

MUTUAL REINFORCEMENT

CSDP and NATO in the Face of Rising Challenges

Corentin BRUSTLEIN (ed.)

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Focus stratégique

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Abstract

Over the past five years, several political and security developments have made it increasingly necessary to look at European Union (EU)/North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) relations through a different lens. The renewed emphasis on European strategic autonomy, a concept that lends itself to multiple and sometimes diverging interpretations, has been a cause for rising concern among NATO member states. While some of those concerns appear legitimate, there are many ways to increase Europe's strategic autonomy without undermining the Alliance. As the EU and NATO have taken new steps to strengthen their cooperation over the past years, it appears more important than ever to reject false dichotomies when prioritizing efforts to strengthen European security, to look at opportunities to better coordinate EU and NATO capability development processes, and to identify which types of military capabilities European countries should invest in to make burden-sharing with the Alliance more effective.

Résumé

Plusieurs développements d'ordres politique et sécuritaire survenus au cours des cinq dernières années ont rendu nécessaire de porter un regard neuf à la problématique des relations Union européenne (UE)/Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique nord (OTAN). L'accent mis de manière croissante sur l'autonomie stratégique européenne, concept se prêtant à des interprétations multiples et parfois contradictoires, a suscité nombre de craintes parmi les États membres de l'OTAN. Si certaines de ces préoccupations apparaissent légitimes, il existe de nombreuses manières de renforcer l'autonomie stratégique européenne sans affaiblir l'Alliance. Tandis que l'UE et l'OTAN se sont engagées en faveur d'une plus grande coopération au cours des dernières années, il apparaît plus nécessaire que jamais de rejeter la fausse opposition entre un renforcement de la Politique de sécurité et de défense commune (PSDC) et celui de l'OTAN, d'exploiter les opportunités existantes pour mieux coordonner les processus de développement capacitaire au sein des deux organisations, et d'identifier dans quels types de capacités militaires les pays européens devraient investir afin d'améliorer le partage du fardeau au sein de l'Alliance.

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Introduction

Corentin Brustlein

Since the end of the Cold War, the Euro-Atlantic debate on security and defense has been both deeply renewed and has repeatedly stumbled over the same rocks. The relation between the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been one such obstacle, as both organizations struggled to adapt to a changing security environment and to redefine their roles and responsibilities accordingly. Controversies about the division of labor between the EU and NATO have sometimes had more to do with theology than with facts or strategic analysis. Even though those controversies have been cropping up for decades and cannot be expected to fully go away anytime soon, they have recently entered a critical phase.

Over the past five years, several developments have made it increasingly necessary to look at EU/NATO relations through a different lens. These include Russia's strategic resurgence in Europe's neighborhood; terrorist campaigns waged against and throughout European countries; the UK vote to leave the European Union; the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America; an unprecedented level of concern about the solidity of the transatlantic link within the Atlantic Alliance; and new EU initiatives such as the activation of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF), encouraged by both EU member states and a European Commission more active on defense matters, to deepen cooperation among member states. This context has given birth to a growing transatlantic debate on European strategic autonomy and its potential promises and risks.¹

The ambiguity surrounding the definition of European strategic autonomy probably explains how such a potentially divisive concept found

1. See, among others, C. Brustlein, "European Strategic Autonomy: Balancing Ambition and Responsibility", *Editoriaux de l'Ifri*, November 2018; M. Drent, "European Strategic Autonomy: Going It Alone?", *Clingendael Policy Brief*, August 2018; F. Mauro, *Strategic Autonomy under the Spotlight*, Brussels: GRIP, 2018; S. Raine, *Europe's Strategic Future: From Crisis to Coherence?*, London/Abingdon: International Institute for Strategic Studies/Routledge, 2019.

its way to the text of the 2016 EU Global Strategy.² Still, the very ambiguity about the actual objectives and level of ambition of those advocating for greater European strategic autonomy also exposed the latter to a number of misunderstandings and critics. Unsurprisingly, the emphasis on *autonomy* and unhelpful public statements on the need for a “European Army” have been a cause for rising concern among NATO allies, invoking the risk of duplication with NATO structures and of undermining the Alliance. There are many reasons, however, to challenge those views, as this paper, and others,³ illustrate. While EU-NATO cooperation remains both an “imperative” and a “conundrum”,⁴ in practice both institutions have committed since 2016 to “step up their efforts”,⁵ and have started to achieve concrete, albeit limited, results since then.⁶

This paper aims to support efforts to revitalize the partnership between the EU and NATO, which is now more important than ever, by looking at three different areas. In the first section, Sven Biscop explains why opposing the EU and NATO when considering efforts to strengthen European security creates a false dichotomy between two organizations of fundamentally different nature. In the second section, Dick Zandee argues that the recent introduction of new instruments offers new possibilities to better synchronize EU and NATO capability development processes. Finally, in the third section, Corentin Brustlein and Luis Simón argue that investing in military capabilities relevant for the conduct of operations at the higher end of the spectrum of conflict would be uniquely helpful to both advance the ambition of European strategic autonomy and to strengthen transatlantic burden-sharing.

2. Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union Foreign and Security Policy, Brussels, June 2016.

3. A recent example is J. Howorth, *Strategic Autonomy: Why It's not about Europe Going It Alone*, Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2019.

4. T. Tardy and G. Lindstrom, “The Scope of EU-NATO Cooperation”, in G. Lindstrom and T. Tardy (eds.), *The EU and NATO: The Essential Partners*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2019, pp. 5-12.

5. “Joint EU-NATO Declaration”, Warsaw, 8 July 2016; “Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation”, Brussels, 10 July 2018.

6. For an assessment of these areas of cooperation, see the chapters of G. Lindstrom and T. Tardy (eds.), *The EU and NATO*, *op. cit.*

The EU or NATO: That is Not the Question

Sven Biscop

The European security architecture does not resemble a Le Corbusier or Oscar Niemeyer design. It is not a neatly planned whole in which every component elegantly and effectively fulfils a specific function. It rather resembles a sprawling palace complex, with every successive occupant adding, restyling or abandoning another wing. It functions, but one would never build it like that if one were to start from scratch. The debate about how to organize, and to fund, the European security architecture has flared up again since the European Union (EU) in its 2016 *Global Strategy* set itself the objective of achieving strategic autonomy in security and defense.⁷

Strategic autonomy and the nature of the beasts

The strategic community in the US nearly universally condemns the EU ambition of strategic autonomy as undermining NATO. At the same time, the US keeps pressing its European allies to spend more on defense. The pledge they made at NATO's Wales Summit in 2014, to "aim to move toward the 2% guideline" by 2024, has been reinterpreted in Washington as an obligation to spend 2% of GDP. At the July 2018 Brussels Summit, US President Donald Trump even spoke of a 4% spending target, though that was quietly ignored by everybody else.⁸ In March 2019, however, he impetuously returned to the charge with the idea that allies hosting American troops should pay the US the full cost of that deployment plus 50%.⁹ The US cannot realistically expect the Europeans to pay more without having more of a say; that would be the opposite of how politics works. The EU, however, has yet to define what it means by strategic

7. On strategic autonomy, see: J. Howorth, "Autonomy and Strategy: What Should Europe Want?", *Security Policy Brief*, No. 110, Egmont Institute, April 2019.

8. R. Emmot, J. Mason and A. de Carbonnel, "Trump Claims NATO Victory after Ultimatum to Go it Alone", *Reuters*, July 12, 2018, available at: www.reuters.com.

9. N. Wadhams and J. Jacobs, "President Trump Reportedly Wants Allies to Pay Full Cost of Hosting U.S. Troops Abroad Plus 50%", *Time*, March 8, 2019, available at: time.com.

autonomy: how much of a say does it want? As Trump is unlikely to abandon his *idée fixe*, while the EU is very divided about how autonomous it really wants (and dares) to be, the debate about strategic autonomy may last for a while yet.

There is an underlying issue, however, which complicates things further: both in the US and in Europe the majority of those involved have yet to understand, and come to accept, that since the creation of the EU, the relationship between the different components of the European security architecture has fundamentally changed.

The EU, in spite of all its limitations as a strategic actor, has become indispensable in three crucial dimensions. Its member states set overall strategy on foreign relations through the EU; European integration guarantees their political and economic power base; and the member states envisage generating military power through the EU as well. The supranational EU, in which member states have pooled sovereignty, has become an *actor*. The EU can achieve strategic autonomy, therefore, even though foreign policy and defense constitute an exception; in these areas the EU still operates on an intergovernmental basis. A completely intergovernmental NATO, on the other hand, always was and will remain an *instrument* – and as such obviously never had or will have any autonomy. Whether EU strategic autonomy undermines NATO is, therefore, a meaningless question – as meaningless as the question whether US strategic autonomy undermines NATO. EU strategic autonomy could, of course, weaken US predominance in NATO: that is the heart of the debate on the American side.

On the European side, the choice is not between the EU and NATO, but between the national level and the EU level. The EU member states are sovereign countries (i.e. they take their own decisions), but their strategic autonomy (i.e. their capacity to act on those decisions, and to safeguard their interests, *by themselves*) is severely constrained for some and non-existent for most. The individual European states have already lost strategic autonomy; through the EU, they could still regain it. The real question is double therefore. (1) In the three dimensions mentioned above – strategy, political and economic power, and military power – will the EU member states pool their sovereignty and act collectively to a sufficient degree to achieve real strategic autonomy? And (2), if they do, will this lead to a reconfiguration of the transatlantic alliance between the EU and the US?

Strategy

The reality sketched above is often misrepresented in the debate. NATO was of course created a long time before the EU. As a consequence, many actors and observers, including in Europe, somehow still perceive a hierarchy in which NATO comes first and the EU second – as if the EU can only make decisions within a prior strategic framework set by NATO. In reality, things work the other way around: NATO provides a military instrument that is put to use within the framework of a grand strategy and a foreign policy that are defined elsewhere: in Washington, as far as the US is concerned, and in Brussels, as far as the EU member states are concerned – if things work as they should, that is. On issues of strategic importance, most European states can only really aspire to have an impact if they adopt a collective policy through the EU. What could even the largest European states do *alone* about the war in Ukraine, the war in Syria, or the rise of China? Where EU and US strategy coincide, they can opt to have recourse to NATO to implement its military component.

Measures taken through NATO since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 clearly illustrate the actual strategic “line of command”. The European reaction depended on the relationship that Europe wanted to offer to Ukraine, on the price that it was willing to pay for that, and on how Europe saw the long-term future of its relations with Russia itself. Of course, the Europeans took into account Washington’s position when taking these decisions – but they could only be taken collectively, through the EU. Once the EU position had been established, the European states were able to agree with the US on the measures to be taken, including through NATO. Within this broadly defined framework, the Europeans continue to contribute military forces to Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics and Poland, under the NATO flag, while applying sanctions against Russia through the EU. Diplomatic initiatives at the highest level to end the conflict have mostly been undertaken by Germany and France. But their leverage also derives to a large extent from the EU: only the EU can apply or end sanctions; no individual European state will risk the ire of Russia on its own.

This is not to say that, on the European side, the EU always adopts the right strategy or even arrives at strategic choices at all. The point is that when the EU does not set strategy, NATO cannot fill that void. NATO has neither the competence nor the authority to step in and decide on issues of foreign policy, trade and investment, or energy. And, of course, if the Europeans are divided when they meet in the EU, they will be no less divided when they meet in NATO.

Absent an EU strategy, on many issues the majority of member states will have at most a token policy, for lack of leverage, or they may simply follow US policy. If the lack of EU strategy is mostly the result of inertia, the US may indeed be capable of convincing many or most Europeans to follow its lead and act jointly, either through NATO or through a broad coalition of the willing. An ad hoc coalition might be the preferred option even if there is a common EU position, as in the case of the US-led coalition against Islamic State (IS), created at NATO's Wales Summit in 2014 but not run as a NATO operation.

If, however, the EU member states are actively divided on an issue, the US will find that it will also be very difficult to mobilize NATO, or to have more than a handful of European states sign up for an ad hoc coalition. The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 is the example that best illustrates this scenario. Splitting the EU, the US had to forgo the active support of all but a few European allies. The 2011 air campaign in Libya is another example: formally presented as a NATO operation, in reality it was a British/French/US-led coalition that made use of the NATO command structure, with few European allies participating, and the EU initially abstaining, in the face of German disagreement with the intervention. In such cases, the EU's political and economic instruments and resources cannot be made available, or at least not from the start; hence the implementation of a comprehensive approach will be very difficult.

One of the key questions for the future of NATO is precisely whether the EU and the US will maintain sufficient consensus on a grand strategy. NATO was created in order to deter Soviet aggression. For the European allies, deterring Russia remains the Alliance's *raison d'être*. In the eyes of the US, however, China has replaced Russia as the only peer competitor. The Europeans are increasingly aware of the need to safeguard their sovereignty in the face of China's growing influence, but do not perceive China as a strategic threat in the same way as the US. If Sino-American rivalry results in a new bipolar confrontation, it remains to be seen whether the Europeans would follow the US in that logic.¹⁰ What, in that case, would remain of NATO?

Political and economic power

European integration is the foundation of the political and economic power of the EU member states. Although inequalities remain in their societies, and are growing again, the single market has allowed Europeans to achieve

10. On the future of European grand strategy, see: S. Biscop, *European Strategy in the 21st Century – New Future for Old Power*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019.

unprecedented levels of prosperity. For most EU member states, quitting the single market would amount to economic suicide. Thanks to European integration, Europeans have achieved the same scale and can hold their own against the continent-sized great powers, in economic and, to a lesser extent, in political terms: the US, China, and Russia. The EU could certainly improve its geo-economic performance – i.e. putting its economic clout to use to pursue its strategic objectives – but if it holds any sway in world politics, it is because of European unity. The same goes, increasingly, for innovation and technology: here, too, scale has become ever more important. In the areas in which Europe has fallen behind, such as artificial intelligence, only a concerted effort could redraw the balance.

After World War Two, the US strongly encouraged European integration, which could indeed not have been achieved without the American security guarantee, which was cemented through NATO. This has now come to work both ways, however: because the EU has become indispensable to the political and economic stability of Europe, NATO can no longer do without the EU either. Put differently, if the EU were to flounder, that would be the end of NATO as well. If the states of Europe would once again become rivals, Europe would no longer be a source of allies for the US, but a source of risks. The US might replace a defunct NATO with a set of bilateral alliances – but not necessarily with all current allies. If another power sought to exploit the floundering of the EU and NATO to gain control of significant parts of the European continent, the US might intervene – or not, depending on its assessment of how essential which parts of Europe are in the framework of its strategic competition with China.

That is why those European political parties and, alas, several governments that are actively undermining the cohesion of the EU are playing with fire, as are those Americans who support them. Those governments especially that espouse the fiction of “illiberal democracy” and are setting their countries on the road towards authoritarianism, forget that today the purpose of NATO is not just to defend the territory of its members, but also the democratic model that they have created in their countries. That was not the case when NATO was founded, when for strategic reasons more than one dictatorship was invited to join. But today, any democratic government would be hard put to convince its public to put its armed forces in harm’s way in order to defend a dictatorship in another European country. It is first and foremost the EU’s responsibility to uphold democracy in all of its members, yet it is surprising, and worrying, how little NATO, and the US, have to say about the democratic backsliding in several allies.

Several European governments indeed feel that they can safely antagonize their fellow EU member states because the US will always have their back. But they might just be isolating themselves. For if the EU goes, NATO goes, and who can predict where the US will draw the red line in such a scenario? Which European states will it judge essential to its interests and which not, in the face of potential actions by other powers? Even if one can convince the US to build a “Fort Trump” on one’s territory, one cannot be sure whether, when push comes to shove, the cavalry manning the fort will consider those living around it as allies that merit protection or as Indian tribes that are expendable.

If the states of Europe gain leverage on the international scene through the EU, leaving the Union is equal to giving up that leverage and indeed becoming vulnerable to outside pressure from other powers. Brexit did not even have to become a reality for the UK to already experience this: when in September 2018 a Royal Navy ship sailed through what China considers its waters in the South China Sea, Beijing explicitly warned London that such actions might jeopardize the future bilateral economic relationship post-Brexit.¹¹ China could never blackmail Britain to such an extent if it remained in the EU, for it cannot afford to put economic relations with all of the Union at risk. This means that, contrary to Britain’s assertions, Brexit does weaken NATO, for even though London may decide not to give in to them, it does provide other powers with more leverage to influence British decision-making through non-military means.

In a similar vein, the absence of EU political unity weakens the Alliance as well, even if (as is indeed most likely) the worst-case scenario of further member states leaving the Union, or its total disintegration, does not come to pass. Unfortunately, several European governments willingly allow themselves to be instrumentalized by other powers, and at their behest tone down or block EU decision-making altogether. Since nearly all decisions on foreign and defense policy require unanimity, it is sufficient for another power to convince one or two capitals to betray the EU. While so far this has not significantly affected the EU stance on Russia and Ukraine, in spite of continued Russian attempts to divide the Union, China has often been successful in recruiting member states as its agents and weakening or avoiding EU policies that it considers detrimental to its interests. Once again, since there is little scope for concerted transatlantic action in the absence of a broader EU strategic consensus, this weakens NATO as well.

11. C. Shepherd and A. Jourdan, “China Warns UK Ties at Risk after Warship Mission”, *Reuters*, September 7, 2018, available at: [uk.reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/article/us/china-navy/uk-navy-warship-mission-china-warns-uk-ties-at-risk-idUSKCN170001).

Military power

In the field of defense, finally, European integration has become indispensable as well. This was not always the case: during the Cold War, when the European states maintained large conscript forces, each had the scale to create a full-spectrum force or at least a very broad range of capabilities. Today, however, smaller-scale forces, smaller defense budgets, and inordinately more expensive arms and equipment mean that not a single European state can maintain a full-spectrum force of any significant size. Fragmentation and protectionism have resulted in a patchwork of national forces of mostly low readiness. Taken all together, these national forces do not constitute a comprehensive full-spectrum force package. There are major shortfalls in terms of strategic enablers, reserve forces, and stocks of munitions and equipment. Consequently, Europe is dependent on the US for any significant deployment.

Only by pooling its defense efforts could a group of European states field a comprehensive full-spectrum force package, including the strategic enablers that allow it to be projected at the borders of Europe and beyond. The Europeans have agreed, in the framework of NATO, to spend more on defense. But if each state continues to do so separately, the state of Europe's armed forces and their dependence on the US will basically remain unaltered, even if they all spend 2% of GDP on defense.

The EU is not the only framework in which the required pooling of efforts could be organized, but it definitely is the most promising one. Twenty-five EU member states have joined Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which has institutionalized defense cooperation in the Union, while the Commission has set up the European Defence Fund (EDF), which for the first time ever provides funds for defense in the EU budget. If it is put to maximum use, PESCO can be the single platform where the Europeans organize themselves to collectively develop all the capabilities that they require, in order to meet their EU as well as their NATO targets. Rather than undermining NATO, PESCO could help NATO ensure that the additional means that the Allies are making available are put to the best possible use. There is no guarantee that PESCO will work, but that is all the more reason why NATO and the US should encourage rather than question it.

Naturally, if and when the Europeans spend more, they will spend more on European arms and equipment. For NATO, that is not an issue, but it is an issue for the US. It was always unrealistic of Washington, however, to expect that all of the additional means would be used to place orders in the US. If PESCO works, Europe will buy more European – but

not only. Defense industrial autonomy is but a logical component of the overall economic and technological autonomy that the EU, just like the other powers, aspires to.

If, thanks to PESCO and the EDF, the EU becomes indispensable in military capability development, the official aim also is to put those capabilities to use and to conduct certain operations in an autonomous manner. The focus clearly is on expeditionary operations, in line with the long-standing but still unachieved EU objective of being able to deploy and sustain up to an army corps, and equivalent naval and air forces, abroad (the so-called Helsinki Headline Goal from 1999). Autonomous operations do not necessarily mean EU operations, though. In practice – though it does not always appear so from the EU rhetoric – these can be operations under any flag (EU, NATO, UN, national, ad hoc coalition), but under the political control and strategic direction of European governments, with a European general or admiral in command, and relying only on European forces and assets.

Seen from NATO, the bone of contention is command and control: will this necessitate the creation of a standing EU operational headquarters, alongside the NATO command and control structure? Autonomous European operations do require European command arrangements. The only other option would be to give the EU, or an ad hoc coalition of European states, direct access to a specific NATO headquarters that would conduct an individual operation (rather than having to pass through the North Atlantic Council and then SHAPE, such a circuitous delegation that it amounts to an abdication of control). Seen from the US, autonomous European operations should be welcome, for if the Europeans are capable of taking care by themselves of any contingency in their neighborhood that falls below the threshold of Article 5 (NATO's collective defense guarantee), that would allow Washington to focus its attention on Asia.

Precisely because Asia and, more specifically, China, is now the focus of American strategic attention, the Europeans might also have to consider whether, even in the area of collective territorial defense, they should aspire to more autonomy. Again, this could be organized within as well as outside NATO structures. The question is whether the Europeans alone should be able to deter and, if necessary, defend themselves against any military threat in case their American allies are absorbed by a crisis in Asia. Put differently, for how long do the Europeans think they need to be able to hold out against an attack until American reinforcements arrive? Whether imagined as an autonomous European pillar within NATO or through the EU, this proposition is anathema to the US (and to several European governments). It is the US pivot to Asia that has invited such thinking,

however, and Washington may indeed also wish to see more European independence in defense as exactly enabling that pivot. However, given the resources and the willpower required, this could only become reality in the long term, if ever.¹²

Conclusion

Joining the EU is like moving into an apartment building. Inside your own apartment, you can do as you please, within certain rules and as long as you don't overly disturb the neighbors. About the building as a whole, you still decide, but only as part of a collective decision by all the owners; you cannot decide by yourself. And you had better participate in the meetings, tedious though they may be, for decisions are taken by majority and are binding even if you don't attend. NATO, in this analogy, is the neighborhood watch. Some of the owners in your building have joined it, others have not, and it also has members from other buildings, including the huge mansion across the street – the US. The neighborhood watch is important, especially when security problems arise, but it does not shape your daily life; your building and your relations with the other owners in it does. The EU building is unfinished, even though you are already living there, whereas the US mansion is towering higher and higher – so high that some begin to doubt whether its foundations can carry it.

The most strategic decision that the European states have taken since the end of World War Two was to launch European integration. This could not have taken off without NATO: it prospered thanks to the stability that the American security guarantee, embodied in the Alliance, provided. Today, the EU itself has become indispensable to the stability of Europe, and now NATO can no longer do without the EU either. There is no going back to pre-EU days, at least not as a matter of choice, because for the first time in history, Europe has united voluntarily, rather than through force of arms (as Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Wilhelm II and Hitler all attempted – and failed). Therefore the unravelling of the EU could only result from a catastrophic crisis; it would signal the return of intra-European rivalry, and possibly even war.

There really are only two options, therefore – options that concern the relationship between the EU and the US rather than between the EU and NATO, because, once again, the former (in spite of all the imperfections of

12. For an elaborate discussion of strategic autonomy in the military sphere, see: S. Biscop, "Fighting for Europe: European Strategic Autonomy and the Use of Force", *Egmont Paper*, No. 103, Egmont Institute, January 2019.

the EU in foreign policy and defense) are actors, whereas NATO is an instrument.

The first option, and a not unlikely option, for the future is to carry on muddling through, both in the EU as such and in the way it organizes its alliance with the US. This may, at times, suit the US, for an EU that can muster but a weak strategic consensus, and that does not adopt strong courses of action, may be easier to mobilize for US-led initiatives and will at least not cause interference with American policies. But herein lies the eternal dilemma for the US: relatively weaker European allies will be easier to recruit for American designs, but will they be able to contribute much to their implementation? If they are too weak, they might actually hinder implementation and handicap the Alliance, and even become a source of security problems rather than of allies.

The other option, therefore, is to deepen EU integration and reconfigure the alliance with the US accordingly. The obvious steps to take would be to introduce decision-making by majority in EU strategy and foreign policy, and to use PESCO and the EDF to maximally streamline the European defense effort. The aim would be to shift the center of gravity from the national capitals to Brussels in both diplomacy and defense. If the EU were to manage this – though it is a very tall order – then it would make sense to reconfigure NATO as a bilateral alliance, between the US and the EU as such, rather than between the US and a host of individual European states that a long time ago lost their strategic autonomy, i.e. the capacity to act. This is what some American authors are themselves proposing, as the only way of actually forcing the Europeans to shape a really adequate defense.¹³ Non-EU European states, such as Norway or a post-Brexit UK, would then have even more interest in aligning closely with the EU. But there is of course no guarantee that, if the EU emerges as a more comprehensive strategic actor, it will always subscribe to American grand strategy, notably on China (as already mentioned).

For the US, the dilemma remains: which is worse – European strategic autonomy or the absence of it? For the EU itself, muddling through remains the most likely scenario. But it is highly unlikely to be sufficient to safeguard the European interest in the face of external powers that are actively trying to divide and subvert its member states. For the great powers, Europe is but one of the theatres in which their rivalry is playing out. Basically, Europe's choice is this: to be an actor, or to be a theatre prop.

13. B. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

EU and NATO Capability Development: Separate or Together?

Dick Zandee

Since 2016, cooperation between the European Union and NATO has gained momentum. The changed security environment has been the driving factor in recasting the outdated cooperation model, based on the Berlin-Plus arrangement of 2003, into a new strategic partnership for addressing together the challenges and threats to European security, coming from the East and the South in particular. Politically, the most important result from the new partnership consists of the well-coordinated decisions of both organizations, taken in response to the Russian annexation of the Crimea and Moscow's interference in Eastern Ukraine. NATO's military reinforcement measures – such as the enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States and Poland – have been mirrored by the EU's package of sanctions imposed on Russia. No formal agreement between the EU and NATO was needed for this well-coordinated action. It is the result of the recognition by all EU and NATO member states that the Russian disregard of international law and the post-Cold War international order poses a fundamental threat to European security, which requires that the EU and NATO stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the defense of freedom, security and justice.

A further result of the new partnership is the list of 74 measures to advance EU-NATO cooperation. They are grouped in seven areas: 1. countering hybrid threats; 2. operational cooperation; 3. cyber security and defense; 4. defense capabilities; 5. defense industry and research; 6. Exercises, and 7. supporting Eastern and Southern partners' capacity-building efforts. The focus of this article will be on area 4, which aims to ensure coherence of output between the planning instruments and processes: on the EU side the Capability Development Plan, Permanent Structured Cooperation, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence and the European Defence Fund; on the NATO side primarily the NATO Defence Planning Process.

Making sense of defense capability cooperation

In recent years, major developments in capability development have taken place on the EU side. At first glance, one becomes completely confused when looking at the alphabet soup of acronyms, from “oldies” such as CDP, EDTIB, HLG and CoDaBa to a range of “newcomers” – CARD, EDF, EDIDP, OSRA, PADR, PESCO and SCC (see Box 1). On the NATO side, there is less new terminology: the NDPP dominates the scene as it did in the past.

Box 1 – EU and NATO capability planning acronyms

CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CoDaBa	Collaborative Data Base
CDP	Capability Development Plan
DOTMLPF-I	Doctrine, Organization, Training, Material, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities plus Interoperability
EDIDP	European Defence Industrial Development Programme
EDTIB	European Defence Technological and Industrial Base
EDF	European Defence Fund
HLG	Headline Goal
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
OSRA	Overarching Strategic Research Agendas
PADR	Preparatory Action on Defence Research
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
SCC	Strategic Context Cases

How does one bring order into this world of capability development disorder? A logical start would be to define what capability development entails. The European Defence Agency, established in 2004, presented the four-phased approach of capability development: (1) defining military requirements; (2) research & technology; (3) development and procurement programming, and (4) industrial production (see Figure 1). Even this chain approach falls short of what is needed to deliver military capabilities. Industry produces fighter aircraft, naval ships and armored

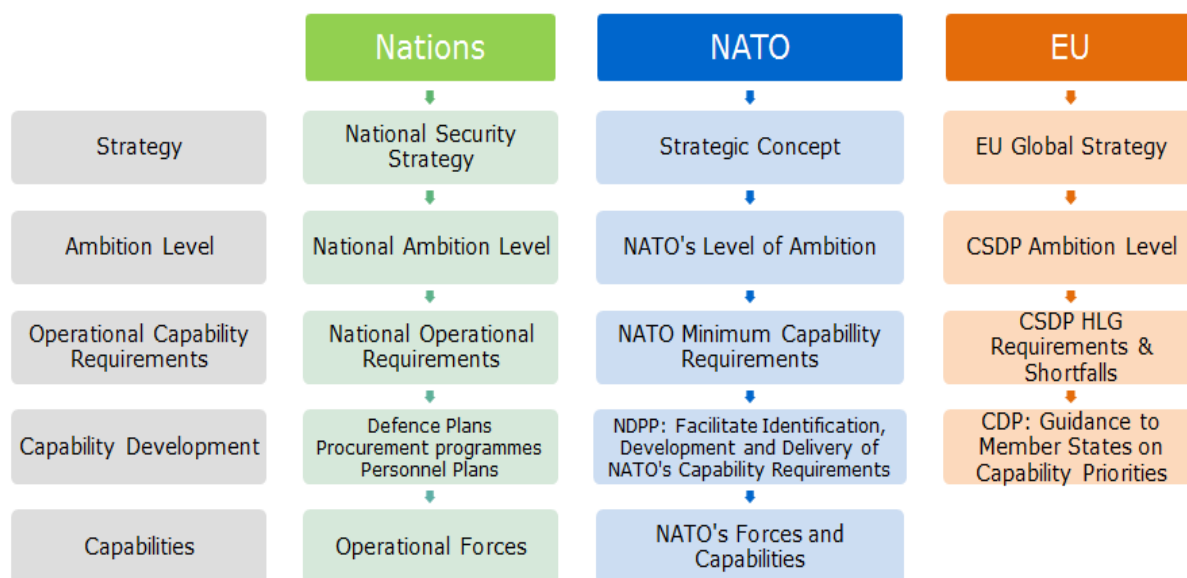
vehicles, but these will not fly, sail or drive without well-trained crews, fuel and other logistical support. For that purpose, NATO uses a list of key elements which together constitute capabilities: doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, personnel, facilities plus interoperability. This results in the ugliest acronym of all – DOTMLPF-I – but it tells us that capability development is much more complicated than producing military equipment. The latter is the task of defense industries. The European Commission places capability development foremost in this context. In its publications on the European Defence Fund (EDF) proposal, the Commission underlines the goal of strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). Through the EDF, the Commission wants to inject €13 billion into defense capability development by funding defense research and by co-funding industrial development, in particular of prototypes of defense equipment. So, the Commission brings money into the research & technology, development and procurement phases.

Figure 1 – The four phases of capability development



From strategy to capability development

Capability development can also be placed in the wider context of security strategies and their implementation. Most nations have a national security and defense strategy, which provides direction to a political level of ambition (what should we be able to do?). The ministries of defense translate the level of ambition into military operational requirements (what capabilities do we need to have?). Defense plans, procurement programs and personnel plans are the key tools in fulfilling the operational aims (how do we realize the required capabilities?) – the capability development phase. The operational capabilities of the armed forces are the outcome of this process. The same sequence (strategy level to ambition to operational requirements to planning to operational capabilities) can also be applied to NATO and the EU (see Figure 2).

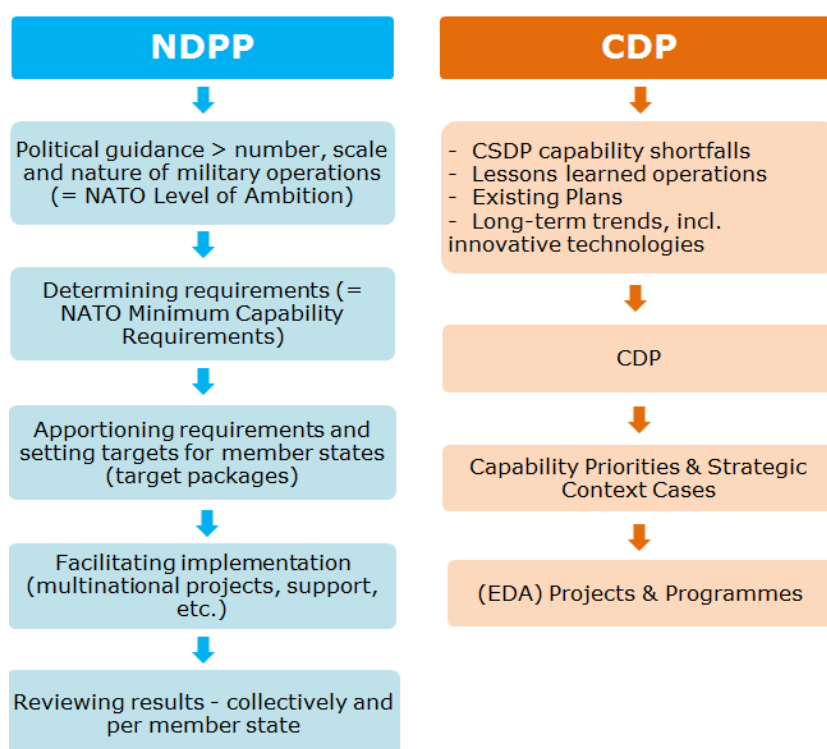
Figure 2 – From strategy to capability development

However, as the EU and NATO member states “own” the armed forces and procure their equipment, the roles of both organizations are limited when it comes to capability development. Through the NDPP, the member states of the Alliance are held accountable for their performance in realizing their military contributions to NATO’s forces and capabilities. In the EU, the Capability Development Plan (CDP) provides guidance to the member states on capability priorities. In essence, neither the NDPP nor the CDP deals with capability development: both support the member states’ efforts to address the shortfalls and improve their military capabilities.

NATO defense planning and EU capability development

A closer look at the NDPP and CDP reveals that there are some similarities but also important differences between the two mechanisms (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 – NATO and EU mechanisms



The NDPP has a fixed four-year cycle of five steps. It is “the primary means to facilitate the identification, development and delivery of NATO’s present and future capability requirements” and “a common framework for the integration and rationalisation of capability development across all NATO structures.”¹⁴ It is focused on the short (0-6 years) and medium term (7-19 years). The NDPP assists the Allies in realizing their capability targets – the sum of which provides NATO with the forces and capabilities needed to carry out the Alliance’s Level of Ambition. The last step in the cycle is the capability review, taking place every two years. NATO staffs assess whether the Allies, all together, can provide the forces needed, in quantitative and qualitative terms, to reach the minimum capability requirements as defined in step two of the NDPP cycle. Every two years

14. *The NATO Defence Planning Process*, available at: www.nato.int.

member states are assessed individually on the realization of the target packages, as defined in step three. This is carried out by a Defence Planning Capability Review. So far, only two Allies (Norway and the Netherlands) have made public their country assessment by NATO.

The overall purpose of the CDP “is to provide a full capability picture that supports decision-making at EU and national levels regarding defence capability development”. The objective is “to increase coherence between Member States’ defence planning and to encourage European cooperation by jointly considering future operational needs and defining common EU Capability Development Priorities”.¹⁵ The CDP provides an assessment of short-term, mid-term and long-term capability trend analyses, comprising the analysis of capability shortfalls in the context of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy, lessons learned from recent operations, planned capabilities and associated potential for future European cooperation, and finally the long-term capability trends, taking into account innovative technologies and subsequent adaptation of military needs (2035 and beyond). The analysis results in a list of capability priorities, to be supported by Strategic Context Cases (SCCs). The SCCs present an overview of the capability landscape and provide the reference for generating collaborative capability development projects. They also deliver roadmaps with objectives and milestones for capability priority actions, to be taken into account by member states in their national capability planning. Originally, the CDP did not result in an assessment of the performance of the member states, contrary to the NDPP. This has changed with the introduction of CARD and PESCO.

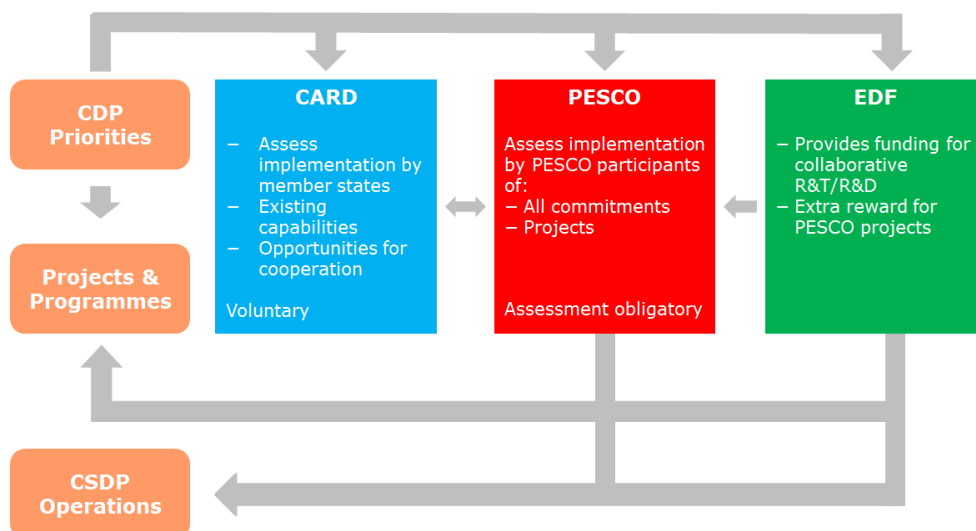
The impact of CARD, PESCO and the EDF

In the EU, important changes in the security and defense area are underway: CARD, PESCO and the EDF are three key separate but interlinked initiatives aimed at EU capability development. CARD provides an overview of existing capabilities in Europe, assesses the member states’ efforts in addressing the CDP-based capability priorities, and identifies opportunities for cooperation. PESCO defines commitments (for all PESCO participating member states) and offers the context for projects (for groups of variable member-state participation), which can be operationally oriented but also related to capability development. The EDF provides EU funding to support the implementation of cooperative projects for defense research & technology as well as for industrial development. Figure 4

15. The EU Capability Development Priorities – 2018 CDP Review, Brussels: European Defense Agency, December 2018.

visualizes the relationship between CARD, PESCO and the EDF. The chart also explains how these three initiatives relate to the CDP priorities and the projects and programs.

Figure 4 – The linkage between the CDP, CARD, PESCO and the EDF



CARD provides an assessment system, which the EU has lacked up to now. A CARD trial run was conducted in 2017-2018. The results have not been made public, but an article written by a former EDA official has provided some insights into the outcome.¹⁶ However, CARD participation is voluntary. Perhaps, in due course CARD should be merged with the PESCO assessment system or disbanded. As almost all EU member states have joined PESCO, CARD assessment separate from PESCO becomes superfluous. PESCO defines the commitments concerning both operational objectives and capability development. Thus, the annual assessment will also encompass both elements. EDA will provide the assessor input on defense investments and capability development, while the European External Action Service/EU Military Staff will do this for operational aspects. The High Representative will send the annual assessment report to the Council. The first PESCO report appeared in May 2019, but it is not publicly accessible.

16. R. Van Reybroeck, "What's in the CARDS?", *Security Policy Brief*, No. 103, Egmont Institute, February 2019.

Scope for NDPP-CDP synchronization

The plea to more closely coordinate or even combine the EU and NATO defense capability planning instruments has often been made. Equally, proper analysis is often lacking of where one can find overlap and differences, thus providing a solid basis for seeking maximum potential for synchronization. Clearly, there is overlap in several areas, the most important ones being requirements, priorities, monitoring and assessment. Unfortunately, for each of these categories of overlap there are differences between the two systems. The driving factor behind these differences is the ultimate focus of both planning systems: in simple terms, the NDPP measures the member states' performance in realizing the national (and multinational) targets for delivering the operational capabilities the Alliance needs to perform its military level of ambition; and the EU capability planning tools direct and assess the member states' efforts in capability development, which is primarily focused on projects and programs. The adaptation of the NDPP between 2009 and 2016 has led to deletion of terminology such as "force planning", and step 4 of the cycle foresees assisting member states and NATO in initiatives and efforts to realize the targets and priorities. However, these efforts take place elsewhere in the NATO bureaucracy. There is no coherent capability development process in the Alliance, encompassing the whole chain from defining requirements to industrial development and production. In the EU, the creation of the European Defence Agency in 2004 made it possible to start from scratch and to establish a capability planning system encompassing all four elements of the capability development chain. The EU's collective operational requirements are just one factor of influence; the CDP takes all relevant short-, medium- and long-term trends into consideration, thus looking far beyond the EU's current operational needs. Connecting capability requirements to the selection of R&T projects has been a major objective from the start. Today, this is carried out by the Overarching Strategic Research Agenda (OSRA). The upstream-downstream relationship in capability development between EDA (defining common requirements, R&T priorities, business cases for armament programmes) and the Organisation conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement (OCCAR) – managing multinational procurement programmes – brings together important parts of the chain. With the EDF initiative of the European Commission, the connection of European defense industries to European capability development will be strengthened.

While these differences between the EU and NATO capability planning systems will continue to exist, there is ample scope for increased

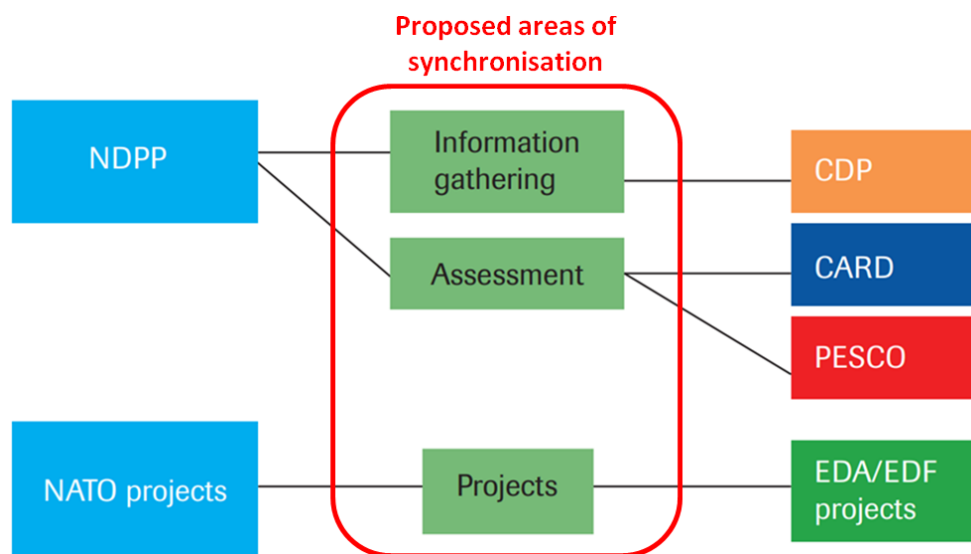
synchronization. So far, information-gathering on member states' armed forces was the only area of overlap between the two systems. The broadened scope of the EU requirements in the 2018 CDP opens additional space for coordination. Box 2 lists the 11 CDP priorities and the 14 NATO planning domains from the NDPP. At least six of them overlap (completely or partially), implying that requirements (or at least part of them when there is overlap within those priority areas) could be harmonized and project selection coordinated.

Box 2 – EU and NATO capability priorities

CDP priorities	NDPP planning domains
Cyber response operations	Cyber defense
Air superiority	Air and missile defense (partial)
Integration of military air capabilities	Aviation planning in a changing aviation sector
Information superiority + Space-based information and communication services	Intelligence (partial)
Enhanced logistics and medical supporting capabilities	Logistics + Medical
Cross-domain capabilities contributing to achieving EU's level of ambition	Science & technology
Ground combat capabilities Naval maneuverability Underwater control contributing to resilience at sea Air mobility	Armaments Civil emergency planning Consultation, command & control Force planning Nuclear deterrence Resources Standardization & Interoperability

With CARD and PESCO, an additional element of NATO-EU synchronization comes into the picture: monitoring and assessment. As PESCO entails operational aspects as well as defense investment and capability development reporting, it seems that there is scope for a certain degree of commonality between the EU and NATO in assessing member states' performance. Another area would be the level of projects and programs: EU/EDA and NATO staffs informally exchange information in order to synchronize the R&T, procurement and other capability development activities of both organizations. With PESCO and the funding from the EDF for defense research and industrial development, there is room for a more structured approach to synchronize capability development projects in the NATO and in the EU/EDA context. Figure 5 depicts the three potential areas for NATO-EU synchronization in capability development.

Figure 8 – The scope for EU-NATO synchronization



As OCCAR is mentioned in the PESCO list of commitments as “the preferred collaborative program managing organization”, this Bonn-based entity should also be brought into the EU-NATO synchronization process, either directly or through the EDA, which is OCCAR’s upstream natural partner in the EU.

Conclusion

The capability development processes in the EU and NATO overlap in certain aspects but are different in nature. The NATO Defence Planning

Process (NDPP) is primarily focused on planning and assessing the contributions of Allies to the NATO forces and capabilities needed to carry out the Alliance's Level of Ambition. The Capability Development Plan (CDP), Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and European Defence Fund (EDF) are primarily tools for selecting, launching, monitoring and assessing collaborative research & technology projects, industrial development programs and other capability development activities in order to strengthen both European military capabilities and the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). The difference in nature sets limits on the scope for synchronizing the NDPP and the EU capability planning tools.

While recognizing not only the autonomy of the EU and NATO but also the difference in nature of their capability planning processes, there is more scope for synchronization than in the past. An overview of capability priority areas already indicates the scope for synchronizing requirements and coordinating initiatives to address shortfalls. But the major factor of influence is the new framework for capability development in the EU (CDP-CARD-PESCO-EDF). It has changed the role of the organization, in particular in monitoring and assessing the member states' performance in capability development. One area for synchronization is assessment (NDPP – CARD/PESCO); another is at the project level (NATO projects – PESCO/EDF projects).

Tremendous change has taken place in the EU-NATO relationship in recent years. Obstacles resulting from non-overlapping membership have been overcome by pragmatic solutions through increased staff-to-staff contacts and informal meetings. It seems that already, in a short timeframe, more has been realized than in a decade and a half of formal relations under Berlin-Plus. Now is the moment to build on the *acquis* of recent years, and to further explore the scope for EU-NATO synchronization of the defense planning systems of the two organizations – to the benefit of European and transatlantic security.

Battle-Ready?

Preparing European military forces for a more competitive environment

Corentin Brustlein and Luis Simón¹⁷

This section looks at the concept of European strategic autonomy from the dual perspective of strategic planning and capability development, and looks into the capability mix that would allow Europeans to best cope with a rapidly changing threat environment. It argues that Europeans should be able to conduct high-end, combined arms warfare on their own in the context of both collective defense and expeditionary operations.

Any discussion around capability development must be preceded by an assessment and prioritization of the different threats Europeans face. This analysis revolves around two broad assumptions.

The first is that the European threat environment is increasingly diverse. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 signaled the return of inter-state threats, and the renewed need for Europeans to develop capabilities making them better able to defend themselves against a neighbor with a large and capable military. This development complements – and even supersedes – Europe's interest in expeditionary operations, but it does not replace it altogether. In fact, regional instability and state fragility in the Middle East and North and Sub-Saharan Africa threaten European interests abroad and at home. This continues to underscore the importance of expeditionary operations, and has also led to growing attention to homeland security missions. Last but not least, the return of great-power competition globally and China's geostrategic rise raise the specter of possible threats to the global sea lines of communication (SLoC) – so vital to European trade – and control of raw materials. This means that, to defend their strategic interests, Europeans should be able to project power in a maritime context, and beyond their immediate neighborhood. Not only

17. For their useful and constructive feedback, the authors would like to thank Jorge Domecq, Daniel Fiott, Heinz Krieb, Alexander Mattelaer and Diego Ruiz Palmer.

do these trends coexist; they interact with each other. Indeed, Russia's intervention and lasting military presence in Syria is a good reminder of the unique challenges posed by multi-theater strategies, as well as deliberate or uncontrolled spillover effects.

The second assumption informing this analysis is that the threat environment is not only more complex or diverse; it is also increasingly competitive and challenging. There has been much discussion recently about the return of great-power competition, marked by China's growing assertiveness across the Indo-Pacific, and Russia's attempts to recreate a sphere of influence in parts of Europe and the Middle East.¹⁸ Both these phenomena are geopolitical in nature, but they are strongly underpinned by efforts on the part of those powers to modernize their militaries, and leverage advances in precision-strike systems to develop so-called Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities that threaten the West's ability to access and move freely around their strategic vicinities.¹⁹ The increasingly competitive nature of the threat environment is not just explained by the return of great-power competition: even non-peer states and non-state actors – traditionally thought of as conventionally weak – have leveraged advances in military technology, as well as their knowledge of the Western way of warfare, to become more competitive in the military domain. The diffusion of precision-strike weaponry and A2/AD capabilities in parts of Europe's southern and southeastern neighborhood increases the costs of entry for Europeans into theaters of operations that were hitherto largely permissive from a military standpoint. This reduction in the freedom of action enjoyed by European countries in their own neighborhood could ultimately raise the threshold for military interventions. Whereas, following the end of the Cold War, Europeans associated expeditionary operations with militarily (semi-) permissive and non-competitive environments, this has now changed.²⁰ There is thus a common thread that connects many of the threats Europeans face: the growing relevance of the higher end of the conflict spectrum, which is common to both collective defense and expeditionary scenarios.

Taking into account these trends, this section advocates a capability concept that emphasizes flexibility (i.e. the ability to deal with the multiple

18. See: T. J. Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Context for the 21st Century and the Future of American Power*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017.

19. T. Mahnken, "China's Anti-Access Strategy in Historical and Theoretical Perspective", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2011), pp. 299-323; L. Simón, "The 'Third' US Offset Strategy and Europe's 'Anti-Access' Challenge", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2016), pp. 417-445.

20. C. Brustlein, "Entry Operations and the Future of Strategic Autonomy", *Focus stratégique*, No. 70 bis, Ifri, December 2017.

threats Europeans face) but gives priority to those capabilities suited to the higher end of the conflict spectrum. Flexibility at the high end of the conflict spectrum can play a unique role in developing European strategic autonomy while strengthening the transatlantic link. The European capability development conversation should therefore shift to the many synergies between the two most critical types of tasks: collective defense and expeditionary warfare.²¹ To be sure, different European countries (and even the EU and NATO themselves) will tend to prioritize those threats differently. However, they should all recognize their existence, and thus acknowledge the highly diverse nature of the European threat environment and, perhaps most importantly, its increasingly competitive and challenging nature. On this basis, the section begins with some considerations on the advantages and limits of flexibility in strategic planning; it then discusses how cooperation in capability development can prove instrumental in achieving European strategic flexibility, and zooms in on those capabilities that will allow Europeans to remain militarily credible for full-spectrum expeditionary and collective defense tasks, either by themselves or within a NATO context.

Flexibility, focus and strategic planning in Europe

How should Europeans allocate their limited defense resources? Which capabilities should they invest in? Addressing such questions requires making assumptions about the threat environment, and how it might evolve in the future. That brings up the problem of uncertainty, which is a core feature of international relations, and is thus central to the business of strategic planning.²²

In the face of strategic uncertainty, states typically avoid black-and-white, exclusive choices. Indeed, when it comes to the allocation of defense resources, they are often reluctant to make clearcut choices: they would rather keep their options open, and choose the most adaptable investments.²³ However, although it looks appealing, that approach has its limits and, as a matter of fact, can rarely be implemented.

21. Depending on factors such as the strategic goals of an operation, the nature of the adversary or the balance of forces, different types of missions can be conducted in an expeditionary warfare framework, from forcible entry to peacekeeping, counterinsurgency or coercive diplomacy.

22. See, e.g.: R. K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2000), pp. 5-50; C. Gray, "Strategic Thoughts for Defense Planners", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (2010), pp. 159-178.

23. See, e.g.: R. Danzig, *Driving in the Dark: Ten Propositions about Prediction and National Security*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, October 2011; F. Hoffman,

Strategic flexibility allows a given state to be *relatively competent* in the face of a great diversity of threats without having to adapt substantially its strategic policy at short notice. However, following that path will not leave it in an *optimal* position to address any of those threats individually.²⁴ In turn, focusing on a single threat, and developing a specific set of capabilities tailored to it, can bring a higher reward than hedging bets, but is also riskier. In other words, all countries have to face a tradeoff between flexibility and focus. An effective strategy must prioritize, and not just enumerate, threats, as well as the capabilities needed to address them.

Given that focus and flexibility both have their drawbacks and advantages, states will typically strive to achieve some sort of balance between the two. How they do that will depend on several factors such as their resources (financial, technological/industrial, etc.), the nature of the threat environment, and more subjective factors such as strategic culture, perceptions, and behavior vis-à-vis alliances. A very diverse threat environment will tend to push countries towards more flexibility, which requires higher levels of resourcing; whilst a simple threat environment will incentivize countries to opt for more focused strategic investments, i.e. tailored to the key threat. Conversely, the more resources a country has, the easier it will be for it to opt for flexibility and invest in different types of capabilities; and the more constrained a country's resources are, the more it will focus on a narrow capability set.

What does this mean for Europeans? As already argued, different European countries will tend to prioritize threats differently, but they are also likely to take a different perspective on the flexibility vs. focus tradeoff. For instance, countries in northeastern Europe may not only prioritize collective defense over expeditionary warfare; they may also rather *focus* on the need to defend against the threat posed by Russia rather than opt for a flexible capability set, not least given their threat perception and resource constraints. Other countries in western or southern Europe may worry less about the problem of collective defense against a great power (i.e. Russia). Instead, they may focus on other priorities such as the need to tackle the problem of instability in Europe's southern periphery through expeditionary power projection, or on their need to protect their homeland from terrorism. While they may also contribute to collective defense, their relatively limited resources and low prioritization of the Russian threat may lead them to focus on the lower end of the spectrum of missions.

"Black Swans and Pink Flamingos: Five Principles for Force Design", *War on the Rocks*, August 19, 2015.

24. B. Wernefelt and A. Karnani, "Competitive Strategy under Uncertainty", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1987, pp. 187-194.

A limited number of more capable countries that embrace a more holistic view of European security appear better able to balance priorities between strengthening their ability to contribute to collective defense missions and threats such as terrorism at home and instability and state fragility in the southern neighborhood. Made possible by higher defense spending, this flexible approach leads them to maintain both heavy forces and modern expeditionary capabilities.

Strengthening European strategic flexibility through cooperation

Since the end of the Cold War, the armed forces of NATO member states have successfully taken on new types of expeditionary missions (stability operations, building partner capacity, counter-terrorism at the lower end of the spectrum, initial entry and force projection at the higher end), thus complementing their enduring commitment to deterrence and collective defense. It might therefore be tempting to conclude that, collectively speaking, European armed forces have become increasingly flexible. There are, however, at least two reasons to challenge that view.

First, while NATO militaries started to focus increasingly on expeditionary operations in the 1990s, they remained constrained by decreasing levels of spending, imposing cuts and trade-offs in force structure and capability development. Ever more limited financial resources and a changing geopolitical environment led most NATO members to prioritize focus over flexibility, and, in doing so, to prioritize expeditionary operations over collective defense.²⁵ As a consequence of either programmatic decisions or sheer neglect, the strategic flexibility of NATO allies taken collectively diminished as their doctrinal orientations, capability choices, training programs or human resources moved away from the requirements of high-end warfare, to meet the requirements of stability and counter-insurgency operations.²⁶ As they refocused on a different set of priorities, rather than simply broadening their skillset, NATO militaries dramatically reduced their force structures, and

25. G. Lasconjarias, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Land Forces: Losing Ground", in G. J. Schmitt (ed.), *A Hard Look at Hard Power: Assessing the Defense Capabilities of Key U.S. Allies and Security Partners*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College Press, 2015, pp. 231-255.

26. For a study of how France, Germany and the UK armies have dealt with those constraints, see M. Shurkin, *Setting Priorities in the Age of Austerity: British, French, and German Experiences*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013.

particularly their numbers of armored, artillery, and air defense units.²⁷ At the same time, most European militaries abandoned key capabilities dedicated to missions such as suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD), electronic warfare, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defense, and antisubmarine warfare (ASW).

In following that downward trend, these armed forces have become increasingly dependent on the sophisticated high-end capabilities of the United States military. While the US did indeed take a similar path, its critical mass and resource base allowed it to salvage a much broader spectrum of capabilities and preserve a much larger force structure. The second and related reason not to assume that the strategic flexibility of NATO as a whole has improved thus has to do with how dependent on the United States European armed forces have grown since the end of the Cold War. The truth is that, as most European allies tried to reap the peace dividends of the post-Cold War era, their armed forces were so critically underfunded over such long periods that they grew neither strategically flexible at a national level, nor focused enough to be able to conduct expeditionary operations autonomously.²⁸ Indeed, whenever NATO as an alliance conducted expeditionary operations in the Balkans, in Afghanistan or in Libya, in many capability areas the contribution of European militaries remained only marginal to the overall allied endeavor, while the US bore the brunt of the effort.

As a consequence of the dilemmas they face while crafting their national strategies, only a few European countries have achieved a substantial degree of strategic flexibility, and thus possess armed forces trained and equipped for a wide spectrum of possibilities such as collective defense scenarios, forcible entry operations and counter-terrorism missions. While strategic flexibility is, and will remain, extremely rare at a strictly national level, it might be a more realistic objective to strive for at a collective level. When acting within a multinational framework such as NATO, the EU, or some ad hoc coalition, countries operating alongside allies can at least partially compensate for their national weaknesses. From this viewpoint, the armed forces that made the programmatic decision to maintain proficiency in some niche areas (antisubmarine warfare, heavy armor, surface-to-air defense, mine warfare, etc.) might be able to compensate in part for the capability gap of others, while benefiting from the latter's specific skills. To be clear, collective strategic flexibility is far

27. To be sure, this trend has been partially turned in some countries (like Germany), while others never fully abandoned a collective defense setting (e.g. Poland, Baltic States). However, it will take time to rebuild the forces and structures required for collective defense.

28. C. Mölling *et al.*, *European Defence Monitoring (EDM)*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2014.

from ideal. It reflects decades of lack of ambition and insufficient defense spending by European countries. It represents by any measure a poor man's way to achieve strategic flexibility, and that flexibility will in any case remain less robust and less resilient than one that would rely on stronger foundations such as a higher number of flexible national militaries. Still, cooperation, in conjunction with higher defense spending by member states, appears to be the fastest way to achieve greater strategic flexibility, and thus to efficiently respond to the threats Europe faces.

From the perspective of alliances and multinational defense cooperation, having member states over-focusing on a narrow set of challenges can create challenges in terms of both solidarity and interoperability, as it ultimately decreases the ability to share the burden between allies. As international organizations, the EU and NATO may also, on the basis of their comparative institutional advantages, adopt different approaches to the question of which threats should be prioritized, and how to strike the right balance between flexibility and focus. Through their planning and capability development processes and instruments such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) or defense-industrial initiatives like the European Defense Fund (EDF), these organizations can incentivize national choices in terms of research & development and procurement, so that European militaries taken together do not suffer from overwhelming capability gaps or miss out on investment in future technologies.²⁹

The purpose of this section is not to provide an analysis of how different European countries or institutions grapple with threat prioritization or the focus vs. flexibility tradeoff, but to argue that cooperation may allow Europeans to collectively address the main threats they face, thus affording them the advantage of both flexibility and focus.³⁰ At a more specific level, it is then possible to map out some of the capabilities required to conduct operations in contested environments and identify synergies between collective defense and expeditionary operations.

29. See D. Zandee, "Developing European Defense Capabilities: Bringing Order into Disorder", Clingendael Report, October 2017; J. Domecq, "Coherence and Focus on Capability Development: Why EDA's Role in CARD, PESCO and EDF Matters", *ARI* 54/2018, Elcano Royal Institute; P. Serrano, "The Bundle of Sticks: A Stronger European Defence to Face Global Challenges", *WP*, March 2019, Elcano Royal Institute.

30. In this very vein, the risk-management literature suggests that a cooperative arrangement can give a firm (and its partners) a reasonable presence in several scenarios. See, e.g.: B. Wernefelt and A. Karnani, "Competitive Strategy under Uncertainty", *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.

Flexibility at the higher end of the conflict spectrum

Ever since the end of the Cold War, most European discussions on capability development have been set against the backdrop of Western military-technological supremacy. Such supremacy led Europeans to dismiss the problem of collective defense and focus on expeditionary power projection against non-peer adversaries. Over the last decade, however, two main factors – of a geopolitical and military-technological nature – have rendered these assumptions obsolete. On the one hand, Russia's resurgence has brought the problem of collective defense and deterrence back to forefront of European security. On the other, the increasing diffusion of precision-guided munitions (PGMs) and concomitant development of A2/AD capabilities has led to a progressive leveling of the playing field, by (re-)introducing (some degree of) symmetry in the balance of forces between the West and its neighborhood. This has serious implications, both for East-oriented deterrence and defense posture, but also when it comes to preparing for out-of-area military operations in the South (or beyond).

Very few capabilities are indispensable for the conduct of every single type of mission – except if defined in generic functional terms such as command and control, logistics, and intelligence. The past two centuries have shown that success in modern warfare requires increasing levels of integration between branches and capabilities. From the birth of combined arms warfare in the 19th century to multi-domain battle and operations, achieving ever deeper integration between complementary weapon systems and capabilities has appeared as the only way to deal with the complexity of combat and operations in highly lethal and complex physical and social environments.³¹ While novel in some ways, the rise of a mature precision-strike regime and the need for multi-domain integration represents only the most recent phase of a long-established trend.³² When it comes to the details of specific equipment, beyond the general principle of combined arms integration, not all platforms and weapon systems are equally necessary, or able to operate, across the spectrum of conflict: on the one hand, high-end capabilities (missile defense, deep conventional strike, antisubmarine warfare, etc.) can be superfluous in lower-end contingencies such as peacekeeping, stability operations and humanitarian

31. S. D. Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004; J. M. House, *Combined Arms Warfare in the Twentieth Century*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001.

32. Multi-Domain Battle: Evolution of Combined Arms for the 21st Century, 2025-2040, Fort Monroe, KS: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2017.

assistance/disaster relief. On the other hand, light infantry, unarmored vehicles, or slow manned or unmanned air vehicles with a large radar signature can become extremely vulnerable in contested environments.³³

It is now high time for European armed forces to increase their strategic flexibility at the higher end of the conflict spectrum. There are multiple reasons to do so. First, as previously highlighted, all trends indicate that our neighborhood will be more and more militarily contested. Second, as competition between the United States and China continues to intensify, Washington's impetus to rebalance its strategic focus toward the Indo-Pacific region will only get stronger, as will the demands on European allies to pull their weight militarily, at the very least in and around Europe. And third, the higher end of the spectrum is both the area in which Europeans remain most dependent on the US, and the one that will be increasingly in demand in the Indo-Pacific region. This is thus where European efforts should concentrate in order to develop Europe's strategic autonomy while reinforcing its ability to share the burden with the US.³⁴

Table 1: Categorizing mission types

Spectrum of conflict	Protection-oriented	Projection-oriented
Higher end	Collective defense Deterrence	Initial entry/Forcible entry Military coercion
Lower end	Terrorism	Stability operations Peacekeeping

In many respects, due to the diffusion of advanced, long-range A2/AD systems from Russia and China to smaller regional or local powers, the capability requirements of collective defense and force projection in contested environments tend to converge at least in part. On the one hand, Russia's broad and expanding portfolio of long-range conventional strike capabilities means that NATO forces would no longer enjoy the benefits of relatively secure rear-areas while responding to a major crisis.³⁵ In the

33. M. Gunzinger *et al.*, *Force Planning for the Era of Great Power Competition*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017.

34. For a similar approach, see D. Barrie *et al.*, *Defending Europe: Scenario-Based Capability Requirements for NATO's European members*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, April 2019.

35. R. N. McDermott and T. Bukkvoll, *Russia in the Precision-Strike Regime. Military Theory, Procurement, and Operational Impact*, Oslo: Norwegian Defense Research Establishment, 2017;

initial phases of a crisis, the Russian threat to the Suwalki corridor and to north-east Europe means that the military support from NATO allies to Baltic armed forces and to the enhanced Forward Presence would strongly resemble an expeditionary operation in a highly contested environment.³⁶ On the other hand, the proliferation of A2/AD capabilities offers a growing number of countries an ability to challenge the military freedom of action of a joint expeditionary force with a defensive strength that until recently only Russia or China enjoyed. To sum up, both collective defense and expeditionary tasks face a similar challenge – the growing ability of potential adversaries to create heavily contested environments – that a common thread of measures could efficiently mitigate.

What does that mean in concrete terms? Providing an exhaustive assessment of the capabilities required to operate in contested environments would go beyond the ambition of this paper. However, whether it is due to their unique contribution to military effectiveness in contested environments, or to their burden-sharing value within the Atlantic Alliance, three efforts appear particularly critical to ensuring future European strategic flexibility at the higher end of the conflict spectrum, and thus worthy of additional investments and common efforts: survivability, information superiority, and deep conventional strike.

Understood as the ability to evade or withstand an attack, survivability as a concern applies to all types of platforms and fixed sites. Operating in a contested environment mechanically increases the survivability challenges that European militaries might face, inviting additional efforts in capabilities such as integrated air and theater (cruise/ballistic) missile defense, counter-rocket/artillery/mortar systems, surface fleet protection (soft and hard kill) against advanced anti-ship missile threats, and man-machine teaming or passive and active protection for ground platforms. Importantly, reinforcing survivability should not be based solely on updated weapons systems: simulation, realistic training for contested environments, creative combined-arms tactics, and advances in concealment and deception on the battlefield should also be considered as worth strengthening through cooperation.

Most European militaries rely on the US to achieve information superiority, i.e. the ability to effectively collect, process, distribute and exchange information over operational and strategic distances. Considering the emphasis put by potential adversaries on electronic warfare, cyber-warfare and information manipulation, European

N. Sokov, "Russia's New Conventional Capability. Implications for Eurasia and Beyond", *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 472, April 2017.

36. C. Brustlein, "Entry Operations and the Future of Strategic Autonomy", *op. cit.*, p. 20.

dependence in this area should be a rising concern. European capability and resilience in this area should be strengthened by investing in airborne and space-based imagery, electronic intelligence, early-warning assets and networks, multi-domain operational and strategic awareness and surveillance, resilient C4 networks – all of which would be of tremendous value for burden-sharing, provided these capabilities remain interoperable with US systems.

Finally, the ability of European armed forces to conduct deep conventional strike in contested environments is insufficient. The growing range of A2/AD capabilities means that maintaining freedom of action over a theater of operation will require both an increasing number of stand-off strike capabilities (from air, naval and ground platforms), which are too rare as of now, and efforts to develop some “stand-in” strike options (suppression of enemy air defenses, including electronic attack and self-defense, survivable indirect ground fires, low-signature unmanned platforms, etc.).

Conclusion

This section has sought to ascertain how Europeans should prioritize their future capability development efforts in a threat environment that is both increasingly diverse and increasingly competitive. On the one hand, growing threat diversity compels Europeans to aim for capabilities that are flexible. On the other hand, the fact that the strategic context is also becoming increasingly competitive compels Europeans to develop capabilities that are suitable to deal with contingencies at the higher end of the conflict spectrum. This argument, therefore, builds on a synthesis of sorts: when thinking about which capabilities to invest in, Europeans should achieve some balance between the flexibility needed to navigate defense and expeditionary challenges alike, and the need to focus on capabilities that are geared for the higher end of the conflict spectrum.

In addressing the question of what sort of capability set would allow Europeans to best cope with a rapidly changing threat environment, this paper rejects a widespread but false dichotomy; namely, that it is only possible to strengthen either NATO or the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). By strengthening their own national military capabilities, member states will automatically contribute to the strengthening of both NATO and CSDP. In fact, there has recently been a proliferation of bilateral and “minilateral” clusters of security and defense

cooperation in Europe, both within and outside NATO and CSDP.³⁷ This fragmentation of European security cooperation applies to both the conduct of military operations and the process of capability development. Coming to terms with such a reality will to a large extent determine the success of both NATO and CSDP, which will need to look for ways to integrate emerging bilateral and minilateral initiatives into their capability development and operational initiatives. This paper, therefore, has explored ways to identify which capabilities and priorities could be considered as key to the operationalization of European strategic autonomy, regardless of whether the EU, NATO or both are leveraged in the process of developing such capabilities, and whether those capabilities are eventually put at the service of either organization or any other grouping of countries.

This case in favor of making European militaries capable of operating in contested environments did not seek to address the political and perhaps even psychological dimensions of the challenge. If they ever intend to be strategically autonomous, Europeans need first to stop assuming that a uniquely successful construct like the EU can insulate itself from the security challenges arising from its neighborhood. As alarming as it has already been, the downward trend in Europe's security environment could continue for years, perhaps decades, and an EU unfit for such a tragic era would no longer be in a position to protect a norm-based order. European decision-makers, institutions and public opinion thus need to reconcile themselves with the prospect of the use of military force, if only to defend European interests and values.

37. See: L. Simón, A. Lanoszka and H. Meijer, "Nodal Defence: The Changing Structure of U.S. Alliance Systems in Europe and East Asia", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2019 (firstview).



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