

Defense as a convergence policy tool for the European Union

Riga Conference Future Scholars – policy analysis paper
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Abstract

The European Union faces an array of complex, long-term issues directly affecting the cohesion of Europe's peace and prosperity project. This policy paper recommends using the defense sector as a pillar of convergence to both physically protect European values (however they may be defined), but also to rally and unify the continent as a distinct political and sovereign whole. Progress with PESCO, E2I, the EDF, EU foreign policy, and the like, in general is encouraging; overreach and overzealous foreign interventionism is a distinct and serious risk. Overall, leaving the secure future of a free Europe upon the whims of external actors with changing priorities is ill-advised. Because of the theoretical (and practical) sharing of values and rights in Europe, the EU owes its citizens a solid and unified European security framework to guarantee these privileges.

Introduction

The European Union faces an array of complex issues affecting its status as the preeminent institution of peace and prosperity for Europe as a regional whole – unity issues, North/South disagreements, East/West disparities, economic crises ranging from financial to monetary, enduring migration phenomena, populist and anti-EU movements, and other questions of enlargement, neighborhood policy, foreign threats, and more. Fresh current affairs complicate matters further, from Brexit negotiations to Crimean annexations. Many of these issues require complex answers to complex questions, and are especially difficult to address in an uncertain political environment: from Trump to the EU 28-1 format, and even a lack of convergence on a national scale, such as currently in Italian or even German politics. So how to move forward on European convergence, and without delay? Defense politics, industry, and policy are a surefire way to contribute to contemporary European unity without stressing the otherwise tenuous ties that continue to hold the continent together.

Security

Conceptually, the keyword is *hard* security. This policy paper takes the definition of hard security to mean matters of strictly military interest – including for example armed forces, and increasingly including issues of cyber and space security, and excluding issues of political,

economic, social, and environmental security.¹ Security – especially military security – provides the framework for the nation-state, defining (and more importantly, as a guarantee for the EU) external boundaries and internal cohesion; security in this way needs to provide not just the framework for the supra-national state of the EU, but also the smart and efficient management of defense. Within the EU there are currently 27 armies, 23 air forces, and 21 navies that guarantee different levels of security for different member states.² A smarter defense would include unifying these capabilities, developing an independent security council and intelligence center for Europe, and identifying a competent European Minister of Defense to effectively make decisions on security matters. Current affairs suggesting that the US will withdraw its traditional post-World War II security guarantee, whether unilaterally or not, leaves European security in the hands of Europeans. Even NATO itself is ill-equipped to counter sub-Article 5 threats, such as asymmetrical or hybrid warfare. Beyond these threats, Europe should not forfeit the opportunity to take control of her own hard security situation on a reliable, sustainable, and resilient basis.³ Coherence in defense matters.

Defense

Current developments for cooperative European security are encouraging. The Partnership for European Security Cooperation Organization (PESCO) agreements and 17 projects are pushing forward a European pillar of NATO defense. The European Intervention Initiative (E2I) encourages important European states to commit to foreign policy follow-up for issues that have the potential for domestic implications. Eurocorps and European battlegroups, though to-date undeployed, are the operationalization of a unified defense. Countless domestic exercises such as Vital Sword 2018 and many others both past and present⁴, and joint missions abroad, are further examples of „European“ units in action. The European Defense Agency (EDA) institutionalizes the theory. The European Defense Fund (EDF) provides a resource platform for further development.⁵ The European External Action Service (EEAS) already delivers the soft diplomacy that must always accompany hard security. Joint

¹ Buzan, Barry, Jaap De Wilde, and Ole Wæver. 1998. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

² Howorth, Jolyon. „Future of Europe: For a True European Defence Union.“ Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.

³ For more on examples on the serious reality of security competition, see: Bitzinger, Richard A. and Nicu Popescu (eds.). „Defense industries in Russia and China: players and strategies“. European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2017.

⁴ „Three armies – one battalion“, *A review*, Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, June 2018.

⁵ Funding, however, at the moment is quite inadequate. While EU states expend approx. over €200b together annually, the EDF only provides a budget in the millions of Euros.

endeavors such as the European Security and Defence College and academies in Europe, as well as think-tanks such as the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) add academic vigor for a European civil audience and help legitimize the largely non-democratic defense sector. And according to polls, EU citizens (up to 75% of those polled) encourage European defense as such.⁶ All these developments fortify a European pillar of defense within, initially, a NATO framework and eventually, with enough versatility for deployment with the UN and, most importantly, the EU. The alternatives are paltry and lacking.

Alternatives

There are three alternative developments for European defense. First, Europe can continue to maintain reserve military forces on an individual level, with little serious considerations for domestic defense, and with or without NATO support. Under the NATO flag, Europe can bandwagon or be active contributors, provide support and logistics or operational ground troops, or any combination inbetween for member states on an individual basis (or in other words, as is the current reality). But without NATO support, great power politics – i.e. political theory such as (neo)realism, and international relations scholars from Hobbes to Mearsheimer (not to mention practitioners in the past and contemporarily in an increasing number of states) – suggest to us that the strong will do as they may and the weak will suffer what they must.⁷ Alternatively, modern neoliberal institutionalized values such as open markets and liberal societies may theoretically predict, without NATO, the possibility for the peace within Europe; what effect liberal institutions might have on other major external actors (such as China, or Russia, and even the contemporary US), is open to debate. Leaving the future of a free Europe upon the whims of external actors with changing priorities is, at best, ill-advised.

Second, Europe can maintain standing military forces in direct coordination and cooperation with NATO member states. This would involve maintaining a defense budget at 2% of GDP⁸ and taking seriously Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This would also necessitate a political push to further inflate the perspective of military (in)security – in other words, securitization of threats, for example a focus on evolving threats such as impending Russian interventionism or the mediatization of a „new“ Islamic terror group. However, at the moment

⁶ „More European, More Connected and More Capable“, Munich Security Conference Report 2018, p.20.

⁷ Thucydides. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (1881).

⁸ According to Eurostat, in 2016 European states on average contribute 1,3% of GDP on defense spending.

there is no consensus on NATO. Divergent views range from Turkish dissatisfaction to vigorous Polish support, all for various, complex military and politico-economic reasons. Financially, NATO is effectively a zero-sum organization – in Europe, states must decide to contribute military resources (especially funding) as a complement to the organization, and specialize vis-a-vis the other contributing nations, or commit these resources elsewhere under alternative agreements and commit to different specializations (such as in PESCO projects). If the US has the UH-60 Blackhawk, why duplicate investment in Europe for the research, design, production and procurement of the NH-90? Simultaneously, the alliance's historical architect and main benefactor (i.e. the US) that has been increasingly, from Robert Gates to Donald Trump, one of its largest opponents, and is increasingly making threats that range from the personal erratic impulses of the US president, to incoherent administrative inconsistencies.

Third, Europe can venture forth on her own defense initiative. The Why question has already been answered; here, the How question inevitably regards composition. Who is a member of the new European defense community? Under what conditions of entry, or exit? Where are operational headquarters? Forces for deterrence, or coercion, or both?⁹ These types of questions have answers, and an amalgamation is already evident throughout Europe. Progress would need to include developing existing and new battlegroups, partnership structures, and goal-setting efforts between European nation states. A European nuclear deterrent would enhance pan-European protection. Requirements of involvement on particular missions – voluntary or mandatory involvement, financial contributions, leadership status, operational commitments – could be left on a case-by-case basis depending on operational needs built on experience. And in fact various missions and experiences have already been accumulated. Under CSDP missions, the European Union has initiated dozens of actions abroad, from international civil missions to police assistance in the Middle East to military peacekeeping in Africa. An annual review, based on an analysis of defense mechanisms and procedures, would enhance the entire process. The remaining task is to facilitate the unification of these fragments – policy and practice – under one coherent banner of a European defense force.

⁹ For more on the importance of coercive diplomacy, see: Freedman, Lawrence. "Strategic Coercion." *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases*. Oxford University Press. 1998; Schelling, Thomas C. „The Diplomacy of Violence.“ *The Cost of Conflict*, John A. Copps, ed., Michigan Business Paper, No. 51 (1969); Smetana, Michal and Jan Ludvík (eds.). *Indirect Coercion*. Karolinum Press. 2017.

Solidarity

Solidarity is key. Internal divisions make European Union member states weak, both as individual parts as well as a whole. This process is unsustainable and inadvisable, even without external stimuli – all the while adversaries certainly encourage intra-European squabbles and division. These stresses produce incoherent, and inept, strategic vision, and contribute to the waves of populist rhetoric and opinion that risk further fracture. Debate on defense strategy is a useful rallying call. European security is in the interests for Europe. Roots exist in the forms of Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) or the German Framework Nation Initiative.¹⁰ These types of programs have been making distinct progress in creating a European Defense Union identity ever since the CSDP European Security and Defense Identity. Participation of most EU states in NATO has formalized the process and proven the relevance of European security as a unifying concept; a large majority of EU members are full partners of NATO, and many of the rest cooperate as partners. A more difficult task would be the integration of EU non-NATO states from partnership status to full-fledged members of a European defense union; though the Partnership for Peace channel has certainly provided a taste of integration. Modern threats will push even reluctant Western partners towards the European defense umbrella, as has already been documented in countries such as Finland, Poland, and some Balkan states. Trends suggest the increase of perceived threats in the near future, and therefore that more perceptions of insecurity may follow.

Obstacles

Obstacles for Europe to organize her own collective defense have disturbed efforts of organization since the 1950s. These obstacles have ranged from French fear of German inclusion and dominance, the Jean Monnet effect of sidelining military officers as part of the European „peace“ project, issues of unnecessary NATO duplication, and UK resistance.¹¹ In other words, perceptions of threats and proposed spending levels in Europe have consistently failed to align, no doubt relevant for the era of post-World War II reconstruction and NATO dominance. Fifty years later, in a new era, independent defense is newly, and highly, relevant. The EU itself as an entity has been officially involved in missions from the Balkans, to Africa, and the Middle East. Questions of NATO relevancy persist. The US under the Trump administration threatens to withdraw its nuclear deterrent. And pressing conflicts on the direct

¹⁰ Witney, Nick. European Council on Foreign Relations. „Macron and the European Intervention Initiative: Erasmus for soldiers?“ Accessed on 06 July 2018.

¹¹ Howorth, Jolyon. „Future of Europe: For a True European Defence Union.“ Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2017.

external borders of Europe have continued to go unresolved – particularly in countries such as Libya and Ukraine, strategically important for a secure Europe. In other words, the new obstacles of European defense integration are external rather than internal. European governments and citizens are rather exploring the positive implications of integrated European defense; allies such as the US encourage the developments. Obstacles are at a historic low, and opportunity is ripe for cohesion.

Risks

There is certainly risk of overreach. In the short term, though at its nadir, political backlash to the prospect of EU defense could potentially disturb the process if not handled delicately. In the medium term, the European Union faces few real, direct external threats, but even the absence of threats does not allow the dissolution of armies. And mild threats – whether rationally or not is another question – evoke emotions that demand the illusion of protection at a base level; a European army must not be large, but at least exist in some format to protect European citizens and their European rights. The real threat lies in long-term hubris: rampant global adventurism based on an ad hoc method that continually inflates threats and encourages the resolution of universal problems unilaterally.^{12 13 14} Coalitions of the this type, such as the E2I is seeding, must be carefully nurtured and controlled. There must exist a sensitive and sensible framework that limits excursions, and especially restricts any intervention – reactionary, preventative or preemptive, humanitarian, or otherwise – to rules of action. The preparations, tools, and goals must be carefully weighed with the entire spectrum of potential results. Leaders such as French President Macron is correct when he fosters the development of a „European strategic culture“ of European defense¹⁵, but one must be wary when a politician considers a culture, strategic or otherwise, as a universal force for European (or, for example, „global“) good¹⁶ – recent history is rife with interventions and

¹² Buzan, Barry. *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. European Consortium for Political Research Press; 2nd edition, 2008.

¹³ Williams, Michael C. „Words, Images, Enemies, Securitization and International Politics.“ *International Studies Quarterly*(47), 2003:512.

¹⁴ Zwitter, Andrej and Jaap de Wilde. „Prismatic Security Expanding the Copenhagen School to the Local Level,“ Department of International Relations and International Organization (IRIO), University of Groningen, 2010.

¹⁵ Sorbonne speech of Emmanuel Macron, 26 September 2017. Accessed at: <http://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html>

¹⁶ Johnston, Alastair Ian. „Thinking about Strategic Culture,“ *International Security*, 19:4 (1995), pp. 32-64.

global policing missions gone awry. Defense, strictly speaking, need not include offensive interventionism.

Future

Ultimately, the current internal debate within EU member states, with the highest prospects for the greatest success – that is, consensus of a realizable future – should focus on European defense. Providing a hard military security deterrent not only encourages internal convergence for the EU but also projects steadfast, serious commitment to a united Europe in regards to external actors, including adversaries. The resources already exist in the EU, and now remains applying the means to the proper ends. Fulfilling this goal allows the EU to tackle one of its (relatively) easiest thematic goals – unification in diversity – and simultaenously secures domestic values from external threat. If citizens of Europe are Europeans, share pan-European values, and have pan-European rights, and then there must be a pan-European guarantee of security to secure these joint values and rights. The shared defense of Europe in turn promotes EU interests and provides the solid, coherent groundwork to tackle additional challenges in a united manner. Inaction otherwise risks leaving much to uncertainty in a rapidly changing world.