

The Quest for European Strategic Autonomy – A Collective Reflection

by Ester Sabatino, Daniel Fiott, Dick Zandee, Christian Mölling, Claudia Major, Jean-Pierre Maulny, Daniel Keohane and Domenico Moro

ABSTRACT

The year 2020 has been a challenging year not only under a health, social and economic perspective, but also in relation to EU defence. The level of strategic autonomy necessary to satisfy the EU level of ambition has not been reached yet, with consequences on the EU effectiveness to deliver results. Difficulties towards this end have been exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19 and EU member states will need to take into account several factors – from the Brexit impact on defence, towards the lack of military capabilities, to the nuclear landscape in Europe – to let the Strategic Compass be successful in achieving the expected outcomes. This publication is a follow-on of a reflection inaugurated with the online roundtable “Europe of Defence in a New World (Dis)order: Choices for Italy”, held on 11 November 2020. The virtual event has been jointly organised by IAI, Centro Studi sul Federalismo (CSF) and Scuola di Applicazione dell’Esercito. It received the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and took place within the framework of the strategic partnership with the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

*Strategic autonomy | European Union | European defence | Brexit | Nuclear
| Defence industry*

keywords

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· Follow-on of a reflection inaugurated with the online roundtable "Europe of Defence in a World (Dis) Order: Choices for Italy", jointly organised on 11 November 2020 by IAI, Centro Studi sul Federalismo (CSF) and Scuola di Applicazione dell'Esercito, with the support of the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo and of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The paper, produced in the framework of the IAI project "Politiche e strumenti per promuovere l'autonomia strategica dell'Ue nei settori della difesa, del commercio internazionale e dell'allargamento", has benefited from the financial support with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation pursuant to art. 23-bis of Presidential Decree 18/1967. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Introduction

by Ester Sabatino

The year 2020 has been a challenging year not only under a health, social and economic perspective, but also in relation to EU defence. EU member states have had to face numerous challenges and have also been in a position to reach numerous achievements.

The aggressive multipolarism affecting the international arena has been worsened by COVID-19, with some countries trying to exploit the pandemic to their own advantage. The virus crisis also generated grave economic consequences that will most probably affect the defence sector and its industries from the short to long term. At the European level, Brexit became a reality and probably the UK will be completely unbound from the EU by 1 January 2021 but with no specific agreement on defence-related issues.

As for the achievements at the EU level in the defence field, they have been mainly concentrated in the second part of the year, starting from the launch of the Strategic Compass initiative in June, and followed by a long-awaited agreement on the participation of third countries and entities in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects. In addition, PESCO reached the completion of its first phase and is expected to follow the recommendations resulting from its 2020 Strategic Review during its second phase (2021–2025). The latter should also better take into account the collaborative opportunities identified by the recently released 2020 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence report. All these efforts will need to be developed in coherence with the European Defence Fund, to which a 7 billion euro fund has been allocated under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027, with the final aim of reaching European strategic autonomy. In parallel, 2020 has been the year of the Atlantic Alliance reflection process that led to the presentation of the expert group NATO 2030, paving the way for the elaboration of a new strategic concept which may be an opportunity to re-launch NATO–EU cooperation with the support of the new US administration.

The present publication is a follow-on of a reflection inaugurated with the online roundtable “Europe of Defence in a New World (Dis)order: Choices for Italy”, held on 11 November 2020.¹ During the roundtable, the strategic autonomy of the EU and the tools to achieve it have been the subject of debate in the broader framework of transatlantic relations and the current context of aggressive multipolarism aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual event has been jointly organised by IAI, Centro Studi sul Federalismo (CSF) and Scuola di Applicazione dell’Esercito. The event received the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and took place within the framework of the strategic partnership with the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

¹ The event discussed the IAI Paper “Europe of Defence in the New World (Dis)Order: Choices for Italy” co-authored by Ester Sabatino and Alessandro Marrone, November 2020, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/12404>.

1. Going viral? EU defence and the response to COVID-19

by Daniel Fiott

Defence is bracing itself

By now, we are familiar with the serious risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Militaries across Europe have been praised for their role in delivering medical supplies, transporting patients, testing citizens and building makeshift hospitals. Notwithstanding the current second and possible future waves of the virus, however, attention is turning away from response towards the long-term economic implications of the pandemic on European defence. In this respect, many analysts were quick off the mark to document the potential dangers that COVID-19 could have for defence budgets and capability development.² These analysts rightfully pointed out that any future budgetary “black hole” left after the virus would have a dramatic effect on European defence, and more than the 2008 financial crisis ever did.³ The simple math shows what they mean. In 2008, a -4.5 per cent drop in EU GDP resulted in a 24 billion euro fall in defence spending over six years. Today, the European Commission calculates that the EU will experience a -7.2 per cent drop in GDP in 2020 alone.⁴

Yet any fears about defence budget decreases need to be set against the very different threat landscape facing Europe in 2020. The geopolitical trends of 2008 bear no resemblance to today’s challenges. Perhaps this drastically shifting threat landscape will galvanise EU governments to ensure that defence budgets remain on course to rise. There are already positive signals that this could be the case as the governments of France⁵ and Sweden⁶ have either announced spending rises or protected budgets despite the pandemic. Even the UK, now outside the Union,

² See for example, Daniel Fiott, “Will European Defence Survive Coronavirus?”, in *Real Elcano Institute Expert Comments*, No. 11/2020 (27 March 2020), http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/riecano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/commentary-fiott-will-european-defence-survive-coronavirus; Alessandro Marrone and Ottavia Credi, “COVID-19: Which Effects on Defence Policies in Europe?”, in *Documenti IAI*, No. 20|09 (April 2020), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/11538>; Sophia Becker, Christian Mölling and Torben Schütz, “Deterrence and Defense in Times of COVID-19: Europe’s Political Choices”, in *DGAP Policy Briefs*, No. 9 (April 2020), <https://dgap.org/en/node/33657>.

³ For example, Pierre Morcos, “Toward a New ‘Lost Decade’? Covid-19 and Defense Spending in Europe”, in *CSIS Briefs*, October 2020, <https://www.csis.org/node/58498>.

⁴ European Commission, *Autumn 2020 Economic Forecast: Rebound Interrupted as Resurgence of Pandemic Deepens Uncertainty*, 5 November 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2021.

⁵ Christina Mackenzie, “Despite Pressure from Lawmakers and Pandemic, French Defense Budget to Remain Unchanged”, in *Defense News*, 5 October 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/10/05/despite-pressure-from-lawmakers-and-pandemic-french-defense-budget-to-remain-unchanged>.

⁶ “Sweden Plans Massive Boost to Military Budget Amid Growing Tension with Russia”, in *Euronews*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/10/28/sweden-plans-massive-boost-to-military-budget-amid-growing-tension-with-russia>.

has recently announced spending hikes.⁷ A growing awareness of the mounting threats facing the EU could be one of the major reasons why governments safeguard or increase defence spending in the coming months and years. There is also a realisation that defence spending can actually form part of a country's broader economic recovery by stimulating defence research and ensuring work for highly skilled labourers in the sector. Any downwards tick in defence spending is likely to greatly affect ongoing procurement programmes and defence research and innovation.

Making full use of the EU

There is every reason to believe that the EU can play a role in making the case for a retention and increase in defence budgets. Keep in mind that the Union has just completed its first ever "threat analysis" and the EU's own intelligence services have presented a sobering analysis to governments. The analysis lays the foundation for the Strategic Compass, which will – through 2021 until early 2022 – set out the EU's security and defence priorities for crisis management, resilience, capabilities and partnerships. Included in the list of threats is an emphasis on the fact that the EU "might also face an increase of the actual use of military force", especially given the growing "military potential of various actors". As the EU's intelligence services make clear, the "threat analysis demonstrates that the EU's work to further strengthen its security and defence policy is not a luxury, but highly necessary".⁸ The message is clear: the pandemic is likely to aggravate a number of worrying security trends, so now is not the time to revise defence budgets.

In this respect, the EU offers its member states a range of cooperative mechanisms that can be used to ensure more "bang for the buck" in defence capability development. In particular, Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund offer member states the opportunity to jointly develop capabilities against carefully defined political benchmarks and with the prospect of financial support. The EU's tools allow for two specific possibilities: 1) that should defence budgets decline, then the Union can help member states manage capability planning with a view to avoiding misplaced programme cuts or capability duplication; or 2) that should defence budgets survive the virus and increase, then the EU can offer member states collaborative platforms to ensure that capabilities meet military shortfalls at the EU level and support the relative defence technological and industrial base. In this sense, to meet the challenges of COVID-19 the member states do not need to reinvent the wheel – they simply need to invest in the very EU security and defence mechanisms they insisted on creating.⁹

⁷ "UK Announces Biggest Military Spending Boost Since Cold War", in *Deutsche Welle*, 19 November 2020, <https://p.dw.com/p/3lYIU>.

⁸ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Memo. Questions and Answers: Threat Analysis – A Background for the Strategic Compass*, 20 November 2020, <https://europa.eu/!mY64uR>.

⁹ Daniel Fiott, "Covid-19 Should Mean More European Defence Cooperation", in *European Defence Matters*, No. 19 (2020), p. 12-13, https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-magazine/edm19_web.

More European cooperation on defence is required, as the task facing the EU on defence capabilities is daunting. As the recent PESCO strategic review reveals, the member states still need to ensure that EU defence tools are fully integrated into national defence planning and that PESCO projects meet jointly acknowledged capability shortfalls under the High Impact Capability Goals and the Capability Development Plan. As it stands, the PESCO strategic review acknowledges that only 23 (or 55 per cent) of the current batch of 47 PESCO projects will be delivered by 2025.¹⁰ The picture is not made less challenging when one reads the first full report of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, which states that only 50 per cent of current member state capability priorities actually address the High Impact Capability Goals and the Union's military level of ambition.¹¹

Despite this acknowledgement of the harsh reality, however, the EU is working hard to address the capability gaps so that the Union can strengthen its strategic autonomy. For example, even if only half of the current batch of PESCO projects will be developed by 2025, these projects are important as they deal with gaps in Europe's maritime surveillance, cyber, radio navigation, space and logistics capabilities. Furthermore, even though the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) has revealed the distance between rhetoric and reality in EU defence it still details 55 collaborative opportunities in capability development that can be advanced by member states, including capabilities such as a main battle tank, soldier systems, patrol vessels, counter drones, defence in space and military mobility. CARD has also uncovered 56 further options for defence research and innovation cooperation in artificial intelligence, cyber defence, sensors, emerging materials, robotics and more. It should not be forgotten that the preparatory programmes for the European Defence Fund (EDF) are already in motion too: the Preparatory Action on Defence Research is financing defence research projects worth 90 million euro and by the end of 2020 the European Defence Industrial Development Programme will have dispersed calls worth 500 million euro for capability development. Things are therefore starting to stir in EU security and defence.

Staying the course

Yet, one should not be naïve about the challenges facing EU security and defence. The tools developed since 2016 are not some automatic vaccination against the risk of greater nationalism in defence. Indeed, the EDF is dependent on member state contributions under its so-called "capability window", as EU funds will only be used to leverage government investments. In this sense, while there is a debate about whether 7 billion euro over 2021–2027 will be enough, the real

¹⁰ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the PESCO Strategic Review 2020* (13188/20), 20 November 2020, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13188-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

¹¹ European Defence Agency (EDA), *2020 CARD Report. Executive Summary*, November 2020, <https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/reports/card-2020-executive-summary-report.pdf>.

challenge is unlocking additional member state investments under the Fund.¹² A similar challenge faces PESCO because whereas some projects may be held up as capability contributions in the fight against the virus (e.g., medical hubs or Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear), there is a risk that project investments dry up as national governments feel any potential budgetary pinch. Furthermore, as PESCO's 20 binding commitments are assessed on a collective basis there is a need to avoid the "free rider" dilemma, where states that cut budgets hide behind those that increase them. In this sense, no amount of rhetoric about the promise of EU security and defence tools can substitute for consistent and dedicated political and financial support from the member states.

Past ways of looking at defence cooperation will not help Europe today. Should defence budgets increase, then governments may shy away from Europe-wide efforts in order to ensure that the money remains within national borders. Another risk is that increased defence spending will simply lead to duplication, resulting in the all too familiar challenges of a lack of interoperability, rising costs and missed collaborative defence innovation opportunities. Ironically, these very same trends and results can occur with decreased defence budgets too. Either way, a return to defence nationalism may secure short-term national gains but at the expense of Europe's longer-term geopolitical and technological position. Of course, both PESCO and the EDF do not do away with national interests or competition over what capability projects should be supported at the EU level (and between what partners). Yet, what the EU offers is its convening power and financial resources to ensure that capabilities meet concrete operational needs, while also ensuring the overall health of the defence technological and industrial base in the EU. Ultimately, PESCO and the EDF's unique mix of political commitments and financial incentives are a new means through which to develop closer EU defence cooperation. Given the threats the EU faces, there is no option but to work more closely together.

¹² European Council, *Special Meeting of the European Council* (17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 July 2020) – Conclusions (EUCO 10/20), 21 July 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45109/210720-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>.

2. More European military capabilities for a more autonomous Europe

by Dick Zandee

In recent years the debate on European strategic autonomy has been sullied by the black and white presentation of a choice between Europe “with the US” or Europe “going alone”. The picture is neither black nor white. The changing world order implies that the era of the Pax Americana has come to an end. The rise of China and other emerging powers has resulted in a relative decline of the dominant position of the US in global affairs. The darkest years of US foreign policy – economic protectionism, anti-multilateralism, friendly relations with autarkic rulers and undermining the unity of the West – may soon come to an end, but the trends in the world order will continue. The Asian 21st century will continue to dictate the priorities for the US when President-elect Biden has entered the White House. Further erosion of the Alliance is likely to be halted, but American pressure on Europe to take more responsibility for its own security – including increased investment in defence – will not disappear. The pivot to Asia started under President Obama, not under Trump. A scenario in which the US could be engaged in an armed conflict in East Asia and would not defend Europe (or with limited means) is no longer unthinkable. The issue is not so much if NATO is brain dead – it is not. The real issue is that Europe’s defence under the Alliance’s umbrella increasingly demands a higher European versus a lower American contribution.

The EU as a geopolitical actor

The other driver of a greater effort by Europe in security and defence is the aim of the EU to become a geopolitical actor alongside the world’s main competing powers: China, Russia and the US. In order to play such a role, the EU has to be able to apply all elements constituting power: political, economic, financial, military and others. The EU is a true “union” and is already a global actor when it comes to economics, trade and finance, but not in the field of security and defence. In the past two decades the EU has only launched relatively small military operations, in the lower parts of the force spectrum and in recent years increasingly of a training and assistance nature. The more than 223 billion euro that EU countries spend annually on defence¹³ is a considerable amount of money. Yet, the output remains poor despite all efforts by the European Defence Agency and member states to increase multinational defence cooperation. Initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation are commendable, but they lack sufficient direction and some European countries are using this access as the multinational playground for purely nationally driven acquisition projects. Anno 2020, the EU continues to lack military power and, despite the available instruments, member states are too slow in making progress to improve European military capabilities. The assessment of the EU institutions is that “the European defence landscape continues to be

¹³ EDA, *Defence Data 2017-2018. Key Findings and Analysis*, 16 December 2019, <https://www.eda.europa.eu/info-hub/publications/publication-details/pub/defence-data-2017-2018>.

fragmented and lacks coherence in several aspects notably as regards defence capabilities and their development”.¹⁴ The Council concluded in November 2020 that progress with regard to PESCO was assessed “as not sufficient, namely on operational commitments and on those related to the European collaborative approach”.¹⁵ Without addressing this persistent problem, the aim of becoming a geopolitical actor will remain a dream. When woken up by a serious crisis – near or further away from Europe’s borders – the EU will not be able to protect and, if needed, to defend the interests of its citizens. Rather, it is bound to drift off into irrelevance; the real global powers will determine its fate. Strategic autonomy is not a choice, it is a necessity to become less dependent on the US for Europe’s territorial defence – arranged by NATO – as well as for the ability to act alone when needed.

More strategic autonomy

The aim of European strategic autonomy is not a decoupling of the US or “going alone”. American involvement in European security remains essential. However, in order to protect its own interests Europe should also be able to act alone. For the EU, this implies that the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) can no longer be limited to the small-scale and lower spectrum type of military operations. A geopolitical EU needs a more serious military level of ambition, not only for operations in conflict zones – such as northern Africa and the Sahel – but also for the protection of its economic interests, particularly in the Indo-Pacific area. The dual aim of strengthening NATO and backing up a geopolitical EU with military means is what European strategic autonomy should entail. It is not about “absolute autonomy”, but – in the words of EU High Representative Josep Borrell – “a certain degree of autonomy”.¹⁶ In fact, its aim is to increase the EU’s already existing autonomy in security and defence to a much higher level. In that sense “more European strategic autonomy” is a better label.

Military level of ambition

Although there are enormous challenges for the EU in terms of speeding up decision-making and adjusting the institutional structures to become a more effective geopolitical player, the biggest shortcoming is the lack of adequate military capabilities. The ongoing Strategic Compass exercise – running from 2020 to 2022 – has the purpose of defining the goals and objectives of the (generally phrased) level of ambition in the EU Global Strategy of June 2016. The central question is whether the Strategic Compass will result in a new update of the CSDP tasks, dating back to the 1990s, or if the CSDP will be adapted more fundamentally to the changed security environment of the 21st century. Diverging security interests between the member states might block the latter, as countries in eastern Europe will fear

¹⁴ EDA, 2020 CARD Report. Executive Summary, cit., p. 1.

¹⁵ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the PESCO Strategic Review 2020*, cit., point 2.

¹⁶ Eszter Zalan, “Borrell: EU Doesn’t Need to Choose between US and China”, in *EUobserver*, 2 June 2020, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/148520>.

an effect of undermining NATO. Furthermore, it remains essential to engage the post-Brexit United Kingdom as well as non-EU NATO countries such as Norway in European security and defence, which requires – next to the EU – a European effort. The solution of this puzzle lies in (i) adding to the EU military level of ambition the contribution of the non-EU European Allies and (ii) bringing that combined effort into the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) as “the European military level of ambition” under the roof of the Alliance. Suggestions that the European Allies should deliver half of the NATO military level of ambition have been made before.¹⁷ This delivers a clear output target for transatlantic burden-sharing, next to NATO’s 2 per cent input target. However, this NATO-half cannot constitute the EU’s military level of ambition for the simple reason that it includes the contributions of the UK, Norway and other non-EU European Allies. Furthermore, it is up to the EU itself to decide on its own military level of ambition, based on its own threat analysis – the first step in the Strategic Compass exercise. Once the Council has formally adopted decisions on the outcome of this exercise, it should not only serve as the new basis for the EU’s capability development instruments but also be introduced into the NDPP as the EU contribution to the Alliance’s military level of ambition. Coordination with the non-EU European Allies will be required to add their contributions to the EU total in order to constitute together the 50 per cent European output target. Nevertheless, it will set an ambitious military level of ambition for the EU. Half of the NATO target means that the EU member states should be able to deliver the larger part for one major joint operation and three smaller operations. As the EU should be able to conduct a major operation-minus and perhaps two smaller operations autonomously and, if needed, at the high end of the spectrum, this is a challenging military level of ambition. It requires sustained political, financial, military and defence-industrial efforts, to which member states should commit themselves, with the European Council reviewing progress regularly and taking additional decisions when needed.

The way ahead

The election of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the US should not lead to resuming the “business of the past” whereby Europe would leave the main defence effort for its own security to Washington. This is no longer an option in a changing world order, in which Europe will have to take care of its own security, preferably with the US but alone when needed. The “business of the future” has to consist of a much higher contribution by Europe to NATO while at the same time building up its own military capabilities in support of its role as a geopolitical actor. The two can go together – and unite rather than split the European countries – by connecting the military level of ambition for EU/European strategic autonomy in the security and defence field to that of the Alliance.

¹⁷ Hans Binnendijk and Gene Germanovich, “NATO Needs a European Level of Ambition”, in *Defense News*, 7 December 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/2018/12/07/nato-needs-a-european-level-of-ambition>; Dick Zandee, “Resetting NATO and European Strategic Autonomy”, in *Clingendael Alerts*, December 2019, <https://www.clingendael.org/node/10959>.

3. The EU's Strategic Compass – Showing the way forward to a Union more capable to act

by Christian Mölling and Claudia Major

The nascent EU Strategic Compass can help define a more concrete and updated level of ambition if member states and institutions manage the related challenges successfully.

The Compass in a nutshell

Over the last years, the EU has launched numerous initiatives in the field of security and defence, from PESCO to EDF, that are now running in parallel. To ensure that they all contribute to a common objective, the EU is currently embarking on another process – the Strategic Compass.¹⁸ It should act both as a guide to shape CSDP and Common Foreign and Security Policy, and as a measurement to assess progress.

Particularly the military planners hope that the Strategic Compass (SC) will lead to a more concrete and updated level of ambition (LoA) that will enable better capability planning in the EU. From that perspective, the SC could be a small, but important, step to allow the EU states to finally make the EU fit for a future that promises more crises and more complex conflicts. After years of unproductive talk over autonomy and sovereignty, the SC could finally pave the way for the much needed practical implementation.

Given the ambivalent EU track record in implementing policies in this area,¹⁹ the endeavour could end in three ways:

1. The SC provides guidance for where and how the EU should build capacities to act. It should be possible to do so at least for military capabilities. However, as crises and conflicts become ever more systemic and involve a broad bandwidth of tools, the EU needs to involve more actors. A new LoA would require the EU to include stakeholders from non-military areas in the process from the beginning. The objective would be to come up with a revamped version of the integrated approach that links various actors and instruments in a coordinated and coherent manner.
2. If run perfectly, the SC is an opportunity to overcome the stalemate in strategic discussions and policy developments that results from the recent battle over narratives like autonomy and sovereignty.
3. The SC can also fail: It will add just another document to the fast-growing library of EU declarations on security and defence that will never see implementation because member states or EU institutions prevent it from becoming reality.

¹⁸ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Security and Defence* (8910/20), Brussels, 17 June 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44521/st08910-en20.pdf>.

¹⁹ Daniel Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020. The EU's Legacy and Ambition in Security and Defence*, Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, March 2020, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2423>.

The SC can help to make headway – that is, moving towards options a) and b) – if it puts content first and ideology last. It also needs to factor in that states will never fully agree on either a shared strategic outlook or related priorities. But they all want to remain capable and therefore need partners for cooperation because they are too weak to act on their own – the SC should capitalise on this motivation. However, a realistic approach also means recognising that the national reflex will persist. Thus, the process has to strike a fine balance between policy ambition and inclusiveness of member states' interests.

Level of ambition and capability development: Content and sequencing matters

The first step has been taken by finishing the classified threat analysis in autumn 2020.²⁰ The sanitised public version was indeed not a surprise, as the differences between the member states are well known. Still, if all member states agree on this understanding of the threat environment, a first common point of reference exists. Such an agreement would already be a huge leap forward.

The next element in the SC process is the so-called *strategic dialogue*.²¹ During the Portuguese and Slovenian EU presidencies in 2021, this dialogue aims to generate the policy substance: what should the EU strive for in four areas, also referred to as baskets in the SC. These include crisis management, protecting EU citizens, capability development and partnerships. These four baskets will provide the conceptual basis to shape the design and implementation of those capabilities needed to protect and pursue EU interests.

Therefore, it is necessary to see the *four baskets* in relation to each other: *crisis management* and *protecting EU citizens* are about the LoA: What does the EU need to and want to have? Which threats and risks does the EU have to engage with to protect its interests and values? Answering these questions requires clear priorities on what core values are and which interests need to be protected. The baskets *capabilities* and *partnerships* would define the means or capabilities needed to be able to implement the first two baskets: be it indirectly, through partnerships, or directly, through capability development and cooperation. This also implies a sequencing: baskets one and two need to be drafted to inform baskets three and

²⁰ Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, *Videoconference of EU Defence Ministers: Threat Analysis and Strategic Compass Among Milestones Reached*, 20 November 2020, <https://www.eu2020.de/eu2020-en/2418890>; Daniel Fiott, "Uncharted Territory? Towards a Common Threat Analysis and a Strategic Compass For EU Security and Defence", in *EUISS Policy Briefs*, No. 16 (July 2020), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2457>.

²¹ For further information on the process see: Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, "Europe, Germany and Defense: Priorities and Challenges of the German EU Presidency and the Way Ahead for European Defense", in *Notes de la FRS*, No. 63/2020 (13 October 2020), <https://www.frstrategie.org/en/node/3812>; Nicole Koenig, "The EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence: Just Another Paper?", in *Hertie School Policy Papers*, July 2020, <https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-hsog/frontdoor/index/index/docId/3582>.

four. Doing the work simultaneously could jeopardise the whole process.

Two key challenges: Addressing the future of conflict and EU-NATO relations

To avoid failure and manage expectations, the EU SC needs to be seen in the overall political and strategic context. There are many serious challenges, like a new US administration, a self-referential debate about autonomy and sovereignty in Europe, and an ongoing reflection process in NATO that is likely to lead to a new strategic concept. But two issues stand out: To what extent does the level of ambition take into account the future of conflict? How will capabilities and partnerships be defined in the context of a sub-optimal EU-NATO relationship?

Level of ambition: Future of conflict

Not only the way conflicts are carried out, but also escalation and conflict prevention dynamics have changed and will continue to do so. Ten years ago, cyber-attacks and information operations against missions were a marginal issue. Today they are a challenge, yet again in 10 years' time they will be normal and new challenges will have arisen. In general, we should expect more non-military means being used to win conflicts. This points towards a greater use of tools like trade or export controls that are beyond the classical toolbox of EU crisis management.

EU-NATO division of labour

It is impossible to define European security without defining and consenting to the role of NATO. This is especially salient in view of the current broad division of labour between NATO and the EU: NATO is in charge of allied deterrence and defence whereas the EU concerns itself with crisis management – and only when the USA or NATO do not want to be engaged. In addition, states increasingly use a third option: coalitions of the willing.

Currently, EU-NATO relations are at a low point. This is bad news, because if the full spectrum of instruments is not available or those instruments lack coordination, Europe's security suffers. More practically speaking, NATO is entering into the definition phase of a new Political Guidance, which is similar to the SC the EU is currently developing. As a further consequence, the EU would have to synchronise its capability development processes internally as well.

Recommendations

Synchronise EU and NATO worlds: If the SC is to contribute to European security, it needs to relate to NATO, its 2030 process, the upcoming NATO Political Guidance and the next round of the NATO Defence Planning Process. The objectives should be transparency, synchronisation of timelines and the utmost possible overlap in strategic assessment and conclusions.

Those EU countries that are also NATO allies should spearhead the synchronisation among EU and NATO. They should informally discuss the EU threat assessment and seek agreement on how this could inform the input of NATO members into the Political Guidance and NDPP processes.

This could also be a starting point to discuss a future division of labour and contribution of capabilities to the security needs identified by the other organisation. NATO will need the soft skills of the EU ever increasingly – you cannot shoot a hybrid threat. The final aim could be to agree on a single set of forces/capabilities and on a widened scope of what is needed in future deterrence and defence. To show that the EU takes the SC seriously, it would have to let its own Headline Goal Process, CARD, PESCO and EDF synchronise with the timing of the SC and its outcomes. Otherwise, the SC will be isolated from the rest of the capability development.

Revamping a comprehensive approach within and beyond the EU: Putting the future of conflict at the heart of the SC would be key for an appropriate capability profile. Yet, it is also a major challenge with regard to the inclusiveness and thus to the political commitment that EU states will have to show when it comes to the next steps after the SC. In a maximum version, the EU would aim to engage in essential conflicts with a comprehensive toolbox. This would inevitably need to go beyond the Union and its members to include key partners, such as the UK, but possibly also some geographically distant countries, like Japan and Australia.

A stepping-stone and more in line with the evolutionary trajectory of the EU in security would be to use the SC to prepare, at least in the CSDP, for an integrated LoA. This would include identifying jointly the capability profiles with civilian and military elements. While this is already a huge challenge for the EU, a truly conflict-appropriate approach would also need to assure involving other EU instruments that are not part of the CSDP, such as economic or trade instruments.

The Strategic Compass opens a 12-month window for the EU to finally live up to its ambition in international affairs. This ambition is no longer a free choice without consequences. It is about what the EU and its member states at minimum need to have and need to change in order to deliver what they exist for. Otherwise they might lose their legitimacy derived from providing solutions to existential challenges for their citizens. If EU institutions and states again fail to deliver, they will further threaten their legitimacy and therefore eventually lose power.

4. The 2020 nuclear landscape in Europe

by Jean-Pierre Maulny

NATO's strategic concept adopted in 2010 lays the foundations for Europe's stance on nuclear weapons. The message in Lisbon was loud and clear: "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance" with the understanding that "The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies."²²

It is true that the strategic cards have been redealt since 2010, mainly with the annexing of Crimea by Russia and the UK's exit from the European Union. Yet, at a time when the EU has decided to take the first step in setting out its defence objectives, logically culminating in the adoption of a new security policy (the Strategic Compass slated for publication in 2022) and at a time when NATO's Secretary-General, backed by a group of experts, is undertaking a reflection process to further strengthen the Alliance's political dimension, the role of nuclear weapons as a component of EU security seems to be taken for granted.

The reason behind this is that the nuclear arms situation has taken a serious turn for the worse both in Europe and globally: disarmament is not at the top of the agenda, quite the opposite in fact – the world is in the throes of an arms race. On the European stage, the US withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty on 1 August 2019 and Russia is busy upgrading its nuclear arsenal and even developing disruptive capabilities: the highly manoeuvrable Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle, the Poseidon autonomous underwater drone and the Kinzhal air-launched ballistic missile.²³ There is a risk of Iran abandoning the commitments of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed in July 2015, but it can be hoped that the new US President Joe Biden overturns Donald Trump's decision to pull the US out of the JCPOA, which should prompt Iran to halt its nuclear programme in return for the lifting of US sanctions.²⁴ Outside Europe, there is no reason to believe that the three non-signatories of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons – Pakistan, India and Israel – will be prepared to give up a weapon which they see as a bastion of safety. In Asia, China is modernising its nuclear capabilities and North Korean President Kim Jong-Un will no doubt continue to pursue his atomic tit-for-tat with the new US President

²² NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon*, 19 November 2010, points 17-18, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm.

²³ US Congressional Research Service, "Russia's Nuclear Weapons: Doctrine, Forces, and Modernization", in *CRS Reports*, No. R45861 (20 July 2020), <https://fas.org/spp/crs/nuke/R45861.pdf>.

²⁴ Joe Biden, "There's a Smarter Way to Be Tough on Iran", in *CNN Opinions*, 13 September 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/13/opinions/smarter-way-to-be-tough-on-iran-joe-biden>.

in order to keep his regime afloat.

So, the current context is not conducive to complacency. A sign of the times, ten years ago when NATO drew up its 2010 strategic concept, Germany was lobbying to start negotiations to eradicate tactical nuclear weapons and advocated withdrawing B-61 nuclear bombs. A decade later, in April 2020, Germany decided to procure 30 F-18 combat aircrafts capable of carrying B-61 bombs in order to replace its Tornado.

The UK may have opted to wave goodbye to the EU but still remains a member of NATO. Since the Ottawa Summit in 1974, the role of French and British independent nuclear forces has been referred to, time and time again, as being key to bolstering the security of the Atlantic Alliance. This principle was reaffirmed in NATO's 2010 strategic concept and was one of the messages contained in the final declaration issued in July 2018 to mark the NATO Brussels Summit.²⁵

The UK and France have both started upgrading their nuclear capabilities. The British are farther ahead as the aim is to phase out Vanguard-class submarines in 2030. Feasibility studies on a new submarine kicked off in 2011 and five years later the UK Parliament rubber stamped the nuclear deterrent renewal programme involving the construction of four new Dreadnought-class submarines at a cost estimated at 31 billion pounds.²⁶ In 2018, the UK National Audit Office warned of a 2.9 billion pounds shortfall over a ten-year period.²⁷ The funding gap for the Dreadnought programme is just one illustration of the questionable ability of the UK to bankroll the capabilities outlined in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review. Year in year out, National Audit Office reports bemoan the chronic underfunding of ongoing capacity building programmes,²⁸ a reality acknowledged by Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.²⁹ The announcement, made by prime minister Boris Johnson in November 2020, to increase the overall defence budget by 24.1 billion pounds over four years seems to bring a solution to this budgetary dilemma.³⁰

²⁵ NATO, *Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11-12 July 2018*, 11 July 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

²⁶ Claire Mills, "Replacing the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: Progress of the Dreadnought Class", in *House of Commons Library Briefings*, No. 8010 (17 July 2020), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8010>.

²⁷ UK National Audit Office, *The Defence Nuclear Enterprise: A Landscape Review*, 22 May 2018, <https://www.nao.org.uk/?p=72915>.

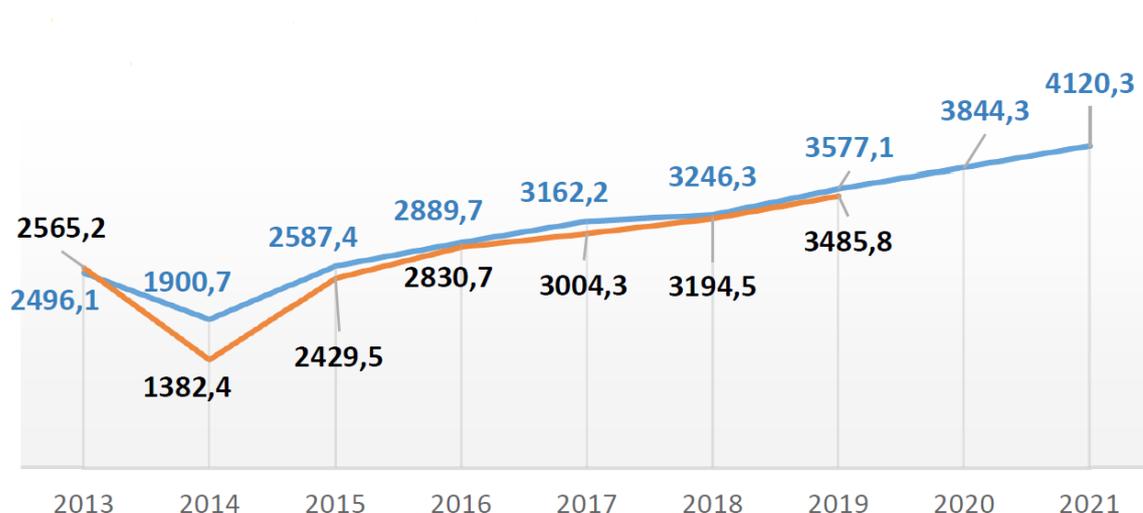
²⁸ UK National Audit Office, *The Equipment Plan 2019 to 2029*, 27 February 2020, <https://www.nao.org.uk/?p=94977>.

²⁹ Richard Wheeler, Sophie Morris and George Ryan, "Wallace Denies Plans to Slash Armed Forces Numbers Amid Commons Concern", in *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 July 2020, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/uk/wallace-denies-plans-to-slash-armed-forces-numbers-amid-commons-concern-39344206.html>.

³⁰ UK Government, *PM to Announce Largest Military Investment in 30 Years*, 19 November 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-to-announce-largest-military-investment-in-30-years>.

France’s scheduled revamp of the components of its nuclear deterrent will require deployment of the new assets in 2035, somewhat later than its British counterparts. France nevertheless plans to replace its nuclear warheads, build a new generation of submarines and develop a successor to the Air-Sol Moyenne Portée (ASMP-A) cruise missile launched from the Rafale and later the Future Combat Air System (FCAS) – all in one fell swoop. Just as in the UK, a parliamentary report in 2017 questioned the affordability of these programmes planned for 2025/2030 and suggested staggering the heavy financial burden which could easily reach 5.5/6 billion euro a year from 2025 onwards, roughly a third of French defence investment spending at that time – hardly a paltry sum.³¹ However in order to renew the assets of deterrence in 2035, the military planning law 2019–2025 planned to increase the defence budget to reach the objective of 2 per cent of GDP in 2025 (1.79 per cent in 2018). The funds dedicated to deterrence are already growing as shown in the table below.³²

Figure 1 | Funds allocated (blue) and spent (orange) for deterrence (million euro)



Source: François Cornut-Gentille, “Défense: préparation de l’avenir”, cit., p. 175.

Brexit makes France the only nuclear power in the EU, which implies shouldering an even greater burden in defending the continent. Since the end of the Cold War, French policy has juggled between seeking possible nuclear defence cooperation with the UK and courting EU partners such as Germany, with the aim of embarking on dialogue on the French nuclear deterrent with the provision that the final say

³¹ Xavier Pintat et al., “La modernisation de la dissuasion nucléaire”, in *Rapport d’information* (French Senate), No. 560 (23 May 2017), <http://www.senat.fr/notice-rapport/2016/r16-560-notice.html>.

³² François Cornut-Gentille, “Défense: préparation de l’avenir”, annex 3 to Laurent Saint-Martin, “Rapport sur le Projet de loi de finances pour 2021”, in *Rapport* (French National Assembly), No. 3389, 8 October 2020, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_fin/l15b3399-tiii-a13_rapport-fond.

on its use lies with the French president as Commander-in-Chief of the French armed forces.

Cooperation between France and the UK never stretched to equipment such as nuclear submarines due to clauses restricting the disclosure of classified information in the agreements signed by the UK with the US on the Trident missiles deployed on British submarines. However, the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties between France and the UK did provide for a joint test facility to ensure the safety of their nuclear warheads.³³

The successive French presidents who have come to power since the end of the Cold War have always let it be understood that France's vital interests defended by nuclear forces did not stop at the French border. Emmanuel Macron said as much in his speech on the nuclear deterrent on 7 February 2020:

Our nuclear forces have a deterrent effect in themselves, particularly in Europe. They strengthen the security of Europe through their very existence and they have, in this sense, a truly European dimension. [...] Let's be clear: France's vital interests now have a European dimension.³⁴

He took the opportunity to reach out to other EU countries:

In this spirit, I would like strategic dialogue to develop with our European partners, which are ready for it, on the role played by France's nuclear deterrence in our collective security. European partners which are willing to walk that road can be associated with the exercises of French deterrence forces.³⁵

This desire for transparency and cooperation regarding nuclear deterrence explained in the Macron speech has two objectives. The first is to demonstrate that French nuclear weapons should not set France apart from its EU partners. As France did not re-join the NATO Nuclear Planning Group when it returned to the integrated military command in 2009, it feels the need to demonstrate that its deterrent is not intended to bolster French sovereignty at the expense of nascent EU sovereignty at a time when the only other European nuclear power, the UK, is leaving the EU.

³³ UK and France, *Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic Relating to Joint Radiographic/Hydrodynamics Facilities*, London, 2 November 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/treaty-between-the-uk-and-france-relating-to-radiographichydrodynamics-facilities>.

³⁴ Emmanuel Macron, *Speech of the President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy*, 7 February 2020, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/news/2020/article/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-emmanuel-macron-on-the-defense-and>.

³⁵ Ibid.

The second is to prove the credibility of the French nuclear deterrent while playing the transparency card. It is not intended to be a substitute for US nuclear capability under the NATO umbrella, but rather a complement to it. At a time when transatlantic relations have taken a battering from former President Donald Trump and the US is urging Europe to take its destiny into its own hands in terms of security, it is important to show that France is committed, alongside its EU partners, to defending Europe by means of its nuclear arsenal.

The question that remains is the extent of US engagement in European security with its nuclear power. US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty was bad news for Europe as, even if Russia's testing and potential deployment of SSC-8/9M729 cruise missiles would be considered a breach of the treaty, it nonetheless formed a cornerstone of European security. This would make the EU dependent on the resumption of talks between Russia and the US on intermediate-range nuclear missiles unless – ideally – it succeeds in getting its views on disarmament issues heard, bearing in mind that continued US nuclear engagement in Europe and the future of the transatlantic partnership currently hangs on the B-61 bombs deployed in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Turkey as no clear decision has, as yet, been taken regarding the deployment of further nuclear US forces.

In conclusion, the great nuclear weapons debate on European security does not stray very far from the general narrative that suggests that Europe needs to better handle its own security in the coming years while maintaining strong links over the pond. The only specific issues relate to the particular responsibility borne by France as the EU's sole nuclear power and the overriding necessity for Europe to overcome its chronic incapacity to voice an opinion on the role arms control measures could play on the European security landscape.

5. The impact of Brexit on EU defence

by Daniel Keohane

Brexit has occurred while European governments face a challenging confluence of security crises alongside a pandemic. Moreover, those who believe that because the UK remains a nuclear-armed member of NATO, nothing much should change for European defence might have reason to reconsider in early 2021.

At the time of writing, there remains a strong prospect of a no-trade-deal Brexit, along with the UK not fully implementing the already-agreed withdrawal agreement.³⁶ If that double-no Brexit deal came to pass, it could hinder European military cooperation because it could greatly strain political relationships with other European allies, especially with the next leading military powers in NATO-Europe: France, Germany and Italy.³⁷

So far relations at NATO have thankfully been “Brexit-proof”, and the hope is they would remain so. Moreover, if the Brexit transition is ultimately handled constructively, based on mutual agreement, military collaboration could become one of the most fruitful areas for cooperation between the UK and the EU post-Brexit. For example, the UK (and the British defence industry) will likely be interested in participating in partly EU-funded capability projects via the European Defence Fund.

More specifically, that Brexit reduces the potential usefulness of EU security and defence policies should be self-evident, since the UK is among the three largest European military spenders in NATO. Indeed, post-Brexit, non-EU members now account for around 80 per cent of collective NATO defence spending.³⁸ But this is not only – or even primarily – an issue of military capabilities, for which the UK is a key provider in Europe. Brexit is helping accelerate a trend of the last decade, the ongoing reduction of the EU’s commitment to international peacekeeping.

At first glance, this line of argument might seem counterintuitive. True, the UK was not a major contributor to most EU military operations, apart from leading the counter-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden, and during the initial phase of the EU peacekeeping mission in Bosnia (run with NATO). But those facts alone may encourage missing the wood for the trees.

³⁶ Daniel Keohane, “A Terrible Border Is Reborn? Ireland and a No Deal Brexit”, in *CER Insights*, 25 September 2020, <https://www.cer.eu/node/8750>.

³⁷ Daniel Keohane et al., “Brexit and European Insecurity”, in Oliver Thränert and Martin Zapfe (eds), *Strategic Trends 2017. Key Developments in Global Affairs*, Zurich, ETH Center for Security Studies, March 2017, p. 55-72, <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000170131>.

³⁸ Jens Stoltenberg, *NATO at 70 - The Bedrock of European and Transatlantic Security*, Speech at the Körber Global Leaders Dialogue, Berlin, 7 November 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_170606.htm.

The aim of EU foreign and security policies is to replace the law of force with the force of law. Sometimes that requires the use of military force to implement international law, and at the behest of the UN, the EU has been able to quickly respond to some crises, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003, and protecting over 400,000 refugees and displaced people fleeing from the Darfur conflict into Chad during 2008–09. It responded rapidly to the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 to shore up a ceasefire. Since 2008, the EU counter-piracy operation on the waters off Somalia has dramatically reduced the number of attacks on both World Food Program and Eurasian maritime trade ships.

In addition, based on their difficulties during the Balkan wars in the 1990s, part of the inspiration for France and the UK to propose an EU defence policy in 1998 was to ensure that Europeans could carry out high-intensity military operations without American help if necessary. As described above, the EU undertook some reasonably testing missions during the 2000s,³⁹ such as in Congo in 2003 and Chad in 2008, and many observers suggested at the time that the EU should be prepared to conduct more intense operations in the future.⁴⁰

In principle, the 2011 Libyan crisis was ready-made for an EU-led response, especially since the Pentagon was cautious about a US intervention. In practice, the US ultimately decided to join Britain and France in a NATO operation in mid-March 2011. As a result of this inability to act, the then French foreign minister Alain Juppé reportedly said that EU defence policy was dead.⁴¹

This has not proven exactly right, since the policy still exists, and the EU continues to carry out (small) military operations. But the aspiration for the EU to lead robust military interventions disappeared into the Libyan sands in 2011. With one of the two initiators of that Libya operation now gone from the EU, the potential for a credible rediscovery of that ambition has probably departed with the UK.

Since 2011, the EU has not initiated any substantial peacekeeping operations. Compare the UN and EU missions in Mali for example. The UN mission is prepared for combat if necessary, whereas the EU operation is focused on training. All that before including the much more robust French-led multinational operation across the Sahel (Barkhane, to which the UK has also been contributing). Instead, the EU has since shifted its operational focus to a military role in protecting the European homeland, namely in the Mediterranean with operation Sophia, which has saved thousands of lives of migrants crossing from Libya to Malta and Italy, then replaced by operation Irini.

³⁹ Giovanni Grevi, Damien Helly and Daniel Keohane (eds), *European Security and Defence Policy. The First 10 Years (1999-2009)*, Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, October 2009, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/611>.

⁴⁰ Daniel Keohane and Tomas Valasek, "Willing and Able? EU Defence in 2020", in *CER EU 2020 Essais*, June 2008, <https://www.cer.eu/node/905>.

⁴¹ Timothy Garton Ash, "France Plays Hawk, Germany Demurs. Libya Has Exposed Europe's Fault Lines", in *The Guardian*, 24 March 2011, <https://gu.com/p/2zxcg>.

When the PESCO mechanism was first conceived in the early 2000s (during the European Convention, a body which drafted what became the Lisbon treaty), the idea was that France and the UK, then the EU's leading military powers, would define an exclusive set of criteria. This way London and Paris would set the military operations gold standard that others would aim to meet.⁴²

However, over time the UK lost interest in using the PESCO mechanism, in part due to a desire to ensure NATO remained the paramount defence institution in Europe following intra-European divisions over the 2003 Iraq war, in part because of France's return to NATO's military command in 2009, and in part because Germany and some other member-states (in the now enlarged EU) wanted an inclusive not exclusive PESCO. Instead the UK preferred to pursue deeper bilateral military cooperation with France based on the 2010 Lancaster House treaties. In a way, those Anglo-French treaties are a type of PESCO outside the EU, since they produce a permanent and structured form of military cooperation between London and Paris.

With the departure of the UK from the EU, alongside the considerable differences in strategic culture between France, Germany, Italy and Spain (and the other 23 EU governments), it is difficult to believe that the now capability-focused PESCO mechanism – in which 25 out of 27 EU members are participating – will add much concrete military value to EU security efforts beyond a few equipment projects at the margins.

Despite Brexit, however, France will want to continue working closely with the UK on military matters. French strategic culture is much closer to that of Britain (and Italy) than to that of other large EU members such as Germany, Poland and Spain. Beyond a limited level of military operations, France cannot expect to act autonomously from the US in the future – if needed – without the help of other Europeans. But not many other EU members seem interested in developing the will, let alone the capability, to act autonomously. The main exception is Italy, which has sent close to double Germany's number of deployed peacekeepers in each of the last five years.

In 2017, French President Macron launched a European Intervention Initiative (E2I), outside and separate from EU structures, which now involves 14 countries – including the UK. His main military objective is to enable Europeans to act autonomously when needed, complementing NATO's territorial defence role with a European capacity to intervene abroad, particularly to the south of Europe.⁴³

⁴² Daniel Keohane, "Does the EU Need a Military Avant-Garde?", in *Strategic Europe*, 24 February 2017, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/68102>.

⁴³ Daniel Keohane, "Macron's European Defence Doctrine", in *Strategic Europe*, 28 September 2017, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/73246>.

Whisper it, but Brexit is probably a major factor behind Macron's E2I, which in turn is a signal that France has few hopes that the EU will do much operationally in the coming years. The problem for France is that the election of Joe Biden as the next US president may also reduce interest in other European capitals on the French-initiated E2I. Already since Biden's election, the governments of Germany, Poland and Spain have each made public their lack of interest in European "strategic autonomy", code for French-driven visions such as the E2I, instead preferring to go back to the future and work mainly through NATO on defence issues.

Brexit has helped accelerate a trend of the EU contributing less and less to international peacekeeping. Instead, EU defence is now mostly focused on marginal capability projects, while France tries to re-invent the original EU operational wheel with the E2I. But the election of Joe Biden in the US might create less incentive for Germany, Poland, Spain and – crucially – the UK to invest much in the E2I, and instead focus political attention and military resources on working closely with a more like-minded US administration at NATO.

In sum, Brexit has helped kill off EU defence, while Joe Biden might inadvertently help kill off European defence.

6. From “Global Strategy” to “Strategic Compass”: The EU in search of a security policy and Italy’s responsibilities

by Domenico Moro

An important step towards a common defence policy, as agreed this year at the meeting of the Council of Defence Ministers on 16 June, the Strategic Compass was discussed by the Council of Ministers on 20 November. During this discussion, crucial foreign and security policy issues were addressed, although in general terms, as the EU needs to identify which are the main, closest and most distant threats to its security.⁴⁴ This is an important step because identifying – and sharing – these threats will make it possible to set priorities regarding military capabilities and to assess the possible gap to be closed in the event of capacity deficits. It is on the basis of this discussion that a genuine European foreign and security policy can start to take shape.

According to the EU’s timetable, after this first discussion, in the first half of 2021 the Strategic Compass should also be discussed with member states. In the second half of 2021, what is referred to in Community language as the “coherent framework” of what the EU considers threats to its security will be clarified. The goal is to approve the Strategic Compass in the first half of 2022. This deadline has its own particular importance. In fact, at a hearing of the French National Assembly in May 2019, Louis Gautier, Macron’s European defence adviser, announced that, in the first half of 2022 when the French presidential elections are to take place, France will submit a proposal to create a “Common Security and Defence Union”, with or without a revision of the Treaties. This deadline is important not only in view of Gautier’s statement, but also because it coincides with the conclusion of the Conference on the Future of Europe and its proposals. The work of the latter, the discussions in the context of the Strategic Compass, and those which France is presumably conducting in view of its proposal for a Common Security and Defence Union, should all be guided by a common perspective: the strengthening of multilateral institutions.

What could the role of Italy be in all of this? Italy, along with France, Germany and Spain, can undoubtedly be credited with launching the Permanent Structured Cooperation in 2017, and with taking the initiative, in the spring of 2020, to send a letter to the European Council and to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy calling for steps towards European defence.⁴⁵ First of all, the 2020 letter called for the strengthening of the role of PESCO, which not only has to complete the projects already presented, but also has to undertake further projects suggested by its experience of ongoing military operations outside

⁴⁴ See EEAS, *Towards a Strategic Compass*, 20 November 2020, <https://europa.eu/!jG49xk>; Council of the European Union, *Video Conference of Defence Ministers*, 20 November 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2020/11/20>.

⁴⁵ Defence Ministers of France, Germany, Spain and Italy, “*At the Heart of our European Union*”, 29 May 2020, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/at-the-heart-of-our-european-union>.

the EU. Secondly, the letter emphasises strengthening the European Defence Fund, which has already been reduced compared to the initially planned allocations. This is vital insofar as the EDF is a key incentive to promote industrial collaboration among European companies, as well as in supporting the European Defence Technology and Industrial Base, where Europe must close a significant gap with the US and with China and Russia. However, there were two other requests that are even more significant: first, that EU member countries should formulate a shared assessment of common threats and challenges, an indispensable prerequisite for defining a common defence strategy and, subsequently, convert it into adequate military capabilities – which the Strategic Compass should do; and second, to strengthen the role of the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), led by General Claudio Graziano, who so far has received little support. The letter also asks the EUMS be in charge of *all* the so-called non-executive missions (largely civilian): therefore, not only the three currently underway in Mali, Somalia and the Central African Republic, but primarily at least two executive missions (largely military) as well.

Problems for Italy's European credibility arise when it comes to making concrete choices, and undoubtedly there are still steps to be taken in this regard. Here, two examples can be brought to light: one, concerning industrial policy choices and the other, cooperation to strengthen existing supranational military structures. Regarding European collaboration in military industry, it is worth recalling the recent agreement between France and Germany on the construction of sixth-generation aircraft: the Future Combat Air System.⁴⁶ Spain subsequently joined the project. This alliance represents both a political and an industrial turning point, and the future will reveal whether it is a strategic watershed as well. Over the past 50 years the European aeronautical industry, especially in the military sector, has been divided into two parts: the French aeronautical industry and the British one, which Germany (and Spain) and Italy respectively joined. It is well known that the first important and successful attempt to overcome this division and create a supranational aeronautical group was made in the 1970s with the establishment of the Airbus consortium, which Italy decided not to be a part of. However, after purchasing a 20 per cent stake in Airbus in 1979, the UK decided to sell it in 2006. The Franco-German agreement to create the FCAS attempted to end these industrial divisions in the military aeronautics sector. Whether or not this was also a strategic turning point still remains to be seen, when it becomes necessary to decide if the new aircraft will be designed to carry French or American nuclear weapons. In fact, the FCAS will have to replace the current Tornado, certified and integrated into the NATO nuclear planning system, and therefore under American control. France, as is known, has decided not to be part of NATO's nuclear planning system, choosing to maintain exclusive control of its nuclear weapons. Italy, on the other hand, following the traditional "foot in both camps" policy, joined the

⁴⁶ French Ministry of Defence, "Signing of the Framework Agreement on SCAF, the Future Air Combat System", in *Defense-Aerospace.com*, 17 June 2019, <http://www.defense-aerospace.com/cgi-bin/client/modele.pl?shop=dae&modele=release&prod=203508&cat=3>.

UK to create a competing project called Tempest. Regarding the strengthening of existing multinational military structures, one example concerns the participation in Eurocorps, the first European supranational military corps in which Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Spain are “framework nations”, while Italy along with some other European countries are only “associated nations”. Eurocorps is known to have obtained NATO High Readiness Force and Response Force certification and EU Battle Group Force HQ certification and is equipped with its own planning, command and control structures, albeit at a divisional level.⁴⁷

Defence and the relaunch of multilateral institutions can only be Europe’s responsibility, and Italy could play a decisive role in supporting this policy and helping to implement a European defence policy. However, this can only happen if the policy provides a European response on some fundamental points, in line with the letter sent in spring 2020 to the European Council and the High Representative. The first could be to request that the current European resources engaged in 16 civil-military missions, conducted in various parts of the world, be made available to the EU, and that Italy declares its willingness to make part of its armed forces permanently available to the EU, provided that the other European states are willing to do the same. Even better would be if Italy, by joining Eurocorps, requested that this structure be made available to the EUMS to conduct whatever operations the EU decides to carry out outside EU borders. It is true that it is a structure created within the framework of intergovernmental cooperation and not Community cooperation, but participation in this initiative would still be an important signal of cohesion.

The second key point is that Italy should promote the integration of the two sixth-generation aircraft projects, as the president of the Leonardo company hopes to do. The integration of the two initiatives will make it possible to avoid further duplication in European military platforms and share the R&D expenses of an expensive project between several countries.

The third is for Italy to resume the road opened up by the Pratica di Mare agreements, followed by the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, thereby supporting Macron in his policy of openness towards Russia, and strengthening the role of existing institutions in continental security matters, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The “European security architecture”, with the involvement of Russia, that Macron spoke about, should obviously be based on the lowest possible weapons level balanced between the parties involved. From a political point of view, achieving this objective would bear a meaning echoing that of the Franco-German peace in the immediate post-war period: it would represent peace on the Eurasian continent and would clear up the spores of the Cold War.

The Conference on the Future of Europe could provide a framework for these positions to be brought to the attention of public opinion and European institutions.

⁴⁷ Eurocorps website: *Key Dates and Figures*, <https://www.eurocorps.org/key-dates-and-figures>.

As the name suggests, it is a Conference on the *future of Europe* and not on the *future of the EU* alone. Therefore, the debate will need to address more than just institutional reform, which should not be an end in itself, but should promote policies, the first being security policy. It will need to address the areas where these policies will have to be promoted: Russia, the African Union and North America. In this case, it would be difficult for the Conference on the Future of Europe to ignore the turning point that the world expects from Europe to relaunch multilateral institutions and take a step towards a new world order.

List of acronyms

ASMP-A	Air-Sol Moyenne Portée
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSF	Centro Studi sul Federalismo
E2I	European Intervention Initiative
EDF	European Defence Fund
EUMS	European Union Military Staff
FCAS	Future Combat Air System
IAI	Istituto Affari Internazionali
IRIS	Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LoA	Level of ambition
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
SC	Strategic Compass

Updated 14 December 2020

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