the EDC, conceived by Jean Monnet largely as a political project—from whose incubation military officers were excluded; the emerging reality of NATO as the alternative defence entity for the old continent; and the refusal of the UK to be a part of it. Furthermore, the idea of a 'European army' so soon after the end of the Second World War was, quite simply, premature. In 2017 the geostrategic context is very different.

By the turn of the 2000 decade, the second attempt (the CSDP), of which today's new dynamic is a continuation and an intensification, had seemed to have reached an impasse. There are four reasons for this, all of which are different from those that had hobbled the EDC in the 1950s. The first concerns the significant differences in strategic culture between the EU member states, divided as they had become during the Cold War into 'extroverts' and 'introverts', US allies and neutrals, those focused on expeditionary missions and those prioritising territorial defence. All of these differences translated into very different perceptions of the threats involved, levels of military ambition and defence spending, willingness to participate in overseas operations and definitions of strategic objectives. The second problem derived from the tensions between the increasing presence and centrality of the EU defence-related institutions (the European Council, Council Secretariat, Political and Security Committee, European Union Military Staff, European Union Military Council and European Defence Agency) and the member states, most of which remained wedded to a firm belief in national sovereignty. This revealed a lack of trust in neighbours and a reluctance to pool and share military capacity. The third problem was that of leadership: while all EU states had grown used to the reality of US leadership, few were comfortable with the hypothetical alternatives: either a politically problematic 'shared' leadership (whether Franco-British, Franco-German, a 'Weimar' format or some other configuration) or a politically impossible central, unitary EU leadership. Finally, there was the very existence of NATO. As long as the US—despite complaints about burden-sharing—indicated that it would assume responsibility in any major crisis for collective European defence, there was little motivation for Europeans to step up to the plate. In this context the highly ambivalent role of the UK, whose self-exclusion in the 1950s had condemned the EDC to its fate, remained a problem. Britain played a major role in the initial launch of the CSDP, but soon veered away, during the Iraq

crisis of 2003, to prioritise the UK–US relationship. Britain essentially saw the CSDP as a means to strengthen the Atlantic alliance, rather than as a European project per se.

The CSDP was initially the centre of a flurry of activity. This included the launch, between 2003 and 2008, of no fewer than 26 ‘crisis management missions’ in 15 countries on 3 continents. However, by 2010, it had run out of steam. The Libya crisis in 2011— precisely the scenario for which the CSDP had been devised in the first place—had to be handled by NATO (despite US reluctance to be involved), as did the military deterrence of Russia after the Ukraine crisis of 2014. The 2012 takeover of Northern Mali (an area the size of France) by jihadist groups linked to Al-Qaeda was handled, unilaterally, by France. The CSDP remained a project in limbo.

The new defence dynamic

In what ways are matters different in 2017? The first and biggest difference is in the geostrategic situation. For the first time in many years, the very existence of the EU seems threatened from without: Russian destabilisation of Central and Eastern Europe, relentless migratory pressure from Africa and the Middle East, and Trump’s ambivalence about NATO. The impetus behind a coordinated approach to security is both more massive and more real than it was in the 1950s and considerably more urgent than at the end of the 1990s.

The second major difference in the EDU dynamic is the emergence of a strong European framework. National leaders have finally begun to be honest with their populations and to state relatively unambiguously that ‘national sovereignty’ in this policy area is largely mythical. According to leaders such as Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and Jean-Claude Juncker, European citizens are actively seeking ‘protection’ at the European level. These new developments still have a long way to go, but the more Europe’s leaders continue to frame their objectives within an EU-wide context, the more real progress will be possible.

Third, and in parallel with this second development, the EU itself is vitally concerned to demonstrate and forge a sense of unity. Between 2016 and 2017, all of the major EU institutions—including, significantly, the European Commission, which the member states had hitherto held at arm’s length from the CSDP—have come forward with strong statements of support for the EDU and concrete proposals for its advancement (see below).

A fourth new feature is the relative convergence of previously diverging security cultures. Under the impulsion of Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, Germany has made significant steps towards

assuming an active expeditionary military role. While Germany and France still have quite different approaches when it comes to accepting the need for military force and being willing to deploy it, the gap has closed markedly over the past few years. These new developments have enabled important recent initiatives for stepping up the EU's capabilities in defence. Let us briefly assess their significance.

Recent operational 'breakthroughs'

The four apparent 'breakthroughs' in the current dynamic behind the EDU are the decision to go ahead with a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (the new abbreviation for what used to be called the 'Operational Headquarters'); the launch of the European Defence Fund; new financial arrangements for battle groups; and the agreement, reached at the European Council in June 2017, to operationalise Permanent Structured Cooperation, the process that was enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty but had never been acted upon. How significant are these developments?

1. *Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)*. The European Council's decision to set PESCO in motion is seen by many as the major breakthrough for the EDU.² PESCO promises that 'those member states whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another' (Lisbon Treaty 42(6)) should be allowed to join forces to implement the operational requirements of the CSDP. By mid-September 2017, over 20 EU member states had indicated their intention to participate in PESCO.³ If those member states which want to be part of this procedure can agree within three months on the criteria, the commitments and also the objectives, the EU will genuinely have passed an important milestone. However, PESCO is by no means a panacea. It is above all a process designed to facilitate a CSDP worthy of the name.⁴ How does PESCO interdigitate with NATO troops operating in the East? And what would they be for? This question will need an effective answer.

2. *Operational Headquarters (OHQ)*. It was the UK (silently supported by one or two other member states) that always brandished its veto against the notion of the EU developing a genuine OHQ. After the Brexit referendum, many in Europe believed that plans for an OHQ could be revived. But the UK still sat as a full member on all EU agencies, and London's defence minister continued to hold out against the project. That is why the new facility was downgraded to a

² F. Mauro, *Défense européenne: L'enjeu de la coopération structure permanente*, Les Rapports du GRIP 2017/1 (Brussels, 2017); S. Biscop, *Oratio Pro PESCO*, Egmont Paper 91 (Brussels, 2017).

³ F. France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Finland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Belgium, Netherlands, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Sweden, Greece and Malta.

⁴ The most complete study of PESCO to date is F. Mauro, *La Coopération Structurée Permanente: Perspectives nationales et état d'avancement*, European Parliament (Brussels, June 2017).

Military Planning and Conduct Capability, with a brief limited to ‘non-executive’ CSDP missions (essentially military training operations). This is highly unsatisfactory and effectively leaves the situation substantially unchanged. It is only when the EU fields its own fully-fledged OHQ that it can begin to fulfil the objective of strategic autonomy. Therefore, there is an immediate need for intense discussions with NATO to avoid any unnecessary duplication when the EU reaches its end state of genuine strategic autonomy (see below).

3. Battle groups (BGs). One problem with the battle group concept was the funding basis, which called on the member states involved in a BG operation to assume the entire costs of the operation. This largely explains why no BG has ever been deployed, although lack of political will was also a major factor.⁵ In June 2017 the Council decided ‘that the deployment of Battle Groups should be borne as a common cost by the EU-managed Athena mechanism on a permanent basis.’ This removes one administrative hurdle but does not change anything fundamental. The BG format and PESCO might appear to conflict with each other in certain ways. If PESCO truly kicks into gear, there may be no need for BG formations derived from across the 27 EU member states.

4. European Defence Fund. In June 2017 the *European Defence Fund*⁶ was also launched to much media acclaim. The involvement of the European Commission in offering funding both for research into innovative defence products and technologies, and for the development and acquisition of key defence capabilities was widely perceived as another EDU breakthrough. Yet the sums involved (€25 million for research and technology in 2017, compared with the €8.8 billion the EU28 spent on this activity in 2014; and €500 million for development and acquisition, compared with a 2014 spend of €38 billion), while not insignificant, are nevertheless modest—especially in the context of the overall annual EU defence expenditure of around €220 billion. Projections into the EU’s next defence cycle after 2020 amount to wishful thinking since no decisions have yet been taken on the future community budget. Moreover, Brexit could mean as much as a €12 billion annual ‘hole’ in the EU budget, and most of the Commission’s seed money is conditional on the member states raising from their own resources matching funds that amount to 80% of what the Commission provides. Those who perceive this new development as revolutionising European defence funding might be advised to reserve judgment.⁷

⁵ W. Jacoby and C. Jones, ‘The EU Battle Groups in Sweden and the Czech Republic: What National Defence Reforms Tell Us about European Rapid Reaction Capabilities’, *European Security* 17/2–3, 315–38.

⁶ European Parliament and Council regulation (EC) establishing the European Defence Industrial Development Programme aiming at supporting the competitiveness and innovative capacity of the EU defence industry (7 June 2017).

⁷ T. Valasek, ‘Cajoling Europe into Cooperating on Defence’, Carnegie Europe, 8 June 2017, accessed at <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategi-ceurope/?fa=71196> on 30 November 2017.

A brief conclusion on the many current initiatives and dynamics behind the EDU: they are helpful and creative, but they will not, in and of themselves, change anything fundamental. For that to happen, new breakthroughs in the EDU are needed, as detailed in the following section. Besides, two major hurdles persist. The role of the UK remains problematic (though not necessarily fatal to the enterprise) and, at the time of writing, difficult to predict with any accuracy. Similarly, the role of the US remains a double-edged sword. As in the 1950s and the 1990s, Washington's declared preference is for a robust European military capacity to relieve the US of much of the security burden it has assumed in Europe and its periphery. But at the same time, there are few Americans who are entirely comfortable with the idea of transferring leadership to the Europeans, and even fewer who believe in the ability of the Europeans to assume it. The Europeans oscillate between the fear of abandonment and the self-defeating consequences of bandwagoning. Both sides display elements of schizophrenia.

Operationalising the EDU

To effectively operationalise the EDU, we must start by clearly defining its goal. In June 2016 the EU's much anticipated *Global Strategy* document (EUGS)⁸ set the level of ambition for the revitalised CSDP as being nothing less than 'strategic autonomy' (the concept—never actually defined—appears no fewer than eight times in the document). However, there is little attempt to outline what the achievement of strategic autonomy might entail in practice or how this ambition might be realised. The concept of strategic autonomy immediately gave rise to political controversy, fuelling a Eurosceptic narrative that had been hawked by UK 'Brexiters' to the effect that the hidden agenda behind the new defence dynamic was the creation of a 'European army'. The High Representative, Federica Mogherini, somewhat disingenuously, went to extraordinary lengths to assure the world's media that she had 'never heard anybody even mention a European army'.⁹

While the specific phrase 'European army' appears to generate far more heat than light, there seems little doubt that, if the current dynamic in favour of the EDU is to lead anywhere at all, the end state will have to be some form of highly coordinated, multi-national, joint and tightly integrated defence capacity enabling the EU to engage in high intensity military (and civil–military) operations with

⁸ EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe* (Brussels, June 2016).

⁹ N. Gros-Verheyde, 'Le non sujet de l'armée européenne', *Bruxelles 2*, 27 September 2016.

minimal assistance from the US. If there is strong political will, such an outcome is both attainable and desirable. It is in the best interests of both Europe and the US, and it should be overtly stated, up-front, as the explicit goal of the new EDU. If strategic autonomy is little more than a political slogan, it can conveniently be ignored. If it is a genuine strategic objective, then it requires sustained, energetic and extremely elaborate forward planning over the long term.

If autonomy is the end goal, the first challenge in the operationalisation of the EDU is the challenge of devising a *grand strategy*, defined as ‘the calculated relationship between means and large ends’. Europe needs to agree on both elements of the equation. It possesses considerable means but has hitherto failed to maximise or synergise their potential. It tends not to think in terms of ‘large ends’. The EUGS has devised new concepts in lieu of tangible strategic objectives. ‘Resilience’ is the keyword of the document (it appears no fewer than thirty times). The fostering of ‘resilience’ in the EU’s neighbouring states has become a major focus for reflexion. State resilience has been defined as ‘not so much a matter of financial or economic solvency, but rather about the capabilities, procedures, mechanisms, measures and provisions in place which allow the state’s institutions to act in an agile manner when necessary.’¹⁰ It implies the ability to recover from adversity and suggests that, as states become wealthier, they can hold out hope for stability in the future. It is intended to have implications for both the Eastern and the Southern neighbourhoods. Similarly, the term ‘selective engagement’ has been used to indicate an approach to Moscow that involves talking to our gigantic neighbour ‘if and when our interests overlap’, but resisting it when they do not. Much more flesh needs to be put on the bones of these broad objectives before the EU can claim to have a viable grand strategy.

What follows will sketch what a strategic EU reflection on both large ends and means might look like. To move forward in that direction, however, some institutional rearrangements are necessary.

Institutional rearrangements

The current remit of the High Representative is too all-encompassing and should be disaggregated. The security and defence aspects should be separated from the diplomatic, commercial and other activities, which should remain under the aegis of the *European External Action Service*. A *European Security Council*, modelled roughly on the US *National Security Council*, should be established within the Council Secretariat (rather than within the Commission). This body would combine the strategic planning functions of the High Representative’s office with the intelligence-gathering functions of the

¹⁰ F. Gaub and N. Popescu, ‘Introduction’, in F. Gaub and N. Popescu (eds.), *After the EU Global Strategy: Building Resilience* (Paris: EU-ISS, 2017), 7.

Intelligence Analysis Centre (currently assigned to the European External Action Service) and should operate in close coordination with the *Intelligence Division* of the European Union Military Staff and with the *Political and Security Committee*. It should be headed by a *European Security Advisor* who would focus on the strictly security and defence aspects of the EDU, which are currently handled by various members of the High Representative's team. The European Security Advisor should chair the Political and Security Committee. He or she would work closely with the recently proposed *Minister for European Defence*, who, in turn, should be closely involved with the work of the European Union Military Council and the European Union Military Staff. The *Minister for European Defence* would become the EU's interlocutor with the Secretary General of NATO. Regular meetings of a fully fledged Council of *Defence Ministers* would exercise political oversight.

Thinking about large ends

As stated above, the endorsement of strategic autonomy in the EUGS document implies that the end goal of the current process will have to be a multi-national and integrated defence capacity enabling the EU to engage in high-intensity military and civil–military operations with minimal assistance from the US. There is no reason why the EU should be militarily dependent on the US in perpetuity. The final goal of the EDU should be to generate the type of coordinated and integrated military capacity that currently exists within NATO—but under EU institutional mechanisms and with centralised EU military leadership. The remainder of this paper offers suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

The key question to be asked regarding large ends is the following: Given that Eurasia and Africa are the two largest landmasses on earth and that security challenges do not stop at their periphery, what can the EU realistically expect to achieve in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods? One complicating factor derives from the huge difference between these neighbourhoods: NATO and the US have de facto elected to give absolute priority to the East, thereby leaving the EU to take primary responsibility for the South. Such a geographical division of labour should be resisted. Strategic autonomy means that the EU itself should be the primary player in both neighbourhoods.

The Southern neighbourhood

In the past the EU relied on a type of Faustian pact with North African dictators under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean. In exchange for modest amounts of cash and the willingness to turn a blind eye to their human rights record, these dictators would

hunt down Islamic fundamentalists and stem the tide of African migration across the Mediterranean. This approach was more akin to wishful thinking than to strategy and blew apart during the Arab Spring. The recent focus on Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development is a positive development.¹¹ The EU should focus massively on supporting local, regional and continent-wide developments aimed at deconfliction, reconciliation and stabilisation in societies emerging from civil war. Most of these efforts will be civilian. The High Representative has spoken of rethinking the EU's transformative agenda. That is a crucial strategic objective. Europe cannot fix Africa's problems. Only Africa can do that. Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development must be conducted in close cooperation with the African Union. This will range from the current 'Africanisation' of the French military *Opération Barkhane*, which is combating Islamic fundamentalism in the Sahel, to the many micro-initiatives for fostering the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of the entire continent, with the fundamental objective of reducing poverty and unemployment, especially youth unemployment, and ensuring adequate food supplies. A good example of the type of initiative required is the Alliance for the Sahel, which was launched on 13 July 2017 and focuses on demographic policy and women's rights.

This is the only approach to large ends that will meet the strategic objective of stabilising the continent. The challenge does not stop at the Sahel. Most migrants come from sub-Saharan Africa. The strategy therefore needs to involve not just the African Union and other regional regimes in Africa (Economic Community of West Africa States etc.). Stemming—and eventually reversing—the flood tide of migration requires the participation of other stakeholders: the UN, the World Bank, China, India, Brazil and the US. Development aid has come a long way over the past 50 years. The major development economists continue to fight furiously with one another over the most effective ways of disbursing money, but the impact of these programmes is greater than it has ever been. The EUGS is full of constructive ideas for the pursuit of security via development. These should be developed into a grand strategic project.

This raises the issue of the role of purely military instruments in the Southern neighbourhood in general and in Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development in particular. In pursuing its strategic objectives for the South, does the EU need an aircraft carrier, a new generation of fighter aircraft or main battle tanks? The various scenarios for European defence laid out in the

¹¹ High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development: Enabling Partners to Prevent and Manage Crises*, Joint Communication, JOIN (2015) 17 final (28 April 2015), accessed at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015JC0017&from=EN> on 30 November 2017.

Commission's recent *Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence* arguably place too much emphasis on classical power projection.¹² This may be required in the East, but what are most urgently required in the South are highly trained *trainers* of African security forces. The EU is providing such trainers in Mali, CAR and Somalia. A residual EU light-armoured force will also be required to block the activities of human traffickers across the main transit routes of the Sahara. In this endeavour, the use of 'remotely piloted aerial systems' (drones) will prove crucial. As for traditional soldiers, numbers are available. It is significant that one of the signs of the sea change in German security culture that we noted earlier is the presence of one thousand German troops assigned to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali. The ideal EU large end in the Southern neighbourhood would be the gradual replacement of UN missions with fully integrated and motivated EU missions. An important point to note when discussing EU military capacity is that it can be deployed within various frameworks: UN, EU, NATO, bilateral or ad hoc. However, with respect to the Southern neighbourhood, the role of conventional military land forces should be relatively limited.

The most important military deployment to the South must be the naval presence in the Mediterranean aimed both at preventing and arresting the activities of human traffickers, and at assisting NGO shipping in rescuing and saving endangered migrants. Since this is an activity that benefits all European states, it must eventually become a coordinated naval capacity assigned permanently to the EU, functioning in close coordination with a beefed-up European Border and Coast Guard and centrally funded. Maritime cooperation between the EU and NATO is one of the key aspects of the emerging relationship. Yet it makes no sense to have an EU member state naval capacity assigned to a NATO force (Operation Sea Guardian) and a separate one under an EU flag (Operation Sophia). Naval activities in the Mediterranean and in other international waters require one coordinated EU naval force, cooperating intelligently with the US and other countries.

The Eastern neighbourhood

The challenge to the East is well known. Any strategy for the East has to start (not finish) with Russia. The EU has a Russia challenge, not just a Putin challenge. For 300 years Russia has been an essential player in the European system—one which can be neither integrated nor ignored. The EU's

¹² European Commission, *Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence* (7 June 2017), accessed at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-defence_en.pdf on 30 November 2017.

Russia policy should begin with a lucid assessment of the cards the Union holds. The EU has been playing identity politics in Ukraine, while Putin has been playing Thucydides.¹³ Europe possesses many resources—technological, financial, commercial, scientific, demographic and political—that vastly outweigh those of Russia. These should be deployed far more strategically, which means more collectively. As long as relations with Russia are dealt with through multiple bilateralisms, Moscow will continue to play divide and confuse. The large end for the East is arguably the most difficult external challenge for Brussels. It will be to design the optimum mix between a range of instruments: from hard deterrence power (including nuclear), through trade and diplomacy, to various forms of soft power (including travel privileges for Russian officials and tourists).

The EU played its cards very badly over Ukraine and needs to learn important lessons from that crisis. To date it does not seem to have done so. The EUGS currently states that the EU will ‘uphold the right [of the Eastern neighbours] to determine freely their approach towards the EU’.¹⁴ This is to put the cart before the horse and to hold EU strategy for the region hostage to decisions taken by non-EU citizens. The Union needs far greater clarity on two things. First, is Ukrainian membership (and by extension, that of the other states of the Eastern Partnership) in the EU’s interest? If not, it should be explicitly ruled out and a mutually acceptable arrangement negotiated between Brussels, Moscow and the capitals of the respective states. If Ukrainian accession (as just one example) is deemed to be in the EU’s interests, the second question becomes, at what price? How far is Brussels prepared to go to confront Moscow over the issues on which they disagree, and what should the instruments of that confrontation be? Overall, any workable strategy for the region cannot ignore that Russia has strategic interests in the area. There is little point in simply claiming, as then US Secretary of State John Kerry did after the annexation of Crimea, that the era of ‘spheres of influence’ is over.¹⁵ It is not, as Russia’s aggressive policies in its and the EU’s neighbourhood show. That is one important reason why we need to strengthen common defence and deterrence, as well as democracy and the rule of law in the EU’s Eastern neighbourhood. The EU’s huge neighbour is not going to go away, nor is it likely to convert overnight to transparency and democracy. Ultimately, the strategic objective should be for the EU to develop a pragmatic coexistence with Russia which, while firmly defending the interests of the Union and its allies, does not rule out collaboration for the solution of common problems.

¹³ See the special issue of the *Journal of Common Market Studies* (55/1, 2017) devoted to the EU and the Ukraine crisis.

¹⁴ EEAS, Shared Vision, *Common Action*, 33

¹⁵ T. G. Carpenter, ‘The US Needs to Recognize Russia’s Monroe Doctrine’, Cato Institute (website), 5 December 2014.

Thinking about Means

A European nuclear deterrent?

Meanwhile, the EU will need to demonstrate, initially primarily via NATO, that it is fully committed to deterring Russia, both by conventional means and by a bold new nuclear strategy. On the nuclear front the logic that prevailed during the Cold War still holds. Europeans are dependent on the credibility of a situation in which a US president attempts to deter Moscow from attacking European cities by threatening to unleash nuclear weapons on Russia, in the clear knowledge that this would condemn millions of US citizens to retaliatory incineration. France's President de Gaulle refused to believe in such an arrangement and decided that 'extended deterrence' could never be rendered credible. Only a *national* authority, de Gaulle believed, could evaluate an existential threat to a given nation and credibly threaten to cross the nuclear fire-break as a deterrent. Hence the French independent nuclear deterrent. European nations (especially Russian front-line states such as the Baltics and Poland) remain as dependent as ever on the credibility of the US nuclear component of Article 5. Trump's somersaults over NATO's security guarantees merely highlight what has always been a question mark over the ultimate US commitment to the existential security of Europe. For the EU as a whole to replace the US as a more credible agency for nuclear deterrence would require three major changes:

1. The first would be a French (and potentially British?) agreement to extend the national nuclear deterrent to the entire EU—or European—space. France has long dangled that scenario under the concept of 'concerted deterrence'.¹⁶ But most EU member states are most uncomfortable with that prospect. Some of them are seriously committed to eliminating nuclear weapons altogether.
2. It would require a complex legal agreement under which vulnerable EU states could host French and British nuclear weapons on their soil for potential participation in such an EU deterrent posture. This could also imply third-state involvement in the financing of French and British nuclear weapons. It has recently been decided in Germany that such an arrangement could clear the legal hurdles involved.¹⁷ Such a development would represent a tectonic shift in European security thinking and would crucially require a third seismic shift.

¹⁶ D. S. Yost, 'France's New Nuclear Doctrine', *International Affairs*, 82/4 (2006) 701–21.

¹⁷ M. Fisher, 'European Nuclear Weapons Program Would Be Legal, German Review Finds', *New York Times*, 6 July 2017.

3. Centrality of political decision-making in an existential crisis is an agency that currently does not exist and that remains difficult to imagine. Nuclear deterrence is only credible if it is *politically credible* to a potential adversary. At present that is far from being the case. Any EU grand strategy worthy of the name would have to come to terms with this reality. In the US, concerns that the president technically holds the power to order a nuclear strike without consultation have recently led to suggestions that the ultimate decision on crossing the nuclear firebreak should be made by a high-level group that includes leading government and military officials. Such an agency is not unthinkable within the political–institutional framework of the EU.

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to elaborate on the specifics of conventional deterrence. Several existing policy papers cover this challenge in constructive ways.¹⁸ One danger that requires careful management is that of NATO’s seemingly sole concentration on a conventional deterrence posture in the Eastern neighbourhood.¹⁹ Before the summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016), the Alliance’s large end was the ‘transformation’ of its military assets into a nimble expeditionary force (the NATO Response Force) for deployment anywhere in the world. Since these summits, however, this objective has effectively been abandoned in favour of one in which the entire focus is on creating a conventional tripwire in the East, with permanent deployments at brigade level (the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force) in support of four rotating battalion-level units (the Enhanced Forward Presence) in Poland and the three Baltic states.²⁰ This development carries a number of significant consequences. First, the expeditionary capacity of the NATO Response Force appears to have been sacrificed to the type of static territorial defence capacity that existed during the Cold War. Second, the long-term concentration of European forces in the Eastern theatre (up to 50,000 soldiers, allowing for rotation) and the associated costs of this operation are likely to leave precious little military capacity available for CSDP missions elsewhere, thereby hobbling from the outset the effectiveness of any purely European force. This situation calls strongly for far greater synergy between NATO planning and EU planning.

Europeanising defence spending

A further positive post-EUGS development has been the agreement to expand common funding opportunities for research and technology connected both to projects linked to the defence industry

¹⁸ L. Kulesa and T. Frear, *NATO’s Evolving Modern Deterrence Posture: Challenges and Risks*, European Leadership Network (London, 22 May 2017).

¹⁹ F. Pesme, ‘Après Varsovie, l’OTAN, la PSDC et les enjeux de la défense européenne’, *Revue de Défense Nationale*, no. 794 (November 2016), 103–8.

²⁰ IISS, *NATO’s Continuing Adaptation*, Strategic Comments 23/22 (July 2017).

and to missions such as those of the battle groups. This has been done to circumvent the previous impasse around ‘costs lie where they fall’. Recognition that member states should be willing to open their defence budgets to EU scrutiny and reporting—the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence mechanism—represents a potentially important step forward towards more rational procurement and defence spending.²¹ But to achieve its strategic objectives, the EU will have to take much more radical steps to rationalise defence spending across the 27 member states.

Defence spending should progressively be conducted within an explicitly European framework. The objective here should be to set a date by which the €220 billion that the EU member states currently spend on defence should be drastically rationalised in the interests of cost effectiveness and military impact. EU member states currently fund 27 armies, 23 air forces and 21 navies. Most *national* defence budgets/capacities would not allow for the slightest effective resistance against a significant and determined external adversary. Rationalisation should be introduced in several phases. Where effective clusters of like-minded regional states are engaged in pooling and sharing, those states should be urged to progressively adopt collective defence budgets, with explicit *procurement specialisation* as the driver of savings. This can be assisted by the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence mechanism. The *Athena* mechanism,²² which funds common costs of CSDP missions, was agreed in 2004 but has proven grossly inadequate, covering only 10% of the additional costs borne by member states engaging in missions. It should be radically re-thought and progressively linked, via the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, to the emerging collective defence budgets of the regional clusters of states. Large member states should be encouraged to earmark a growing portion of their defence budgets for an eventual common European defence budget. There is almost certainly no need for significantly greater overall EU spending on defence. The current €220 billion is ample to fund any conceivable strategic large ends. Together, the UK, France and Germany spend three times as much on defence (€117 billion) as does Russia (€39 billion). The goal is to spend that money far more *wisely*.

Third-country involvement in the EDU

While the institutional framework for the EDU must be the EU, in practice the project should also closely involve non-EU countries such as Norway, the UK and Turkey. There is political will on both sides for the UK to be as closely involved as possible with the EU in this policy area. The September

²¹ S. Biscop, ‘What’s in the CARDS for PESCO?’, Egmont Security Policy Brief no.91 (Brussels, October 2017).

²² European Council, ‘Athena: Financing Security and Defence Military Operations’ (Brussels, 21 April 2014).

2017 official UK paper on the security and defence aspects of Brexit seeks to build ‘a new, deep and special partnership with the European Union’ and states that the UK is ‘unconditionally committed’ to European security.²³ Both sides recognise this to be in their best political and geostrategic interests. There therefore needs to be imagination and flexibility on the legal side. When the CSDP was launched in 1999, the EU should have been more flexible in associating Turkey and Norway with the project. This was ruled out of court by the lawyers. This time the politicians should urge the lawyers to find a new politico-institutional framework to maximise the involvement of the UK in decision-shaping in the CSDP, if need be through some form of UK membership of the Political and Security Committee. The same flexible arrangements can then be applied, with appropriate modifications, to countries such as Turkey and Norway. Much will depend on the atmosphere and tone of the general Brexit negotiations. If this is positive, then much is possible on the defence front (including UK involvement with PESCO). If the talks become embittered, then defence issues will be much more difficult to resolve.²⁴ A key issue is bound to be the relationship between the CSDP and NATO.

NATO–EU cooperation

Of all the current developments behind the EDU, the EU–NATO relationship is by far the most important. Most commentary on cooperation between the two entities implicitly assumes that they will continue indefinitely developing separate and distinct capacities and roles, functions on which they will ‘cooperate’. This is a serious mistake and probably a dead end. If the CSDP is ever to approach strategic autonomy, it will have to progressively *take over* an increasing number of functions currently assumed by NATO. The challenge for the EDU is not to find roles and tasks that are distinct from those carried out by NATO but to rise to the challenge of *equivalence with* NATO, in part by progressively *merging* its activities with those of NATO. Several projects discussed earlier (the Mediterranean naval task force, the OHQ and force planning) should be shared, joint capacities. Here again, the EDU must start with large ends and work backwards. The final objective—say, for 2029 (the eightieth anniversary of the Alliance)—should be for the EU, through close association with NATO, to achieve strategic autonomy by becoming entirely self-reliant in terms of both collective security and collective

²³ HM Government, *Foreign Policy, Defence and Development: A Future Partnership Paper* (12 September 2017), 2, accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-policy-defence-and-development-a-future-partnership-paper> on 30 November 2017.

²⁴ I have dealt with this issue at much greater length in ‘EU Defence Cooperation after Brexit: What Role for the UK in the Future EU Defence Arrangements?’, *European View* 16/2.

defence. The alliance with the US could then be recast on the basis of a new treaty recognising the military and strategic equivalence of the two players. There is no reason why the EU should assume in perpetuity a subordinate, dependent status vis-à-vis its transatlantic ally. It has a much bigger population; a higher GDP; equivalent scientific, technological and engineering skills; and global political resources. The US is also in a different geostrategic situation from that of 1950. An intermediary step would be to create within NATO the much-discussed 'European pillar' of the Alliance. But this should be a pillar that both Americans and Europeans perceive and foster as one leading to ever greater autonomy for Europe, not as a tame European support system for US grand strategy. In the short and medium term, the US would continue to assist the EU to emerge as a competent and confident military player, increasingly capable of assuming and exercising leadership of operations in the European neighbourhood.

This raises the question of the relationship between the short-term specifics and the long-term purpose of EU–NATO cooperation. At the NATO summit held in Warsaw on 8 July 2016, a joint declaration²⁵ was published that calls for 'new impetus and new substance' to be given to what it terms the 'NATO–EU strategic partnership'. In December 2016 the EU and NATO released their 'Statement on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration', listing 42 areas in which the 2 entities were actively cooperating.²⁶ Specific cooperative projects included countering cyberthreats, security sector reform, capacity building, strengthening resilience among neighbourhood states, global governance, maritime security, parallel and synchronised exercises, and responding to hybrid warfare. Reports on progress in these areas have been published every six months thereafter. Some of this new impetus was more rhetorical than substantive and much of the work involved issues on which cooperation might arguably be taken for granted rather than needing to be publicly proclaimed.

But the real questions are the following: What is to be the relationship between these two entities over the coming decades? Why does Europe need two seemingly comparable defence entities if strategic autonomy offers the EU the ability to cope with its regional security issues on its own? If the EU actually achieves strategic autonomy, what purpose will NATO have? Conversely, if the EU does not achieve strategic autonomy, what purpose will the CSDP have?

²⁵ 'Joint Declaration of the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization' (8 July 2016), accessed at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm on 30 November 2017.

²⁶ NATO, 'Statement on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration Signed by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization' (6 December 2016), accessed at http://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/official_texts_138829.htm on 30 November 2017.

When Trump called NATO obsolete, his view was by no means marginal in the US. During the 2016 electoral campaign, Senator Bernie Sanders had expressed very similar ideas. During the 2011 Libyan crisis, President Barack Obama had rocked the NATO culture by initiating US ‘leadership from behind’. Major International Relations scholars such as Barry Posen,²⁷ Andrew Bacevich,²⁸ Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer²⁹ have recently called for the US to withdraw progressively from NATO and to hand it over, lock stock and barrel, to the Europeans.

How likely is such a scenario and what are the alternatives? The answer depends on the CSDP’s level of ambition. Mogherini aims at the highest level possible.³⁰ Some experts argue that such a level is indispensable if the EU is to achieve its strategic objectives.³¹ Others remain sceptical of the EU’s ability to attain such a level.³² Some analysts continue to believe that the EU is too divided politically, too incoherent in terms of strategic culture and too uncertain in terms of ambition ever to succeed in achieving strategic autonomy. Some also insist that a clear distinction should be made between collective defence (the absolute preserve of NATO) and regional crisis management (an appropriate task for the CSDP). Such approaches suggest not only that the EU will never reach strategic autonomy, but also that it should not make the attempt. This paper takes a different approach. It takes as a given that the challenge of European security is a constantly evolving historical process in which the different players (Americans, Europeans, Africans and Russians) also undergo historical change. The paper therefore argues that, within this constantly shifting historical framework, the EU not only *should* make a serious effort to achieve strategic autonomy, but also, given clear guidance and a calculated sense of strategic purpose, *is capable of* becoming self-reliant. The current author accepts the possibility that history may eventually find against the EU in this respect, but he also believes that, without a serious effort to achieve autonomy, the Union will forever remain an object rather than a subject of history. Given this diversity of opinion, three possible scenarios present themselves.

²⁷ B. R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2014).

²⁸ A. Bacevich, ‘Ending Endless War: A Pragmatic Military Strategy’, *Foreign Affairs*, September–October 2016.

²⁹ J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, ‘The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior US Grand Strategy’, *Foreign Affairs*, July–August 2016.

³⁰ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence*, 14392/16 (14 November 2016), accessed at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_implementation_plan_st14392.en16_0.pdf on 30 November 2017.

³¹ S. Biscop, *All or Nothing? European and British Strategic Autonomy after the Brexit*, Egmont Paper no. 87 (Brussels, September 2016); L. Simon, ‘EU Strategy and European Defence: What Level of Ambition?’, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Policy Brief (Clingendael, November 2016).

³² D. Keohane and C. Mölling, *Conservative, Comprehensive, Ambitious or Realistic? Assessing EU Defense Strategy Approaches*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Policy Brief no.41 (Washington DC, 2016).

1. *Gradual unravelling of European integration.*³³ This scenario has been rendered even less improbable with the vote on Brexit. In this case, the EU member states would return to the 1950s and become totally dependent on NATO. Such a prospect might please some in the UK but would be the worst of all possible worlds for other Europeans and for the US.

2. *Significant progress as a result of the new EDU.* Some of the instruments being prioritised (the OHQ, the activation of battle groups and the implementation of PESCO) could produce a far more effective CSDP, one capable of making a difference particularly in the Southern neighbourhood. This would not really amount to strategic autonomy in that it would still leave the EU existentially dependent on NATO and the US, while at the same time expending a great deal of money duplicating capabilities provided to NATO largely by the US. It might satisfy those who believe the EU should do more, but who are unconvinced that it should do much more.

3. *Gradual achievement of strategic autonomy.* This assumes that the EU is serious about becoming a strategically autonomous player. If it wishes to genuinely stabilise its neighbourhood, it has no alternative but to develop its capacity to the very fullest extent. This means ending its dependency on the US. That, at any rate, should be the explicit goal. The EU should take up the challenge from the US and progressively assume leadership in meeting its own regional challenges. The US, via NATO, can continue to backstop EU security policy with critical enablers such as intelligence, logistics, heavy lift, command and control—but only as a temporary measure while Europe acquires the experience and the confidence needed to meet future challenges on its own. Such a development would be massively in the best interests of both the EU and the US. The best way of reaching that stage is gradually to merge the CSDP into NATO, for Europeans to progressively take over command of the major agencies in NATO, and to allow the US to focus on the areas of the world that are of the most strategic importance to Washington. At that point, the EU, featuring a Europeanised NATO, might sign a bilateral, co-equal and different type of alliance with the US.

³³ S. Lehne and T. Valasek, *The EU is Not out of the Danger Zone*, Carnegie Europe (Brussels, 13 July 2017).

Conclusion

The geostrategic context in which the EU currently finds itself calls urgently for a rethink of many of the basics of a common security and defence policy. The EUGS was correct to throw down the challenge of strategic autonomy. There is a clear dynamic across the member states to take up this challenge. New operational mechanisms are being actively promoted. New methods of financing operations are being put in place. New approaches to the management of the Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods are emerging. Creative discussions with the UK are within reach. And, above all, a new relationship between the EU and NATO is being actively sought out on both sides of the Atlantic. The EU cannot and should not accept a permanent role as subcontractor to US grand strategy. Europeans are too nervous about offending Uncle Sam. If they truly believe they and the Americans share interests and values, then the evolving transatlantic relationship will rise above short-term problems of adaptation. If they fear abandonment because of a clash of transatlantic values or interests, then to accept a state of permanent dependency makes no sense. The US and the EU share the same underlying objectives. Over the next 10 to 15 years, EU–NATO cooperation should lead to the *Europeanisation of NATO*.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said at the time of NATO's creation: 'If NATO is still needed in ten years, it will have failed in its mission'. Perhaps in 2029, for its eightieth anniversary, NATO can finally declare 'mission accomplished' when Europeans become totally self-reliant in security matters. That, after all, was the original intention of the founding fathers.

About the author

Jolyon Howorth is Jean Monnet Professor of European Politics *ad personam* and Emeritus Professor of European Studies at the University of Bath. He has been a Visiting Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at Yale since 2002. He has held visiting professorships in a number of universities on both sides of the Atlantic and has published extensively in the field of European politics and history, especially in the areas of security and defence policy and transatlantic relations.

Future of Europe

For a True European Defence Union

JOLYON HOWORTH



Credits

The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies is the political foundation and think tank of the European People's Party (EPP), dedicated to the promotion of Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values.

Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies Rue du Commerce
20 Brussels, BE 1000

For more information please visit:

www.martenscentre.eu

Editor: Federico Ottavio Reho, Research Officer, Martens Centre
External editing: Communicative English bvba

This publication receives funding from the European Parliament.
© 2017 Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

The European Parliament and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies assume no responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication or their subsequent use. Sole responsibility lies with the author of this publication.



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies