

**EUROPE, STRATEGY,  
SECURITY  
PROGRAMME**

# **A EUROPEAN ARMY TO DO WHAT?**

(2/5)

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**ANALYSIS #2**



**T**he question as to what purpose a European army would serve is fundamental in the literal sense of the word, in that it comes first.

It is a question that has been asked of the European states since the end of the Second World War and one that has never received a satisfactory answer, because these same states disagree profoundly over the objectives that a European army would serve.

However, the question needs to be answered, because building a military tool takes a long time and costs a lot of money, and it depends entirely on the purpose assigned to it.

### **A QUESTION THAT WAS FIRST ASKED LONG AGO...**

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Although you should never get too caught up in history, it allows us to understand more about the reasons that have led us to be considering a European army today, even though the European states have often differed when it comes to the objectives to be entrusted to a European defence system.

Long before the European Union came about, states felt the need to stand together against an external threat. In this way, the Treaty of Brussels was signed in March 1948 between France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Article 5 of this treaty, which was essentially military but also included elements of social and cultural cooperation, made provision for automatic assistance between the five members.

But given the size of the Soviet threat, the Europeans soon saw fit to turn to the United States and that was how NATO came into being, with the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949. Plans for a "European Defence Community" (EDC), which have long been portrayed as the missed opportunity for European defence, were effectively just a way of reinforcing the Atlantic Alliance by allowing France to accept German rearmament, as this "European army" would have been under the authority of the NATO Commander in Chief, himself appointed by the President of the United States.

What is more interesting from the point of view of concern to us is the history of the "Western European Union" (WEU). Created in 1954 after France refused to ratify the treaty instituting the EDC, it included the five signatories of the Treaty of Brussels plus the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, its principal mission was to allow European states to take an active part in their own defence within NATO, in what would come to be known as the "European pillar" of the Alliance.

However, American dominance of the Atlantic Alliance was ultimately considered unacceptable by General de Gaulle. Having come to power in 1958, he decided to withdraw France from the Alliance's integrated military command in 1966; it would not rejoin it until 2009. It is useful to understand why. In his letters, notes and books published on 17 July 1961, General de Gaulle gave his reasons: "Europe forms a strategic whole (...). Either Europe will defend its territory 'itself', or there will be no defence for Europe to take care of. There is NATO. What is NATO? It is the sum of the Americans, Europe and a few others. But it is not the defence of Europe by Europe, it is the defence of Europe by the Americans. We need another NATO. First of all, we need a Europe that has its own defence. We need this Europe to be allied to America" (our translation).

The WEU, whose activities had slowed down considerably, was relaunched in October 1984 with the declaration of Rome, which gave the signatory states a definition of a European security identity and a duty progressively to harmonise their defence policies. The WEU was intended to become the "sword arm" of the European Union. Unfortunately, the war and slaughter springing from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s highlighted the inability of the European states to resolve security crises on their own doorstep.

It was for this reason that, firstly in Saint-Malo in 1998, then in Cologne and Helsinki in 1999, the Europeans sought to acquire a "capacity for autonomous action based on credible military forces". They named this capacity, and the way in which they would use it, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). This CSDP was designed to be compatible with NATO, which would be able to continue to assure the collective defence of Europe (and North America), with the support of the Americans, including the possibility of having recourse to nuclear weapons, whilst the CSDP gave the member states of the European Union that were willing and able to do so the possibility to build expeditionary forces to intervene outside EU territory, to manage external crises and to do so without the support of the Americans. The proof of the – theoretical – compatibility between NATO and the CSDP was supplied by the fact that the British, the most ardent defenders of NATO, were in it, alongside the French, the instigators.

Unfortunately, the European states largely failed to build this autonomous capacity for action that would have allowed them to resolve the crises occurring in the neighbourhood since 1999. The thirty-five external missions and operations carried out by the EU since 2003 have been mostly of a civilian nature. Only twelve of them were military, plus three mixed missions. What's more, they were just low-intensity operations. The EU has never been in a position to "manage" crises such as the ones in Syria, Libya or even Mali, even though they have triggered mass migration to Europe and profoundly destabilised it.

This inability of the EU no doubt lies in the fact that for one reason and another, the EU has not created the sort of capability process that would have made it possible to build this autonomous capacity, namely the "permanent structured cooperation" (PESCO). It did not do this until 2017 and even then, it was so far removed from the original design that it is unlikely that the PESCO will ever lead to anything but simple bilateral or multilateral cooperation projects of the kind that already exist. But that's another story altogether.

In the meantime, the threats facing the member states of the European Union have increased in number and type. Firstly, there are conventional threats from Russia, which has ramped up its aggression towards its neighbours: cyber-attack on Estonia in 2007, conflict in Georgia in 2008 and then its actions in Ukraine in 2014. It is also suspected of interfering in the US elections of 2016 and has committed murder and attempted murder against its former spies on EU soil. On top of these State threats, there have obviously also been non-state threats, with growing numbers of terrorist attacks due to or linked with the so-called "Islamic State" since the attacks in Paris of 2015.

### **... WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN ANSWERED CONVINCINGLY ...**

Up to now, the only aim of the system of defence commonly agreed by the member states of the EU was that laid down by the Treaty on European Union (EU), namely the capacity to react autonomously to external crises and conflicts. It is the very purpose of the CSDP set out in Title V TEU, and its article 42 in particular, that is translated in measurable military terms into the "global objective" of Helsinki in 1999, redefined at the summit of Brussels in 2004 and which was supposed to be achieved by 2010.

In its conclusions of 14 November 2016 on the implementation of the global strategy in the field of security and defence, however, the Council of the EU adopted a "level of ambition" that includes three defence objectives. This was a departure that merits greater attention.

Naturally, the principal objective of this "level of ambition" continues to be the "reaction to external crises and conflicts" and covers all CSDP missions. There is nothing new under the sun. This confirms the level of ambition laid down in the Treaty – the one that was never met. The member states had to rewrite it, otherwise they would have had to admit that they were not applying the Treaty.

The second is "building the capacities of partners", which is better known in politico-military jargon as "capacity building". This could be a breakthrough if, as logic would

suggest, this is translated into supplying arms to partner forces who have been trained for peacekeeping purposes. This has however been deemed impossible, due to the Treaty's terms.

Finally, the Council of the EU opened up a hitherto locked door by declaring as its third defence objective the "protection of the Union and its citizens". This new ambition, which came about along with the global strategy of June 2016, comprises all actions that do not belong to the original NATO mandate (counter-terrorism, cyber, hybrid threats, resilience, etc.). They can be summed up in the term "common security". With the exception of a bit of faltering progress in the cyber field, the member states have so far failed to make good on this ambition.

The fact is that this level of ambition has not been adequately and transparently translated into military terms in any of the various defence planning exercises carried out between 2016 and 2018. Indeed, the list of critical capability objectives of the military committee of the European Union continues to focus exclusively on the CSDP and does not seriously take account of the aim of "protecting the Union and its citizens". The capacity development plan of the European Defence Agency focus mainly on capability gaps and propose priorities such as anti-ballistic missile defence, which do not have a lot of common ground with the CSDP. This is also the case with permanent structured cooperation, the key project of which, the only one to involve 24 member states out of 25 – military mobility on EU territory – satisfies the needs of NATO, but those of the CSDP not at all.

At the moment, therefore, confusion reigns over the EU's defence objectives, mainly due to the concerns of many member states, particularly the Baltic and Nordic states, plus Poland and Romania, who stand to bear the brunt of Russia's actions on the eastern flank of Europe. Theoretically, the answer is collective defence under the NATO umbrella. But the constant and repeated calls of American leaders for the Europeans to take their own defence in hand should logically prompt the Europeans to provide their own defence without always expecting everything from the US and to become capable of defending themselves on their own, or at the very least to make a start on this.

But these different objectives, and the possible combinations thereof, lead to very different military tools. There is a difference between countering attacks from armoured vehicles in the Baltic states, parrying cyber-attacks to vital infrastructure, preventing terrorist attacks on European soil, carrying out stabilisation missions in the Middle East or Africa – and doing all those things at once.

And it is precisely because they have been incapable, thus far, of agreeing on a common objective that the European states have never gone beyond the strategic chit-chat stage. Each state is self-determining, on the basis of its geographic location and history. Every leader sees the world from his or her own perspective – and the threats on his or her own doorstep. They all make alliances when they see fit and none of them puts the European common interest first. In the meantime, nothing concrete gets done and anything that does come about – such as the European Defence Fund – risks being a disappointment, due to a lack of clear signposting from the member states.

### **... AND THIS LACK OF RESPONSE IS PREVENTING ANY PROGRESS...**

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Given the importance of technological superiority in modern conflicts, the cost of armaments and how long it takes to make them, defence planning has become a vital stage in preparing armed forces and the effectiveness of defence.

It is certainly true that even the most “modern” of the military equipment that is being deployed today was designed more than fifteen years ago. The American F35 fighter aircraft, for instance, is the fruit of the Joint Strike Fighter programme that was launched in 1994. The aircraft, which was recognised as operational in 2017, would carry out its first combat mission in the skies above Syria in 2018, in other words 24 years after the plans were laid. This means that decisions made today for the most complex military equipment will arm troops in around 2035-2040. It is obvious that the geopolitical situation will have moved on a great deal by then. All of this goes to highlight the importance of not mistaking your threat and being quite clear on your defence ambitions. Hence the importance of planning processes.

From this point of view, the European Union is failing. It has had a defence planning system at its disposal since 2003. This system was set in place in successive stages, like layers one on top of the other, and its overall coherence is by no means assured.

Indeed, there is not just one capability process in EU, but four: the Capability Development Mechanism (CDM), which is the responsibility of the military committee of the European Union, with the support of the EU Military Staff; the Capability Development Plan (CDP) of the European Defence Agency; the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), which has been entrusted to the European Defence Agency, associated with Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which is also a capability process in the hands of the member states and with a secretariat provided by the European External Action Service and the European Defence Agency; finally, the European Defence Fund, to launch in 2021

with the aim of paying for capability research and development with a programme of work to be drafted by the Commission under the so-called double-comitology rule, in other words with strong involvement from the member states.

These four processes are operated like so many silos, churning out documents that are scarcely connected to each other, and are steered by institutions that are more worried about their own fields of competence than the need to produce a single road map. The whole house needs setting in order, but this would require a Copernican revolution, namely for the member states to start planning together before they plan nationally.

In particular, there will be no effective European planning unless and until a document or raft of documents can be drawn up explaining clearly what the Union intends to do in the field of defence – the level of political ambition – and what this actually means in military terms – the level of military ambition – in other words, a White Paper or, even better, a strategic concept.

Which brings us back to the question we started off with: a European army to do what?

### **... TOWARDS COMMON DEFENCE**

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It seems obvious to us that a European army should be capable of ensuring the common defence of the states that constitute it, rather than just crisis management. A clarification with NATO, therefore, is indispensable. The aim is for the Europeans to know whether they really want to allocate themselves the resources to manage autonomously external crises, something that is entirely compatible with their presence within a NATO refocused on its core objective: collective Euro-Atlantic defence. It is also up to the Europeans to decide whether they are going to choose to take care of their common defence by creating a European pillar within the Atlantic Alliance.

But no good will come of speculating further, as it is for the member states alone to answer this question. Until they do so, no solid foundation can be built and nothing permanent can be put in place. ■

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