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The 7Ds for Sustainability

Debt
Decarbonisation
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Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

The 7Ds for Sustainability – Defence Extended

Authors

Michael Benhamou
Steven Blockmans
Mihai Chihaia
Ionela Maria Ciolan
Daniel Fiott
Alessandro Marrone
Christian Mölling
Paola Tessari
Adérito Vicente
Klaus Welle

Editors

Ionela Maria Ciolan
Klaus Welle

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Credits

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Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

Rue du Commerce 20
Brussels, BE 1000

For more information, please visit www.martenscentre.eu.

Assistant Editors: Sara Pini, Senior Research Officer & Theo Larue, Editorial and Publications Officer
Cover design: Gëzim Lezha, Brand and Visual Communications Officer
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Table of contents

Table of abbreviations

AFET	Committee on Foreign Affairs
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AP	Action Plan
AUKUS	Trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States
BUDG	Committee on Budgets
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CDP	Capability Development Plan
CEDE	Committe on Security and Defence
CER	Critical Entities Resilience
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DARPA	Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
DIANA	Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic
DG	Directorate-General
DG DEFIS	Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space
DG DEFCO	Directorate General for Defence Cooperation
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDF	European Defence Fund
EDIP	European Defence Investment Programme
EDIS	European Defence Industrial Strategy
EDT	Emerging and Disruptive Technology
EDTB	European Defence Technological and Industrial Base
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIB	European Investment Bank
EP	European Parliament
EPF	European Peace Facility
ESDC	European Security and Defence College
EUCPM	EU Civil Protection Mechanism
EUMS	European Union Military Service
EXCO	Group for External Coordination
FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
FIG	France, Italy and Germany
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRI	Groupe des Relations Inter-institutionnelles
HILP	High-impact, low-probability event
HQ	Headquarters
HR	High-Representative
HR/VP	High Representative / Vice President
IFV	Infantry Fighting Vehicle
ING2	Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament
INGE	Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation
IT	Information Technology
ITRE	Committee on Industry, Research and Energy
JURI	Committee on Legal Affairs
MBT	Main Battle Tank
MFF	Multi-Annual Financial Framework
MPCC	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
NNWS	Non-Nuclear-Weapon State
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Australia, India, Japan and the United States
RDC	Rapid Deployment Capacity
SECDEFPOL	Security and Defence Directorate
SEDE	Sub-Committee on Security and Defence
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

The Defence Pyramid: Ten Building Blocks for a Viable European Defence Union

Klaus Welle

When an idea like the defence community re-emerges regularly over the course of 70 years but is never realised, what does this tell us? The message is, first, that the idea is backed by a strong rationale that does not allow us simply to shelve it and move on; but also, that the preconditions for its implementation have been absent.

What is the strong rationale behind the European Defence Union?

Europe is a continent that is uniting in a slow but steady process that now involves the 27 member states of the EU and more than 440 million citizens. The Union has integrated many of its policies. Today it is unimaginable that one of its member states would be attacked by a third party without the others rallying to its support. An article in one of the EU's treaties explicitly obliges the member states to come to the others' defence. This is Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, which is generally regarded as a stronger legal obligation than Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, on which NATO was founded.

Why then has the Defence Union not been realised yet?

The original treaty for the European defence community was made impossible by an alliance of Gaullist and Communist members of the Assemblée Nationale in France. This opened the way for the establishment of NATO as the transatlantic security pillar, and it has successfully guaranteed its members' security for nearly 70 years. The Alliance is here to stay. Thus, any new arrangement has to prove that it both adds value and does not detract from a very successful partnership.

What is the new challenge forcing us to change?

Europe and the US are now confronted with challenges stemming from Russia and China. Since 2014 at the latest, Russia has engaged in aggressive policies aimed at destabilising security on the European continent. Its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its subjugation of the Donbas were followed by the bombing of millions of Syrian citizens. The movement of Syrian refugees that followed destabilised politics in Western and Central Europe; and this, in turn, emboldened Russia's allies on the extreme right in several member states. The Kremlin sponsors the semi-official Wagner group, using it to stabilise dictatorial regimes in Africa and further weaken Europe's influence in the South. The EU's northern member states have been forced to update their threat perception, which has led Finland and Sweden to decide to join NATO.

Russia has moved from being a challenge mainly for the EU's eastern member states to posing a threat to the Union in its entirety. Russia is trying to change Europe's borders with violence. It wants Ukraine to disappear from the map as an independent country and is seeking to bring Belarus to submission. This would effectively re-establish its empire and its dominance over Central and Eastern Europe, and would create strong pressure on both the northern and southern parts of the continent.

We have to understand that Russia's war against Ukraine is not an isolated regional event but part of a strategy to dominate Europe as a whole. Russia is trying to re-establish on the European continent rules typical of nineteenth-century empires, including land grabbing and destroying weaker states. The EU is standing in the way.

Looking at the map, one sees that today the European continent is structured by two principles and two principles only. The first is the EU, which encompasses citizens and states in the west and the centre. Based on voluntary integration, the rule of law and democracy, it draws its neighbours closely into its orbit through contractual relations and voluntary agreements. The EU provides a home for the nation state. The second principle is Empire. It is represented by Russia in the east, which is trying to subjugate its neighbourhood by means of dependencies, pressure and violence.

And in eastern Eurasia?

Having abandoned the idea of China's 'peaceful rise', President Xi Jinping represents a new phase in the development of Communist China. Within the country, Hong Kong's special status is no longer respected; hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs have been put in 're-education' camps; and dissidents, business leaders and party activists have disappeared without a trace. Moreover, the traditional checks and balances within the Communist party have been abolished, including term limits and the representation of different factions within the leadership.

Outside China, the pressure on its neighbours is mounting. The nine-dash line is a very aggressive interpretation of Communist China's territorial claims in the South China Sea—an interpretation that leaves to its neighbours basically only their immediate coastal areas. The invasion of Taiwan by China or its blockade by sea are now considered likely options and are expected to take place in the short or medium term. They have started to become part of Beijing's military preparations. Moreover, the US military has started to war-game a direct confrontation with China in the scenario where Beijing would attack Taiwan.

In response, we are witnessing the build-up of newly institutionalised forms of security cooperation in Asia under American initiative and leadership. There is the quadrilateral security dialogue between the US, Japan, India and Australia (QUAD); the AUKUS cooperation between Australia, the UK and the US; and most recently, successful attempts at Camp David to get South Korea and Japan to overcome the negative sentiments of the past and enter into more structured cooperation. In addition, India shares with the West an interest in defending against China.

The context of the conflict in Asia between China and the US strongly resembles the situation before the First World War in Europe. An up-and-coming industrial power (then Germany, now China) threatens the status of the established sea power (then the UK, now the US) by building a major fleet. It is crucial that the current situation turns out differently from the former one. One sees, then, that security in Eurasia is threatened from both sides, the east and the west.

The EU complements NATO

The EU has played a decisive role in supporting and stabilising Ukraine. In a time when everything is being weaponised, it has successfully complemented the tools available to support Ukraine. It has made it easier for the member states to welcome millions of Ukrainian refugees, moved quickly to provide a connection to the European energy grid and allowed Ukraine to import food items without having to pay customs fees. Moreover, it has imposed against Russia a package of sanctions that are more severe than those levied against any other country. Importantly, the Union has brought hope to Ukrainians by offering them the prospect of membership in the EU.

The EU has also activated the European Peace Facility to acquire weapons for Ukraine and has initiated the joint procurement of armaments among member states. The Union has developed in practice into a strategic pillar for European security, a success that can be built upon for the future.

We are living and will continue to live in times of the weaponisation of everything. Russia has weaponised food by blocking Ukraine's grain exports, in this way threatening Africa with hunger and death. The Kremlin weaponised refugees by facilitating their access to the border between Belarus and Poland, the aim being to destabilise the latter. Energy was weaponised in the hope that Europeans' support for Ukraine would crumble when they were confronted by a cold winter and skyrocketing gas prices.

The EU has always needed NATO, but in a time when all things are being weaponised, NATO no longer possesses the complete toolkit needed to deal with security challenges. To provide security for the European continent today, NATO and the EU are nowadays necessarily complementary.

The security architecture of the future

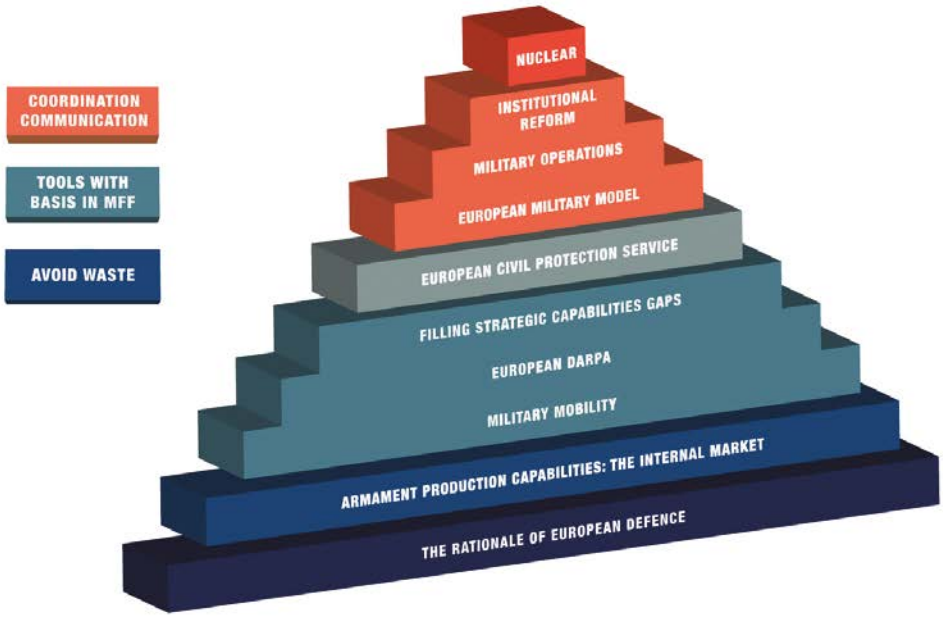
Since the Second World War, the US has decreased its defence spending considerably. It is no longer able to manage two major confrontations in different parts of the world at the same time. Its main focus will have to shift increasingly to Asia, where its status as the leading global power is being challenged by China.

Isolationist tendencies inside the US have dangerously increased and are being nurtured by the impression that Europeans are not contributing enough for their own defence. Donald Trump was the first US president in living memory to seriously consider whether the US should remain a member of NATO. Important underlying arguments were the perceived and real shortcomings of European investment in defence and the perception that Europe was free-riding on security.

Europeans will have to take more responsibility for their own territorial defence within both NATO and the EU. And as Washington has repeatedly requested, they will have to close the capability gaps that currently exist between themselves and the US. Europe and the US have to establish a partnership of equals. The EU can play a decisive role in this process. It has the political, legal and financial infrastructure that is a precondition to overcoming a number of structural weaknesses in European defence. This will help to build up, over time, a European Defence Union.

The defence pyramid

I would like to propose a process for building up a European Defence Union with complete capacity. Developing this Defence Union would be based on the concept of a defence pyramid and would address weaknesses systematically in a step-by-step process. The European Defence Union has to be built from a solid base and not from the roof down. Major changes in defence take a decade or more to become effective. Thus, building the Defence Union has to start now. Ten steps for building the defence pyramid are suggested here and will be outlined in detail in the chapters that follow. These steps differ from one another in nature.



First, make the case for why a major European effort in the area of defence is necessary: the rationale (Step 1). Can we make it clear that, as explained above, we live in a situation that has fundamentally changed, where the changes will last for decades to come?

Second, carry out a number of actions that are long overdue and that arguably only the EU can achieve: cut waste through Europe-wide military procurement (Step 2), ensure that all logistical activities, including transport, can be carried out effectively across borders (Step 3) and become competitive in military-related research through a European DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) (Step 4).

At a time when the average national debt level in the EU stands at 100% of GDP, increased defence efforts will need to exploit economies of scale. The key advantage that the US enjoys over the EU in the procurement of armaments is its common market for armament products. Because of this common market, the US relies on just over 30 systems, whereas in the EU with its exemptions there are more than 170. This leads to production being on a smaller scale in the EU, higher costs per unit and a diffusion of the means available for research and development. It is estimated that not using the current exemptions from the single market could result in overall savings of close to 30%.

Transport and logistics capabilities are critical for winning wars. If materials or personnel cannot be provided in the right place at the right time, they remain useless. This is especially true for any support needed by the Baltic countries in the face of aggression by Russia, which could very quickly cut them off from land support through the Suwałki Gap.

The EU traditionally finances transport infrastructure investments in its Multi-Annual Financial Framework. It needs to multiply its efforts in this area.

The US regularly complains that Europeans are not contributing sufficiently to the common defence. Moreover, Europe's armaments industry does not appear to be keeping up on the technological front. Some fear that a combination of these two factors could even endanger future military cooperation among NATO partners.

Third, introduce a European Civil Protection Service (Step 6) with the aim of providing, for the first time, Europe-wide protection. At the request of then Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Michel Barnier convincingly demonstrated the usefulness and feasibility of such a Protection Service, which would provide practical solidarity in times of natural catastrophes and major accidents. It should be fully put into practice in the 2024–9 legislature.

Fourth, complete then the development of the European Defence Union, bringing it to full capability, by addressing the strategic capabilities gap (Step 5), developing a military model (7), initiating operational reform (8) and carrying out institutional reform (Step 9). The question of the EU's nuclear capability (Step 10) will also have to be addressed.

Europe in Arms: Armament Production Capacities for Disruptive Times

Christian Mölling

Summary

The European Parliament faces a crucial task in shaping the future of Europe's defence. The European defence technological and industrial base must be strengthened to address both geopolitical and internal EU challenges. This requires a geostrategic, evidence-based approach, substantial financial resources, and a commitment to integrating new partners and contributing to the defence of Europe. The European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP) represent the EU's consolidated response to the evolving geopolitical dynamics. The framework needs to be adapted to strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base, balance national and EU efforts, and respond to the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

Keywords Defence – Defence industry – European defence technological and industrial base – European Defence Industrial Strategy – European defence – EU – CSDP – NATO

Today's and tomorrow's wars set the standards

As Europe confronts the existential threat that has arisen from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the potential for further aggression, urgent action is needed to prepare for and deter these threats. The next three to five years are critical for making decisions that will shape Europe's future for decades.[1]

The EU must redefine its contributions to European security and defence, focusing on strengthening the defence industrial base and balancing efforts between deterrence, defence and crisis management. This requires a fresh approach to ensure the European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) remains relevant and responds to the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape. The latter is already changing as a result of several geopolitical factors that together have changed the dynamic, not only for member states and the EU, but globally, and thus have shaped the conditions for the EDTIB to deliver meaningful contributions. These factors are the following:

1. *Nations are already moving*. EU states have individually started to procure new armaments and change their policies, influencing the broader European landscape.[2] It is estimated that EU member states spent around €81 billion on defence investments in 2023.[3] These investments were initiated without any EU coordination.
2. *NATO has renewed its focus on deterrence and defence*. As a consequence of this renewed focus, NATO's defence and planning has fundamentally changed: from a broad capability-based approach to a very detailed threat-based one. The resulting requirements will shape European defence investment capability needs and industrial demand.[4]

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1 C. Mölling and T. Schütz, *Preventing the Next War (#EDINA III) – Germany and NATO Are in a Race Against Time*, German Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief no. 34 (Berlin, November 2023). The timelines suggested are getting shorter; this early report from 2023 suggests a range of six to nine years.

2 C. Mölling, S. Hellmonds and T. Winter, *European Defense in A New Age (#EDINA): Geostrategic Changes and European Responses Shaping the Defense Ecosystem*, German Council on Foreign Relations, Report no. 6 (Berlin, 2023).

3 NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2023)* (2023).

4 C. Mölling, *The Capable: From 'Paper Tigers' to Rapid and Effective Presence on the Ground*, European Parliament Study (submitted June 2024).

3. *Industrial deadlines*. The urgent need to enhance defence capabilities within a short time frame is pressuring the EDTIB to deliver quickly and efficiently. Europeans have discovered that mass remains essential to fighting wars against peer competitors. This is also changing the defence industry's future business model: it needs to deliver high volumes of standard equipment quickly, rather than small doses of technologically cutting-edge equipment over the long term.

4. *Europe beyond the EU*. European countries outside the EU will play a key role in deciding the future of European security. Some European NATO allies (e.g. the UK, Norway and Turkey) are also important industrial players. Moreover, the EU aims to expand to the east in order to extend security and stability, making the Western Balkans, and especially Ukraine, part of the EDTIB. Ukraine will be the most important factor in European security in the decades to come.

5. *EU transformation*. The EU has engaged in its own further transformation, envisaging the integration of Ukraine and other countries into the EU. This intention to widen and change the EU is an unprecedented geopolitical move taken in the light of the looming threat of instability. It shows that the institutions understand that they have to transform to stay relevant.

6. *Changes to the global defence market*. The war has unleashed several parallel developments that have led to a race among industrial and governmental actors. We are seeing a reorganisation of the global market and production structures, creating new opportunities and risks for Europe. There has been an increase in defence spending globally, with this increased military demand creating more opportunities for new suppliers and for changes to customer–supplier relations. There has also been a shift from cheap to secure supply chains; Russia has partly withdrawn from the defence export market; and due to the availability of spare parts and components, a new balance has been struck between modernisation and new purchases.[5]

7. *US military support*. In the short or medium term, Europe will have to find solutions to the dwindling role of the US in NATO. This reduction will result in significant gaps, especially in high-value capabilities, which European allies will have to fill or otherwise mitigate the effects of.

8. *Support for Ukraine*. This support will have to be long term and may have to increase sharply once the main fighting ends. At that point Ukraine will need to take on an immediate deterrence posture to prevent Russia from merely viewing the end of the war as a break before the next invasion.

The EU's response: from an ad-hoc position to the European Defence Industrial Strategy and the European Defence Investment Programme[6]

So far the EU has responded only stepwise to the dynamics, especially in the areas of defence industrial policy. After some ad hoc initiatives, the EU now aims to consolidate its defence industrial approach through the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), from early 2024.[7] The strategy is being implemented through the European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP). The EDIS aims to reset the EU's approach to the EDTIB. As a result, the EU's policy approach sits somewhere between a liberal market paradigm and one driven by security policy.[8] The market-driven approach has created structures

[5] C. Mölling and T. Schütz, *Preventing the Next War (#EDINA III)*, German Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief no. 34 (November 2023).

[6] This part is based on S. Hellmonds and C. Mölling, *Sovereign: Progress in Strengthening the EDTIB*, European Parliament Study (submitted June 2024).

[7] European Commission, *A New European Defence Industrial Strategy: Achieving EU Readiness Through a Responsive and Resilient European Defence Industry*, Communication, JOIN (5 March 2024) 10 final.

[8] C. Håkansson, *From Market Integration to Security Integration: Taking the Next Steps for European Defence–Industrial Cooperation*, UI Brief no. 5 (Stockholm, 2023).

in the form of legislation and procedures that may interfere with the new security policy-driven approach. Despite this, this approach has not delivered more cooperation or a more powerful EDTIB. Rather, the key players, EU governments, have circumvented the legislation and widely ignored the financial incentives.[9]

The EDIS/EDIP now aim to provide a more substantial framework for future collaborative procurement.[10] They focus on four lines of action:

1. increasing the availability of financial resources through direct funding, VAT exemptions, potential lending and so on;
2. improving security of supply;
3. implementing the Structure for European Armament Programme, which facilitates EU member states' defence cooperation; and
4. introducing additional governance, through a defence industrial readiness board with a programming function and a European Defence Industry Group.

To make the EDIS a reality, the EDIP is key. This needs to be formally agreed among the European Commission, the member states and the European Parliament. This brings up the question of the added value of the EDIS and the EDIP: what can states and industries hope to receive if they buy into the new 'business case' of the European Commission?

In addition to the new geopolitical dynamics, three internal EU challenges shape the probability of success of the EDIS/EDIP:

1. *The political bias within the legal framework*. Most of the EDTIB's activities are controlled, regulated and financed by the nations individually, with the EU playing only a minor role. The EDIS shifts the EU towards the classical position of many EU governments, raising the question of who needs the EU institutions.
2. *The knowledge base regarding the EDTIB and evidence for its success*.[11] The EU institutions' approach to the EDTIB shows a limited empirical basis. In this crucial phase, the European Commission thus cannot demonstrate that it is relying on a meaningful picture of the state of the EDTIB. It therefore cannot prove that its past initiatives have been successful or that future initiatives will address the relevant drivers. Evaluations of the investment programmes and regulations have not taken place, or at least are not publicly available.[12]
3. *Available resources*. The economic leverage that the EDIS and other EU instruments provide will remain limited with the new strategy. Hence, the influence of the European Commission on the EDTIB will remain marginal. The leverage of the EDIS/EDIP may even shrink: European countries are expected to invest even more resources in 2024,[13] and therefore the economic leverage of the EU budgets will form a smaller percentage of the overall volume.

[9] D. Fiott, *Beyond Strategy? Industrial Strategy and the Future of European Defence*, Elcano Royal Institute ARI 57/2024 (Madrid); J. J. Andersson, *Building Weapons Together (or Not): How to Strengthen the European Defence Industry*, EUISS Brief 20 (Brussels, November 2023).

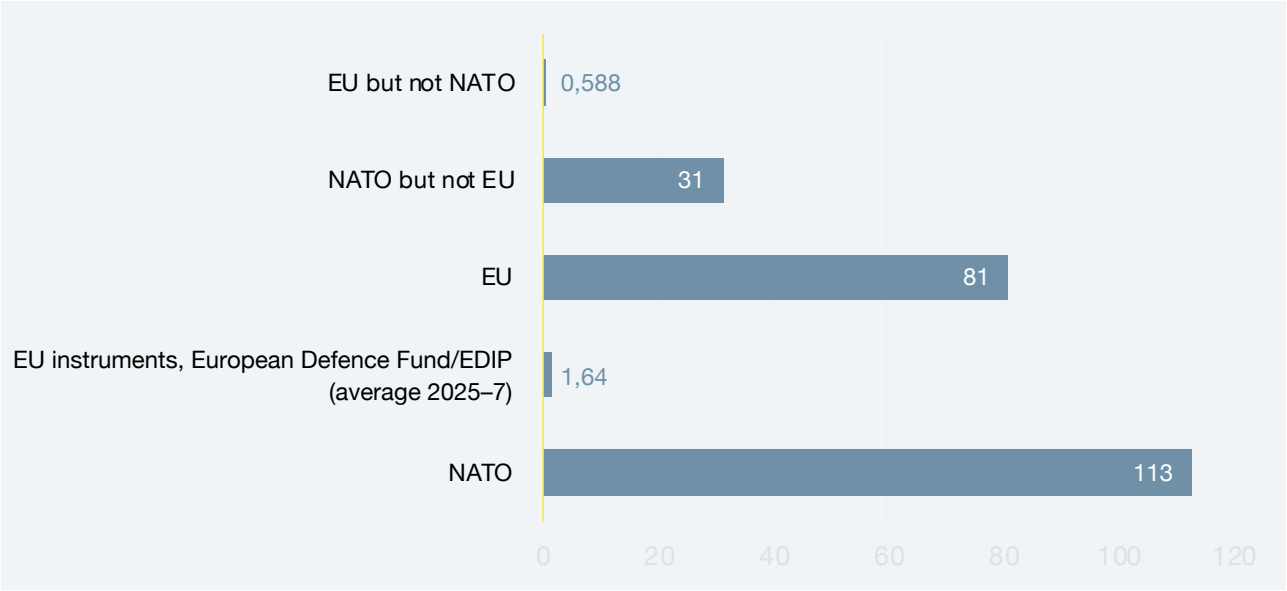
[10] D. Fiott, *In Whose Interests? Regulating Europe's Defence Industry and the Politics of Exemptions*, CSDS Policy Brief 3/2024 (2024).

[11] The argument is further elaborated in Hellmonds and Mölling, *Sovereign*.

[12] Fiott, *In Whose Interests?*; Hellmonds and Mölling, *Sovereign*. At the time of writing, the author had requested that the European Commission clarify which sources were used in the EDIS and their evaluation.

[13] NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2024)* (2024), 4.

Figure 1 Defence investment in billions of euros made by European countries in 2023 as part of . . .



Source: Own calculations based on NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2023)* (2023), 13.

Note: The expenditures of Austria, Cyprus and Sweden have been added individually. The figure for the European Defence Fund/EDIP can only give a rough indication as it is only relevant from 2025. By that time, the other figures will have grown.

Recommendations: bringing defence into the equation of the geopolitical EU[14]

The next legislative period will be pivotal for the EDTIB, with several key actions required.

Resetting the conceptual framework and horizon for defence

A reset of the conceptual framework and horizon for defence would be a useful starting point. The future direction of the EU has to impress Washington and constrain the Kremlin, not please the Brussels Bubble. To operationalise this, the EU should

- *Above all, collect essential evidence*. Establishing a baseline assessment and continuously monitoring the EDTIB are essential for informed decision-making. The European Parliament should insist on empirical evidence for all past and future initiatives of the European Commission, withholding support and resources to ensure compliance if necessary. Independent of the EDIS proposal in this direction, the Commission should establish its own assessment and monitoring system for defence and the defence industries. Additionally, the European Parliament or an external body should establish a centre of excellence for this topic.
- *Develop a geopolitical approach*. The EU should use the EDIS to develop the EDTIB as a geopolitical tool, leveraging global defence technology and industrial changes to secure long-term advantages. This requires transcending narrow national perspectives and embracing a collective EU approach to the global defence technological and industrial base.

[14] These build on C. Mölling, 'Armament Production Capabilities: The Internal Market', in I. Ciolan and K. Welle, *The 7Ds for Sustainability*, Martens Centre (Brussels, March 2024); Hellmonds and Mölling, *Sovereign*.

- *Regulate and finance a defence decade*. The next 10 years should see more investment and less regulation. The challenge to defend Europe cannot be managed within the current framework of defence regulations and resources. Being entrepreneurial and getting ready for defence are steps in the same direction: both involve taking more economic risk by investing in suboptimal things that can be delivered before the deadline and improved later. Regulations have to be thought of as enablers of defence and security; thus, the EU needs to reflect on which regulations it could strengthen or make more flexible to unleash industrial and technological potential and also to encourage investment. Such moves have to be appropriate, scalable and time limited. Substantial financial resources are needed to make a meaningful impact. The EU must significantly increase the financial leverage of its instruments, moving from modest initiatives to ambitious projects with substantial funding.

Shaping the industrial base

The timelines and the urgency will also change the future business model for industry. The EDIS only partly addresses the new challenges and opportunities for the EDTIB. The EU should

- *Define contributions to the defence of Europe*. The EU should use NATO's defence planning and capability priorities. The defence of Europe against a peer competitor is now the top priority. All 23 EU states that are also members of NATO have not only agreed to this prioritisation, but also use the NATO taxonomy and capability priorities as their delivery benchmarks. From NATO's harmonised set of defence plans and capability priorities, EU ambitions can be extrapolated, that is, it can be agreed what EU states should contribute to the defence of Europe. Here, the EU and other Europeans should aim to have capabilities that either could work without US support or that would fill the gaps a US absence would create. From this perspective of (gradually) replacing US contributions at short notice, areas and incentives for cooperation should become clear. This would enable the EU to plug into member states' defence planning and make cooperation more relevant. This also is true vis-à-vis the US and Ukraine.

- *Integrate Ukraine into the defence of Europe*. Because Ukraine is already a security supplier for Europe, it should be quickly integrated into European defence networks, including the EDTIB. The experiences of the country also represent a unique wealth of knowledge and can act as a laboratory for defence and armaments development. Europe should immediately begin to work with Ukraine to plan and implement the country's long-term integration into Western defence mechanisms and the defence manufacturing landscape. Ukraine is already part of the Western defence system. Ukraine's announced future membership of the EU and NATO will further strengthen this connection. Given that the conflict with Russia is likely to continue for decades, Ukraine's location on the borders of Russia and Belarus means that the country will continue to be of outstanding geostrategic importance to Europe's security. On the industrial side, Ukraine should not be seen just as a purchaser, but also as a future supplier and part of the defence industry ecosystem.

- *Balance short-term industrial capacity and innovation*. The EU should leave the development of complex platforms to member states and focus on areas where success is possible. Quantity is the most important thing, for one simple reason: the production of innovative combat systems takes time—on average 10–15 years—that we do not have, with no guarantee that these innovations will be successful. But the demand is there in the short term; both militarily and in terms of industrial policy, those who can meet this need have an advantage. This means mass producing products that already work now and need to be available in sufficient quantities in five years' time. This is where the EU should adapt its funding to ensure that everything that is a priority and does not require new

development can be produced by Europeans—right down to subsidising the capacity of individual large companies or supply chains. This would not eliminate innovation. It would instead take place in smaller, but faster steps or be shifted to countries that do not want to share their technologies.

Showing unique European added value

To better position the EU and Europe in this critical phase, the Commission should see itself as a service provider to the states—whose rationales it cannot fundamentally influence in these times. There are things that the EU is uniquely able to do, while keeping open the possibility of the long-term development of more European approaches:

- *Create an 'Amazon' for defence*. Offer an automated marketplace where national armed forces can buy defence commodities, including goods (and services) that are highly standardised, such as fuel, ammunition and so on. These items are much needed by all EU and European NATO states, including Ukraine. Flexibility in national, and also EU, minimum standards and technical requirements could be triggered by competitive pricing.

- *Enable and sustain critical infrastructure as a public good*. While military mobility as a project already exists, there is much more to be done to make critical infrastructures fit for purpose in terms of their digital capabilities, energy usage, health and so on. This is primarily a peace-time task, but also has to be considered in terms of the resilience of these infrastructures in times of crisis, including an armed conflict in Europe. To allow the Commission to engage in such dual-use build-up and the maintenance of dual-use infrastructures, the Commission, the Council and the Parliament should review the priorities of the common budget.

- *Establish an EU lend–lease programme*. The EU could, in principle, become the owner, operator and lender of defence-relevant dual-use goods. This would offer various ways to combine economies of scale, industrial production and equipment supplies for EU and partner countries. The Commission could buy the equipment needed in many countries for security and defence tasks, using a minimum EU standard. The volume the EU could offer to buy might also allow the Commission to disseminate technical standards as well as to offer lower prices through economies of scale.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Resetting the conceptual framework and horizon for defence	**Shaping the industrial base**	**Showing European added value**
Project 1	Collect essential evidence: establishing a baseline assessment and continuously monitoring the EDTIB are essential for informed decision-making.	Define contributions to the defence of Europe based on NATO requirements. The EU should focus on reducing capability gaps in Allied defences, particularly in those areas where a US withdrawal would create serious problems for Europe.	Establish Amazon for defence: offer an electronic marketplace for defence commodities such as fuel, oils and so on.
Project 2	Develop a geopolitical approach. The EU should use the EDIS to develop the EDTIB as a geopolitical tool, leveraging global defence technology and industrial changes to secure long-term advantages.	Integrate Ukraine into European defence, including into the EDTIB. Learn from Ukrainians' experience.	Enable and maintain critical infrastructure: this must be seen as a public good. Engage in making the defence infrastructure more sustainable and resilient by reviewing the priorities of the common budget.
Project 3	Regulate and finance a defence decade. The next 10 years should see more investment and less regulation. The challenge of defending Europe cannot be managed within the current framework of defence regulations and resources. Being entrepreneurial and getting ready for defence are steps in the same direction: both involve taking more economic risk by investing in suboptimal things that can be delivered before the deadline and improved later. Regulations have to be thought of as enablers of defence and security.	Balance innovation and short-term industrial capacity: focus on what is needed *now*. Leave the development of complex platforms to member states. Give priority to what is urgent. Focus on land warfare. Develop a European vehicle that meets minimum European standards, is based on existing systems for MBTs or IFVs, and has a fixed price for all buyers.	Establish an EU lend–lease programme. The EU should buy the equipment needed for logistics, and then either operate it or rent it out.

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Military Mobility: A Stepping Stone for European Defence and Deterrence

Mihai Chihaia

Summary

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has marked the return of full-scale conflict in Europe and underlined the urgency to strengthen European defence capabilities. Against this background, military mobility is a top priority for the EU and NATO with there being an urgent need to tackle existing weaknesses and challenges.

This policy brief first provides an overview of the state of play of recent developments in the area of military mobility at the EU level. Second, it aims to put forward a series of recommendations for the EU and its member states to advance military mobility goals in three interconnected areas: enhancing political support and funding, multistakeholder engagement and strengthening cooperation with partners.

Keywords Defence – Military mobility – Transport infrastructure – EU – NATO

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has marked the return of full-scale conflict to the European continent. In consequence, the core of security and defence in Europe has shifted back towards territorial defence.

In this new geopolitical context, military mobility is a top priority for the EU, NATO and their member states. Military mobility is a multidisciplinary area that combines all activities aimed at ensuring the swift movement of armed forces and military equipment. Military mobility is also a crucial feature of a credible deterrence posture: being able to move troops quickly will deter any potential adversary from taking military action.

This policy brief provides an overview of the current developments in the area of military mobility at the EU level and aims to put forward a series of recommendations to enhance the EU's efforts to advance military mobility.

Background

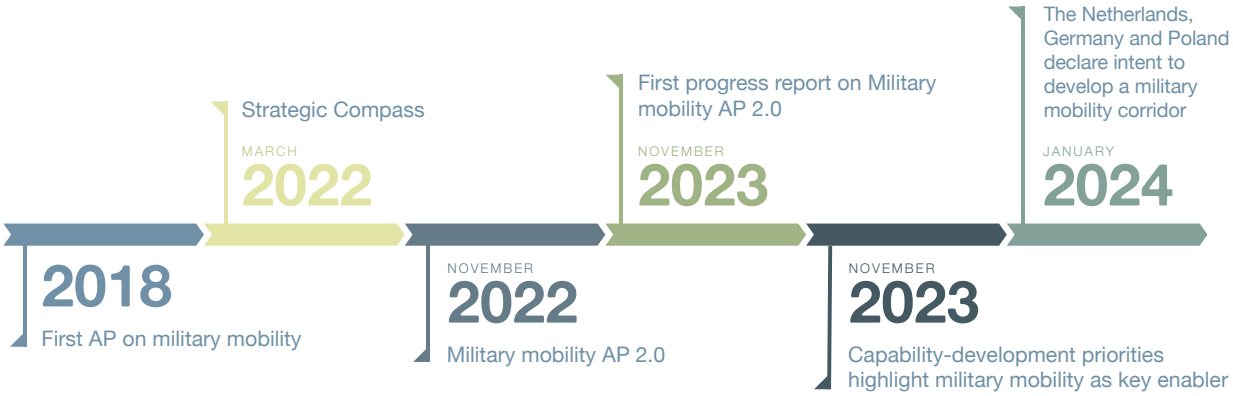
The importance of military mobility started to increase after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In the context of the EU's development of initiatives and instruments in the defence sphere, several steps were also taken to advance military mobility: the publication of the 2018 EU Action Plan (AP) on military mobility, the undertaking of a military mobility pledge by the EU member states at the June 2018 Foreign Affairs Council[1] and, also in 2018, the launching of a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) project on military mobility, aiming to enhance cooperation among member states. Military mobility also received significant attention in the framework of cooperation, being included in the EU–NATO common set of proposals for implementing the 2016 EU–NATO Joint Declaration.

While the importance the EU has placed on military mobility has continuously grown over the past years, the alarm bells rang after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine underlined the urgent need to tackle existing weaknesses and challenges.

[1] Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Security and Defence in the Context of the EU Global Strategy*, Luxembourg, 10246/18 (25 June 2018).

In many places across the EU territory the transport infrastructure is out of date and thus unsuitable for transporting military equipment. Moreover, the EU funding dedicated to enhancing military mobility (funding for dual-use transport infrastructure projects) and the national funding are very low compared to the overall needs. For instance, funding for military mobility at the EU level amounts to only €1.7 billion for 2021–7. Finally, the administrative procedures for crossing borders involve heavy bureaucratic processes that significantly slow down the movement of equipment and forces.

Figure 1 Timeline of most important developments in military mobility at the EU level



State of play and recent developments

In March 2022 the EU adopted the Strategic Compass, its strategy for security and defence. The document put a premium on enhancing military mobility and set priorities, such as the development of the EU AP 2.0 for military mobility,[2] which was delivered in November 2022. The plan places emphasis on four main areas: transport corridors and infrastructure, regulatory measures, resilience and preparedness, and partnerships. The first progress report on the implementation of the AP 2.0 was presented a year later, highlighting progress in the following areas: (a) the continuation of the calls for proposals for funding for dual-use infrastructure projects, (b) sharpened military criteria for the evaluation of dual-use infrastructure project proposals and (c) the organisation of the first annual expert workshop on military mobility.

In November 2023, the EU defence ministers approved the EU Capability Development Priorities,[3] a document that outlines the military capabilities EU member states should focus on developing together to be ready to tackle current and future security challenges. The document underscores both the importance of military mobility as an essential strategic enabler and the urgency of making progress in this area within and beyond the EU.

Co-funding transport infrastructure on the Trans-European Transport Network is an essential priority for the EU highlighted in the AP 2.0. Through the Connecting Europe Facility—a multi-year (2021–7)

[2] European Commission, *Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0*, JOIN (2022) 48 final (10 November 2022)..
[3] *European Defence Agency*, 'EU Defence Ministers Agree to Prioritise 22 Military Capabilities to Bolster European Armed Forces' (14 November 2023).

financial programme instrument—the EU allocated funding of around €1.7 billion for dual-use transport projects, which was dispersed through three calls for projects for member states:[4]

- In the first call 22 projects were awarded a total of €339 million.
- For the second, 35 projects were selected by the European Commission for a total of €616 million in EU co-funding.
- In the third call 112 proposals were submitted, and 38 military mobility projects received co-funding for a total of €807 million.[5]

The rise in the number of applications from member states shows, on one hand, increasing interest and, on the other, the need for EU funding for dual-use infrastructure projects. It also highlights the practical results of the EU's efforts to enhance military mobility. However, the funding has dried up, and more funds are required to sustain these efforts.

Engagement with partners to forge cooperation is paramount in enhancing military mobility on the European continent. Boosting dialogues with regional partners, including Ukraine and Moldova; stepping up cooperation with other partners such as the US, the UK and Norway; and advancing EU–NATO cooperation are among the main priorities for the EU.

The UK was invited to join the PESCO military mobility project in November 2022, and in March 2023 the Council agreed to invite Canada to join the PESCO Project Network Logistical Hubs. Connecting transport infrastructure with Ukraine and Moldova features high on the EU military mobility agenda.[6] Military mobility is also a flagship project for EU–NATO cooperation, making clear the complementary nature of the two organisations. Besides the existent structured dialogue on military mobility, the topic also features in the NATO–EU Task Force on the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure, established in March 2023. In June 2023 the Task Force presented an assessment report that maps out the current security challenges and presents recommendations to strengthen critical infrastructure resilience. Recommendations stress the importance of 'exchanging best practices on enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure and identifying potential ways to strengthen it further, for example, by assessing the need, relevance and feasibility of specific requirements for certain transport infrastructure for the purpose of accommodating the weight, size or scale of military transport'.[7]

In order to expand engagement with stakeholders at the EU level, the first event on military mobility was held in June 2023, under the auspices of the Swedish Presidency of the Council. Several events on military mobility have also been held during the Belgian Presidency (January–June 2024) to create a multistakeholder platform for engagement with actors from the EU institutions, NATO, member states and the expert community from a variety of areas, such as defence, transport and technology.

Cooperation between groups of member states is equally important. On 30 January 2024 the Netherlands, Germany and Poland signed a declaration of intent to develop a military mobility corridor[8] that will address the weaknesses of the transport infrastructure and simplify cross-border administrative

[4] European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0* From *November 2022 to October 2023*, JOIN (2023) 37 final (13 November 2023).
[5] *European Commission*, 'Commission Supports Military Mobility Projects with €807 Million' (24 January 2024).
[6] *European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)*, 'Solidarity Lanes: Study on EU Rail Connections With Ukraine and Moldova Suggests Deploying European Track Gauge on Key Lines' (11 July 2023).
[7] European Commission, *EU-NATO Task Force on the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure: Final Assessment Report* (29 June 2023), 9.
[8] S. Siebold, 'Three NATO Allies Sign Deal to Speed Up Military Deployments to Eastern Flank', *Reuters*, 30 January 2024.

procedures. This is a significant development and represents a good practice that could be replicated by other EU member states in the future.

Prospects and policy recommendations

The following section of the policy brief proposes a series of concrete measures for the EU and its member states to advance military mobility goals in three interconnected areas: enhancing political support and funding, multistakeholder engagement and strengthening cooperation with partners.

Enhancing high-level political support and funding for military mobility

1. *Keep military mobility high on the EU political agenda*. This needs to be done in view of the European elections, the EU strategic agenda for 2024–9 and the priorities of the next European Commission. Security and defence is an important topic for the European elections, and enhanced military mobility should be clearly outlined as a core component of European defence and deterrence. The urgency of enhancing military mobility should be mentioned explicitly in the EU strategic agenda for 2024–9 as well as in the priorities of the next European Commission.

2. *Commit to a new and more ambitious military mobility pledge*. The new strategic environment requires the EU and its member states to double down on enhancing military mobility and revisit the pledge made in 2018. A new pledge agreed by all member states would elevate the political support to further enhance military mobility. It should be ambitious, aim for clear objectives and be implemented in a time frame of three to four years.

3. *Include significant funds for military mobility in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework*. All member states should elevate their financial support for dual-use infrastructure projects to a level that significantly surpasses the funding previously directed through the Framework, which only came to €1.7 billion. Considering the previous success of the funding and the extent of essential needs in this area, the EU member states cannot afford to drag their feet on negotiations and reduce the funding initially proposed, as was the case in the negotiations on the previous Multiannual Financial Framework.

Creating multistakeholder engagement platforms

The area of military mobility encompasses a variety of related fields and actors, both civilian and military. It is essential to forge a collective approach that brings together and enables all relevant stakeholders to contribute to enhancing military mobility on the European continent.

1. *Establish an EU–NATO centre of excellence for military mobility*. The centre would provide a good environment for further research on military mobility, organising seminars and trainings, sharing best practices, inviting partners to exchange views, and stimulating cooperation among EU member states and NATO allies. This centre would operate with the 'blessing' of both the EU and NATO, and an EU member state must take the initiative to host it (along similar lines to the Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats).

2. *Share best practices for enhancing military mobility through regional platforms such as Bucharest 9 and the Three Seas Initiative*. Regional initiatives and platforms could be very good environments for EU member states to share their progress, lessons learned and best practices for military mobility in smaller groups. These exchanges could forge further bilateral and regional cooperation to enhance military mobility. The outcomes of the discussions could then be shared with the EU institutions and other member states.

3. *Establish a dialogue platform to engage with the private sector*. This would facilitate an exploration of the sector's contributions and the role it can play in enhancing military mobility. Working with the private sector is paramount to developing the infrastructure needed to move military equipment and protecting this infrastructure from both traditional and hybrid threats.

Strengthening cooperation with partners

1. *Develop a lessons-learned process*. This should be aimed at helping both the EU and NATO benefit from what the war in Ukraine demonstrates in terms of military mobility. The lessons learned should be used during NATO exercises but also integrated into a long-term perspective for developing military mobility on the European continent.

2. *Set up exchanges on military mobility between senior leaders of the EU and NATO*. This would allow senior leadership to assess progress and explore ways of advancing cooperation. The EU–NATO structured dialogue on military mobility is a success story in advancing cooperation for both organisations. However, military mobility needs to also feature higher up in the exchanges between the EU and NATO. One way to do this is through setting up exchanges at the senior level to assess the progress made, the current challenges that need to be addressed as well as the next steps for EU–NATO cooperation on military mobility. On top of this, military mobility should also feature high on the agenda of future North Atlantic Council–EU Political and Security Committee meetings, enabling the member states to also share views.

3. *Prioritise military mobility in the security and defence dialogues with partners*. The US, the UK and Norway need to be part of the discussions and efforts to advance military mobility on the European continent. The topic should feature high on the agendas of the security and defence dialogues that are set up between them and the EU. Exploring ways for these countries to contribute to EU military mobility and harmonising their efforts with the EU's is essential.

Conclusion

Advancing military mobility has no silver bullet; rather, the EU and its member states need to make progress simultaneously across multiple policy areas, both civilian and military. In all of this, political will is essential. This should translate into political support for committing to provide the resources needed to develop military mobility at both national and EU levels. It is important to recognise that many aspects of military mobility have a civilian side. Supporting this side of the matter (e.g. developing the transport infrastructure) contributes significantly to enhancing military mobility.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Enhancing high-level political support and funding for military mobility	**Creating multistakeholder engagement platforms**	**Strengthening cooperation with partners**
Project 1	Keep military mobility high on the EU political agenda. This needs to be done because of the European elections, the EU strategic agenda for 2024–9 and the priorities of the next European Commission.	Establish an EU–NATO centre of excellence for military mobility.	Develop a lessons-learned process. This should be aimed at helping both the EU and NATO benefit from what the war in Ukraine demonstrates in terms of military mobility.
Project 2	Commit to a new and more ambitious military mobility pledge. The new strategic environment requires the EU and its member states to double down on enhancing military mobility and revisit the pledge made in 2018.	Share best practices for enhancing military mobility through regional platforms such as Bucharest 9 and the Three Seas Initiative. Regional initiatives and platforms could be very good environments for EU member states to share their progress, lessons learned and best practices for military mobility, in smaller groups.	Set up exchanges on military mobility between senior leaders of the EU and NATO. This would facilitate senior leadership to assess progress made and explore ways of advancing cooperation.
Project 3	Include significant funds for military mobility in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework.	Establish a dialogue platform to engage with the private sector. This would facilitate an exploration of the sector's contributions and the role it can play in enhancing military mobility.	Prioritise military mobility in the security and defence dialogues with partners. The US, the UK and Norway need to be part of the discussions and efforts to advance military mobility on the European continent.

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The Case for a European DARPA

Ionela Maria Ciolan

Summary

In a rapidly evolving technological landscape where national security is intertwined with economic security, being at the forefront of technological progress is becoming a crucial component of geopolitical power. In this respect Europe faces considerable difficulties as it lags behind the US and China. The work undertaken by the EU in the field of defence innovation is a fragmented puzzle. Brussels has typically funded innovation by investing predominantly in research and startups through various frameworks linked to the European Commission, together with the inconsistent efforts made by individual member states. If the EU wants to be a geopolitical actor with global influence in the medium to long term, it needs to adopt the American model and build a European DARPA.

Keywords Defence – Innovation – Emerging and disruptive technologies – EU – DARPA

Introduction

One of the key lessons of the past two years of war in Ukraine is the important role of defence innovation and technological advances on the battlefield. The use of satellites, drones, cyberspace, data and digitalisation on the battleground has proven to be a vital element in the fight against a larger and more powerful opponent. Ukraine's incorporation of emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs) provides a glimpse into how upcoming wars will be fought and their critical role in future capabilities and warfare.[1] In the future, wars will have a strong technological defence component as military capabilities are transformed by disruptive innovations and technological progress.

These technological innovations will revolutionise the ability to wage war, and pose numerous threats to the security and defence of the EU. Moreover, the progress made in new materials and human enhancement will increase the effectiveness and survival rate of military personnel, while new disruptive innovations such as directed energy and hypersonic weapons will create new dynamics on the battlefield. In addition, developments in space technologies, artificial intelligence, nanomaterials, quantum technologies and additive manufacturing will transform the entire process of planning and conducting military missions and other external components (intelligence gathering, communications, and force and logistics capabilities).[2]

As such, in a fast-evolving technological landscape, where national security is intertwined with economic security, being at the forefront of technological progress is becoming a crucial component of geopolitical power. Being part of the technological race does not just mean technological and innovative superiority; it also has crucial implications for political order, economic competitiveness and national security.

[1] N. T. Friðbertsson, *Technological Innovation for Future Wars*, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Report no. 025 STCTTS 22 E rev.1 fin (Brussels, 2022), 4.

[2] European Defence Agency, *Enhancing EU Military Capabilities Beyond 2040, Main Findings From the 2023 Long-Term Assessment of the Capability Development Plan* (Brussels, 2023), 12.

In this respect, Europe faces considerable difficulties as it lags behind the US and China in its quest for technological and industrial supremacy. Currently, the EU is straining to preserve its techno-industrial innovative edge.[3] The European Commission's 'de-risking' strategy is seen as insufficient to address the fierce global race for technological leadership and its myriad implications for European security. Beijing's ambitions to become a technological powerhouse, countered by Washington's efforts to circumvent them, are changing the global economic outlook and directly threatening European security.[4]

Moreover, the swift development of new and often disruptive technologies and their rapid weaponisation highlight the key role of innovation as a vital geostrategic element influencing the global distribution of power and the international security landscape. Maintaining the effectiveness, readiness and credibility of its members' combined armed forces is important to the EU for preserving its leading role in security and defence. The EU's ambition to become a credible global security actor is thus inextricably linked to the need to innovate in defence in Europe.

The EU's work on defence innovation

Defence innovation is that area of research and development targeting the advancement of EDTs. In Europe EDTs are defined by the European Defence Agency (EDA) as those technologies that 'significantly alter the rules or conduct of conflict within one or two generations', and thus require military organisations to upgrade their planning and long-term objectives. From all the EDTs identified by the EDA, six are particularly noteworthy for their strategic implications for the near future: artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, robotics and autonomous systems, hypersonic weapon systems and space, new advanced materials and quantum-based technologies.[5]

In recent years, European leaders have committed to growing the defence spending, highlighting investments in critical and emerging technologies for defence and security and boosting the coordination between civil, defence and space innovation, and research. The EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, adopted in March 2022, emphasises the importance of fostering defence innovation in emerging technologies. As such, the Compass proposed the creation of new policy tools such as the Hub for European Defence Innovation within the EDA and the European Commission's Roadmap on Critical Technologies for Security and Defence. It also recommends strengthening existing instruments, such as the European Defence Fund and the Action Plan on Synergies Between Civilian, Space and Defence Industries.[6] Nevertheless, the changes proposed by the Strategic Compass in defence innovation are more gradual than revolutionary, showcasing a low level of ambition and lack of consensus among European decision-makers in advancing with the European defence innovation sector.

This low level of ambition on defence or technological innovation is nothing new for the EU. Its member states have been reluctant to adopt dual-use technological innovations for defence/military purposes due to the perceived impression that defence is a national prerogative. Over the past two decades, European countries have collectively spent less on scientific research and development for defence than the US and China. Priority has been given to personnel, operational expenditure and the procurement of off-the-shelf equipment rather than investment in the creation of new defence platforms. In addition, due to European cultural and political mindsets, the private sector and European academic institutions have shown a lack of interest in collaborating with government initiatives to integrate EDTs into defence strategies.[7]

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[3] K. Sahin and B. Tyson, *Europe's Capacity to Act in the Global Tech Race*, German Council on Foreign Relations, Report no.. 6 (Berlin, 2021), 2.
[4] T. Gehrke, 'The EU Isn't Even Running the Race for Techno-Industrial Leadership', *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 20 June 2023.
[5] European Defence Agency, 'Driven by Global Threats, Shaped by Civil High-Tech', *European Defence Matters* 22 (2021), 6–11.
[6] Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*, 7371/22 (21 March 2022).
[7] International Institute for Strategic Studies, 'Defence Innovation and the European Union's Strategic Compass', *Strategic Comments* 28/3 (2022).

On top of this, the regulatory architecture in the EU's security and defence policy is defined by a division of tasks between member states, specialised EU agencies and various EU actors. This fragmentation points to numerous conflicting perspectives and outcomes in addressing security, defence and civil matters, which are even more contentious regarding military applications of emerging technologies such as AI.

Hence, the EU's work on defence innovation is a fragmented puzzle. Brussels has always funded innovation by mainly investing in research and startup companies through various frameworks associated with the European Commission, together with the inconsistent efforts made by individual member states. Unlike the US, the EU is challenged when it comes to gathering coherent support for a comprehensive body such as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) which is focused on breakthrough advances in defence technologies.

Two of the key pieces of the fragmented puzzle are the EDA (where member states override the processes) and the European Commission's Directorate General for Defence Industry and Space. At the European Commission level, defence innovation is carried out through the European Defence Fund, which allocates 4%–8% of its annual budget to emerging defence technologies, and the EU Defence Innovation Scheme; this scheme supports innovation and entrepreneurship in critical defence technologies and proposes initiatives such as a dual-use incubator and a defence equity facility.[8]

On the other side, the EDA has an important role in defence innovation at the European level, more specifically in the development of EDTs. In coordination with the member states, the EDA's Strategic Research Agenda administers the evaluation of EDTs, promotes common projects through the EDT Action Plan and encourages innovation via the EDA Defence Innovation Prize. The agency is also overseeing the implementation of Permanent Structured Cooperation projects on EDTs, for example, the Integrated Unmanned Ground Systems 2 and TWISTER hypersonic missile defence projects.[9] In addition, the agency launched the Hub for European Defence Innovation in 2022 to act as the main platform for innovation-related joint activities and cooperation among the member states and other stakeholders, as indicated in the objectives of the Strategic Compass.

To blur the picture even further, other EU instruments, bodies and agencies are also working on defence innovation, research and technology development, and EDTs. For example, the European Commission is currently proposing to expand the interoperability between various European initiatives, such as the European Defence Fund and Horizon Europe, and to advocate for dual-use research and development to advance cutting-edge technologies at the intersection of defence, space and civil applications.

While the EU has so far lacked a formal competence in defence issues, the previous years have seen the birth of several projects from the European Commission, which is trying to promote more coherence in projects related to the civil, defence and space industries and to overcome their current isolation from one another. For example, the Commission's Action Plan on Synergies underscores the disruptive potential of technologies such as AI in various sectors.[10] This trend of bridging the various silos is more than welcome, but it should also be carried out in parallel with an ambitious, coherent strategy that utilises European potential and resources at their best.

[8] S. Clapp, *European Capability Development Planning*, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 759.619 (Brussels, 2024).
[9] See *Permanent Structured Cooperation*, Projects, (May 2024).
[10] R. Csernatoni, *The EU's Defense Ambitions: Understanding the Emergence of a European Defense Technological and Industrial Complex*, Carnegie Europe, Working Paper (December 2021).

Financing defence innovation

A comparison of investment in defence innovation among the world's major powers shows that Europeans still have a long way to go to match others. According to the EDA, the EU member states spent only €3.5 billion on research and technology in 2022, which is only 1.4% of their total defence spending.[11] The amounts allocated to defence innovation at the EU level (at the EDA, Directorate General for Defence Industry and Space or other Directorate Generals) are in the hundreds of millions of euros, which also reflects a lack of cooperation on this issue at the European level between member states.

On the other hand, the US Department of Defense spent $34 billion on defence technology innovation in 2022, or 4% of its defence budget.[12] The US agency responsible for defence innovation, DARPA, alone had a budget of $3.8 billion in 2022,[13] more than all the funds spent by EU member states combined. As for China, a lack of transparency makes it difficult to find concrete reliable data for the country, but it is known that China has a defence budget of $229 billion. Moreover, China's military developments over the past few decades show that Beijing is determined to dominate the EDTs landscape, which includes AI, quantum technologies and hypersonic weapons systems, in order to become an innovation superpower.[14]

Thus, it is imperative for the EU to take part in the emerging technology race. On top of increasing the defence spending, policymakers should focus on increasing efficiency and coordination at the European level by limiting current disparities and building a coherent approach to defence investment planning and resource allocation across the EU.

To become an indispensable actor in future technologies and industries and to maintain the ability to influence the global community, the EU will have to promote a culture of risk tolerance and innovation. Hence, European stakeholders will have to redefine economic security through the interdependent links between the economy and defence. For this step, the European Commission and the member states will need to identify those critical technological advantages in research, production capacity and innovation that would give Europe an edge.

The American model of DARPA

The European defence innovation ecosystem is currently hampered by inertia and caution at both national and European levels. But there is an urgent need for a change of mindset and approach to move the EU forward in the technology race. To do so, European leaders must have the courage to adopt the methods of the American DARPA for vital 'disruptive' projects, which have produced real breakthroughs and numerous success stories in dual-use defence technologies in the US since DARPA was created in 1958 in response to the Soviet Union's building of the Sputnik satellite.

Over the past six decades, the Pentagon's DARPA has achieved an unprecedented degree of breakthrough innovation. DARPA's projects have been transformative for the field of technological innovation, and it is widely acknowledged to have the highest and most consistent track record for cutting-edge technologies in history. Its revolutionary inventions include global positioning satellites, the Internet, micro-electromechanical systems, drones or unmanned aerial vehicles, and RISC computing

11 European Defence Agency, *Defence Data 2022, Key Findings and Analysis* (Brussels, 2023), 3.
12 E. Chewning et al., *How Will US Funding for Defense Technology Innovation Evolve?*, McKinsey & Company (New York, 2022).
13 Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, *DARPA Agency Financial Report FY 2023* (Arlington, VA, 2023), 29.
14 US Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2023: Annual Report to Congress* (Arlington County, VA, 2023), 164–68.

and stealth technology. Although originally created for military purposes, DARPA's applications have had a significant impact on the civilian sector, helping to launch numerous multi-billion-dollar industries.[15]

DARPA is guided by five important organisational principles:[16]

1. *Independence*. The agency operates independently of the military, allowing it to pursue disruptive projects beyond traditional military considerations.
2. *Agile organisation*. It maintains a flat hierarchical structure and minimal bureaucratic processes, thus facilitating faster decision-making and project execution.
3. *Sponsorship*. It seeks high-level sponsors within the Department of Defense and other federal agencies to monitor and promote funded projects.
4. *Building communities of innovation*. DARPA brings together diverse communities of individuals with unique capabilities to break down silos and create collective strategies within innovation ecosystems.
5. *Diverse hiring*. DARPA hires project managers from a variety of backgrounds, with an emphasis on technological competence, leadership in managing complex projects and the ability to translate dreams into reality.

What makes DARPA a successful model also relates to four factors that are manifested in the agency's approach to projects. Trust and autonomy, a sense of mission, limited tenure and the urgency it creates, and risk-taking and tolerance for failure are key to the agency's organisational culture.[17] All of these elements are central to the way the agency pursues pioneering, disruptive ideas that can lead to game-changing technology products that can transform the defence sector. DARPA also plays an important role in integrating dual-use technologies and fostering synergies between military and civilian applications.

Prospects for building a European DARPA

The process of creating a European DARPA is twofold. On the one hand, European decision-makers will have to plan and structure all the practical aspects of creating a new European agency. At the same time, the European Commission and, especially, its member states will have to find the political will to reassess the viability of current European institutional frameworks and public policy paradigms for the speed and disruption demanded by the technological race.

Europe's institutional and political culture is dominated by a highly bureaucratic, over-regulated and 'play it safe' mentality. The creation of a European DARPA would require out-of-the-box thinking that takes into account the urgency with which the EU must overcome both cultural and policy-related differences and find space in its complicated internal architecture for the disruptive mechanisms needed to adopt this American model.

Moreover, certain characteristics need to be carefully considered. First, a European DARPA would have to be a high-risk, high-reward agency. It would need a culture that tolerates project failure while recognising the potential for breakthrough success. Second, a culture that tolerates risk is not enough; an EU DARPA

[15] R. E. Dugan and K. J. Gabriel, '"Special Forces" Innovation: How DARPA Attacks Problems', *Harvard Business Review*, October 2013.
[16] V. Mérindol and D. W. Versailles, 'Une « Darpa européenne » pour favoriser l'innovation de rupture, un modèle transposable à l'UE ?' ['A "European DARPA" to Promote Disruptive Innovation, a Model That Can Be Transposed to the EU?'], *The Conversation*, 28 April 2021.
[17] Congressional Research Service, *Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency: Overview and Issues for Congress*, R45088 (Washington, DC, 2021).

would also require a culture characterised by high ambition, minimal bureaucracy and a cohesive structure unified by thematic challenges.[18] In addition, the agency would need a distinct positioning within the European innovation landscape to avoid being overshadowed by existing European initiatives.

To differentiate the agency from other European programmes, its operational activity would revolve around disruptive innovation projects which are too pioneering to be financed by other EU initiatives. In contrast to conventional initiatives, a European DARPA would prioritise projects that address existing challenges with novel solutions but keep in mind a market applicability for those potential solutions and discoveries.

Furthermore, a European DARPA would give programme managers significant autonomy in project scope and direction, as in the successful example of the American agency. This approach would ensure that experts in the field are responsible for risk analysis, allowing for agility and innovation within the agency. While governance oversight remains essential, it should not stifle the creative freedom necessary for breakthrough advances in disruptive technologies.[19]

As part of the EU Strategic Agenda for 2024–2029, the EU needs to start laying the foundations for a European DARPA. Initially, European decision-makers should focus on developing the main three pillars: governance and legislation, funding, and cooperation and oversight.

Governance and legislation

In this regard, the EU will need to do the following:

- Create a dedicated legal framework to establish the European DARPA, ensuring its autonomy and independence from traditional bureaucratic structures within the EU. Clearly define the agency's mandate, scope and decision-making powers in order to promote agility in responding to emerging challenges.
- Establish a comprehensive strategic roadmap outlining the goals, milestones and expected impact of the European DARPA, yet maintain the flexibility and agility to adapt to changing technological environments or unforeseen challenges.
- Adopt a risk-tolerant approach: encourage high-risk, high-reward research initiatives to explore disruptive ideas that may not attract traditional funding sources, especially in deep tech.

Funding

In terms of funding, EU decision-markers must do the following:

- Allocate a substantial budget to the European DARPA to enable ambitious research projects and attract top-tier scientists, engineers and innovators. Consider a multi-year funding commitment to provide stability and continuity for long-term research initiatives.
- Invest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education programmes to cultivate a skilled workforce capable of contributing to the European DARPA's research objectives. Implement initiatives to attract and retain top-tier talent within the European innovation ecosystem.

[18] W. Bonvillian and R. Van Atta, 'ARPA-E and DARPA: Applying the DARPA Model to Energy Innovation', *The Journal of Technology Transfer* 36/5 (2011).

[19] A. Waibel, *What Is DARPA? How to Design Successful Technology Disruption* (Karlsruhe and Pittsburgh, PA, 2019), 14–16.

- Establish a flexible funding architecture. Provide adaptable funding mechanisms that can support projects at different stages of development, from early exploration to pilot testing and commercialisation.

Cooperation and oversight

The EU should take the following actions:

- Encourage open innovation. Foster collaboration between universities, research institutions, industry partners and startups to accelerate the development and commercialisation of new technologies at the European level.
- Develop a partnership with NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic to foster collaboration on EDTs for defence and security. This collaboration would allow the European DARPA to access NATO's expertise and resources, while providing NATO with access to the European DARPA innovation ecosystem.
- Institute a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact and effectiveness of European DARPA–funded research projects. Regularly review and adjust strategies based on performance metrics and lessons learned.

Conclusion

If the EU wants to be a geopolitical actor with global influence in the medium to long term, it must prioritise a comprehensive strategy for technology and defence innovation. Developing the 'next best thing' in technology and defence will depend on making the European innovation ecosystem more flexible, agile and open to risk-taking. To truly compete in the global technology race, the EU needs unwavering political commitment, a long-term vision and a high level of ambition. Failure to cultivate its defence innovation ecosystem will diminish the EU's ability to make an impact on the world stage. It is therefore time for European decision-makers to have the courage to apply the American DARPA model to critical 'disruptive' projects in the European ecosystem.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Focusing on governance and legislation	**Providing funding**	**Improving cooperation and oversight**
Project 1	Create a legal framework dedicated to establishing a European DARPA and to ensuring its autonomy, and more specifically, its independence from traditional bureaucratic structures within the EU. Clearly define the agency's mandate, scope and decision-making powers to improve its agility to respond to emerging challenges.	Allocate substantial budget to the European DARPA to enable ambitious research projects and attract top-tier scientists, engineers, and innovators. Commit to multi-year funding to provide stability and continuity for long-term research initiatives.	Encourage open innovation: foster collaboration between universities, research institutions, industry partners, and startups to accelerate the development and commercialisation of new technologies at European level.
Project 2	Establish a comprehensive strategic roadmap, outlining the goals, milestones and expected impact of the European DARPA. But ensure that it remains flexible and agile, and thus able to adapt to changing technological environments or unforeseen challenges.	Invest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education programmes to cultivate a skilled workforce capable of contributing to the European DARPA's research objectives. Implement initiatives to attract and retain top-tier talent within the European innovation ecosystem.	Develop a partnership with NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic to foster collaboration on emerging and disruptive technologies for defence and security. This collaboration would allow the European DARPA to access NATO's expertise and resources, while providing NATO with access to the European DARPA's innovation ecosystem.
Project 3	Adopt a risk-tolerant approach: encourage high-risk, high-reward research initiatives aimed at exploring disruptive ideas that may not attract traditional funding sources, especially ideas related to deep tech.	Establish a flexible funding structure: provide adaptable funding mechanisms that can support projects at different stages of development, from early-stage exploration to pilot testing and commercialisation.	Institute a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact and effectiveness of research projects funded by the European DARPA. Regularly review and adjust strategies based on performance metrics and lessons learned.

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Filling Strategic Capability Gaps

Daniel Fiott

Summary

This policy brief looks at how the EU can better contribute to filling strategic capability gaps. It does so by acknowledging that the EU could play a greater role in filling those gaps that would most enhance European defence and deterrence. Working alongside NATO, the EU should help to jointly develop those capabilities that cannot be built on a national basis alone, such as air and missile defence, tanks, naval platforms, cyber defence and space systems. Given the war in Ukraine, providing these capabilities could contribute to Europe's defence and help to deter and deny Russia's revisionist aims—both now and over the longer term. This brief offers recommendations in three key areas: clearer priorities for military capabilities, the ramping up of investments, and joint capability development and procurement.

Keywords EU – Defence – Capabilities – Enablers – Investment

Introduction

'All hands on deck!' This has been the clarion call for European governments during the past two years as they have moved to support Ukraine against Russia's brutal invasion. The war has served to bring clarity to minds in the EU, especially in terms of defence capabilities and equipment. The need to support Ukraine has led to some difficult questions being asked about the health of Europe's defence manufacturing base. It has been challenging for the EU member states to ramp up production for 155 mm ammunition, and there are still severe capability shortfalls in areas such as air and missile defence. This is one of the reasons why the Union has produced its European Defence Industrial Strategy, to which the European Council gave its political support on 21 March 2024. Since the war started, the EU has delivered almost €30 billion[1] worth of ammunition and weapons to Ukraine, including almost 250,000 shells,[2] via both the European Peace Facility (EPF) and direct member state deliveries. However, Ukraine's needs currently outstrip European production, as the country is using up to forty thousand 155 mm shells each week.[3] Although the Union has pledged to step up its ammunition production capacity to 1.3 million shells by the end of 2024,[4] the war has exposed the limits of Europe's defence manufacturing prowess.

With a possible political shift in Washington on the horizon, EU member states need to show a renewed commitment to capability development. This means ensuring that the European defence industrial base can draw on sustainable levels of investment, labour, skills, and research and technology, and also on secure supply chains. However, filling strategic capability gaps also requires a greater focus on those projects that most enhance European defence and deterrence. Working with NATO is paramount in this regard, but the EU should look to invest in capability areas where it is unsustainable for individual member states to do so on a national basis alone (e.g. in air and missile defence, naval platforms, cyber defence and space systems). As underlined by the war in Ukraine, Europe cannot contribute to its defence and deterrence unless it develops strategic capabilities that will deter and deny Russia's revisionist aims—both now and over the longer term. This policy brief looks at how the EU can better contribute to filling gaps in strategic capability.

1 *European Union External Action Service*, 'The War Against Ukraine and European Security' (23 January 2024).
2 *Euractiv*, 'EU Delivers Ukraine 224,000 Shells Under Ammo Plan', 12 August 2023.
3 L. Maślanka, *ASAP: EU Support for Ammunition Production in Member States*, Centre for Eastern Studies, Commentary 537 (2023).
4 *Euractiv*, 'Breton: EU Ammunition Capacity to Reach 1.3 Million Shells by Year End', 20 January 2024.

The EU approach to filling strategic capability gaps

Capability development goes to the heart of the EU's defence cooperation efforts. Back at the Saint Malo Summit in 1998, which is the bedrock on which EU security and defence has been built, the French and British governments called for the Union to 'have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces', and stated that 'Europe needs strengthened armed forces that can react rapidly to the new risks, and which are supported by a strong and competitive European defence industry and technology'.[5] Fast forward to the Versailles Declaration of 2022, and the EU27 agreed that the Union should take 'more responsibility for its own security and, in the field of defence, pursue a strategic course of action and increase its capacity to act autonomously' by resolutely investing 'more and better in defence capabilities and innovative technologies'.[6] In fact, the need for the EU to be a more capable defence actor is hardwired into the Treaty on European Union, which states, 'Member States shall undertake progressively to improve their military capabilities' (Article 42(3)).

Since 2008 the EU has entrusted the European Defence Agency (EDA) with identifying the military capability gaps facing the Union through its Capability Development Plan (CDP). In the first-ever CDP in 2008, which was based on its 2006 *Long-Term Vision* report, the Agency prioritised shortfalls such as mine counter-measure technologies, medical support, helicopters and counter–improvised explosive device capabilities, among others.[7] By 2013, and at the behest of the European Council, the CDP priorities had grown to include remotely piloted aircraft systems, air-to-air refuelling capacities, cyber-defence and satellite communications.[8] In 2023, and thus after Russia's war on Ukraine began, the CDP was revised to encompass 22 priorities, including air and missile defence, air transport, underwater and seabed warfare, ground combat capabilities, cyber-defence and more.[9] It is important to remember that the EU's CDP has four specific strands: (1) capability-gap shortfalls identified as part of EU missions and operations; (2) lessons learned from EU missions and operations; (3) scheduled European collaborative capability planning; and (4) long-term future technology and operational horizon scanning.[10]

However, despite the CDP's long-standing format, the EU has not been immune to the criticism that it still cannot effectively prioritise capabilities. In this sense, identifying military capability gaps is not the same as developing a coherent plan to provide the most essential capabilities: in other words, how does one prioritise among all of the priorities? This problem has not been lost on the EU, and the introduction of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence in 2017 was specifically created to provide more clarity about the most relevant defence capabilities. Indeed, its report from 2022 stresses the need for the EU to invest rapidly and jointly in main battle tanks, unmanned maritime and aerial systems, air transport, earth observation and cyber-defence.[11] It should also be noted that since the introduction of the European Defence Fund (EDF) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the EU has been able to engage in a form of 'prioritisation by design'. This means, for instance, that the EU has used financial incentives from the EDF to invest in priority capability areas such as naval anti-air and missile defence and space early-warning systems, among others.[12]

With the war on Ukraine, there is today a renewed urgency to the EU's long-standing interest in filling strategic capability gaps. Not only has the Union, rather rapidly, agreed to new financing tools, such as the Act in Support of Ammunition Production to support its ammunition production efforts, but it has also agreed to a

5 *CVCE*, 'Joint Declaration on European Defence. Joint Declaration Issued at the British–French Summit (Saint-Malo, 4 December 1998)'.
6 European Council, *Versailles Declaration* (11 March 2022).
7 *EDA*, 'Background Note – Capability Development Plan' (8 July 2008).
8 European Council, *European Council 19–20 December 2013* (20 December 2013).
9 *EDA*, '2023 EU Capability Development Priorities', Factsheet (13 November 2023).
10 Ibid.
11 EDA, *2022 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence Report* (November 2022).
12 D. Fiott, 'Investing and Innovating? Spain and the European Defence Fund', *Real Instituto Elcano*, 28 August 2023.

financial top-up for defence in 2024 by adding an additional €1.5 billion through the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform during the mid-term review of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF). This top-up will be used to kick-start the European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), which will see the EU eventually move beyond financially supporting defence research and prototyping under the EDF, into joint military capability development. Although an initial endowment of €1.5 billion over the period 2024–7 will help the EDIP come to life, there are serious questions about its potential for funding under the next MFF (2028–34). However, the European Investment Bank (EIB)—the Union's primary investment bank—is also taking strides to increase its investments in dual-use projects under the Strategic European Security Initiative. Through this initiative, the Bank is investing up to €8 billion in infrastructure and research and technology.[13] The EIB has also recently pledged to alter its borrowing criteria for dual-use projects, which could unlock additional capital investment into small and medium-sized enterprises and strategic defence projects.[14]

What is Europe missing?

While the EU has certainly developed an array of frameworks and new financial tools to support defence capability development in Europe, perhaps the most vital issue at stake today is being able to rapidly produce military capabilities at scale. This is certainly not an easy task. For example, it took European nations a decade and a half to fully certify and make operational the A400M strategic aircraft,[15] despite a long-standing need to develop strategic and tactical airlift capabilities. Certain military capabilities take time to develop, so there is even more reason to invest in European defence capability development today. In fact, while Europeans may be struggling at present to fill the capability gaps that are directly needed to respond to Russian aggression, the truth is that most major military systems projects launched today will only actually be ready and operational in 10–20 years. In this respect, political will from governments and industry is required, not only to launch projects, but also throughout the full life cycle of a development project due to the inevitable delays and cost overruns that will emerge.

Indeed, even if it is not a natural impulse for governments to jointly launch military capability programmes with EU support, the framework does allow for a degree of financial and political sustainability. Having a bureaucratic structure in place, such as that provided by the EU, may be seen as cumbersome, but in reality it is beneficial as it enables project management and funding horizons beyond the electoral mandates of individual governments (which usually last for four to five years). Despite these benefits, there is as yet no agreed overarching capability development 'strategy' for the EU. True, many may point to the Strategic Compass agreed in 2022, or even to the recent European Defence Industrial Strategy, but these documents have their limits and are also perhaps too broad in scope. To be sure, the Compass does highlight the need for a better capability development process and for next-generation capabilities and technological innovation. However, it does not provide any greater clarity than can already be found in the EU CDP, as it also calls for investment in main battle tanks, patrol-class ships, remotely piloted aircraft systems, earth observation and cyber-defence.[16]

Identifying which military capabilities are required for the EU is a different task to specifying how many units of a particular weapon system are required, over what timescale and for what military task, and whether these capabilities can be sustainably utilised (i.e. logistically, in terms of supply chains, maintenance, repair, ammunition etc.). Some analysts, rather than bureaucrats, have tried to answer these questions through

[13] *EIB*, 'EU Finance Ministers Set in Motion EIB Group Action Plan to Further Step-up Support for Europe's Security and Defence Industry' (12 April 2024).
[14] *EIB*, 'Strategic European Security Initiative'.
[15] *Airbus*, 'A400M – Delivery to the Point of Need'.
[16] Council of the EU, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (21 March 2022).

the use of military scenarios. For example, even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine it was estimated in one scenario—in which Russia hypothetically attacked Poland and Lithuania—that Europeans would have to invest as much as €330 billion in 90 long-range missile batteries, over 3,500 main battle tanks, over 250 ground-attack aircraft and[16] naval destroyers, among other weapons systems and capabilities.[17] Such scenarios usefully highlight the extent of Europe's capability shortfalls.

There is also a pressing political dimension that should be added to any reflection on European capability development: namely, future US strategy. The prospect of a second Trump presidency may hasten the need for Europeans to rapidly develop their own capabilities. Political signals that a Trump administration may not necessarily honour NATO's Article 5 commitments, or that US forces and capabilities in Europe may be moved to the Indo-Pacific theatre, only serve to underline the need for Europeans to take on more of the defence burden. Regardless of who sits in the White House, however, the European ramping-up of defence production and large-scale investment in military capabilities is long overdue: the message from Washington will essentially remain the same, even if the method of delivery or political approach differs. In this sense, the EU can help NATO meet the need to enhance European conventional military capabilities. In fact, a greater contribution by Europe to conventional forces may be the only way to ensure the long-term political unity and defence of the Alliance.[18]

Looking to the future

Based on the extent of Europe's capability shortfalls, it will be necessary for member states to further utilise the EU for their capability development needs. The relatively good news is that the EU does not need to reinvent the wheel on institutional frameworks and initiatives. Indeed, the EU already has the EDF and PESCO as mechanisms to support capability development, and the introduction of new tools such as the EDIP should provide member states with all of the cooperative structures they require. The EU is already using these tools to develop further strategic enablers in key domains such as space, cyber-defence and military mobility. However, more can be done to ensure that the Union makes a credible and sustainable contribution to defence and deterrence in Europe. This can be achieved in the coming years in three main ways: (1) military capability prioritisation, (2) increased joint investment in capabilities by EU member states, and (3) higher levels of EU funding.

Be clear about Europe's military capability priorities

The EU and its member states must become more precise about their military capability priorities. Existing tools such as the EDF and PESCO need to be geared to developing capabilities that contribute to European defence, especially in those areas that would be further exposed should the US reduce its contribution to European defence. In this respect, it is absolutely vital that the EU and NATO engage in a structured and genuine process of streamlining capability development processes. There are already well-tested linkages between the Union's CDP and NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP), but effective capability prioritisation would hone in on the handful of capabilities that would truly improve European defence. These include air and missile defence, main battle tanks and naval vessels, as well as continued efforts to develop space- and cyber-defence capacities. Instead of listing all of Europe's defence capability gaps, the process should instead focus on a handful of military projects that could be developed in a collaborative manner at the EU level. Politically, this would also allow the EU to be clearer about its role in developing capabilities for European defence.

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[17] B. Barry et al., *Defending Europe: Scenario-Based Capability Requirements for NATO's European Members*, International Institute for Strategic Studies (2019), 38.

[18] L. Simón, D. Fiott and O. Manea, *Two Fronts, One Goal: Euro-Atlantic Security in the Indo-Pacific Age*, The Marathon Initiative (August 2023).

Become serious about investments and joint capability collaboration

No serious attempt to fulfil strategic capabilities in Europe can realistically and sustainably occur without financial resources. It is a positive development that many EU and NATO members are gradually reaching NATO's defence investment pledge of 2% of GDP. While EU member states are only indirectly bound by the NATO pledge, they have committed to increasing defence spending as part of their binding commitments in PESCO (Commitment 1). What is more, PESCO-participating member states have committed to successive medium-term increases in defence investment expenditure to 20% of total defence spending, in line with the collective benchmark (see Commitment 2). They have also committed to increasing joint and collaborative strategic defence capability projects, to be supported by the EDF when appropriate (Commitment 3).[19] Of course, PESCO commitments mean little if there are no meaningful sanctions, and in lieu of such consequences one can only hope that the combination of a potential new Trump presidency and the continued threat from Russia is sufficient to ensure further defence investment.

However, national defence investment needs to be supported by more joint investment because this enables the ability to mass produce much-needed armaments at an appropriate scale and cost. Although national defence procurement decisions will persist, perhaps even more so with additional national defence investment, there are signs that Europeans are prepared to jointly produce capabilities (e.g. the Future Combat Aircraft System by France, Germany and Spain, and the Main Ground Combat System by France and Germany). The reality is that advanced weapons systems are subject to a form of cost escalation that will become increasingly difficult to manage on a purely national basis. The more sophisticated military systems and technologies become, the less realistic it becomes to produce those systems at scale nationally. Developing these systems and technologies on a purely national basis may also leave too small an export market to help manage programme costs. In this respect, there is a logic to avoiding investing huge amounts of public money into defence development programmes that can only be produced on a small scale and for one or two markets. Joint development and procurement, by contrast, provides an opportunity to spread investment risks, create mass production and ensure enough European states use similar systems to allow military interoperability.

Use the EU to invest in joint capabilities

To ensure the long-term health of the European defence industry and to support joint development and procurement, increased levels of EU investment are required over the coming years. When the EDIP is finally adopted it should come with a strong commitment in the next MFF (2028–34) to defence-industrial investment. Somewhere in the region of €100 billion for defence over a seven-year period would be a good place to start. Should this amount of investment be established in the next MFF, it would be possible to create a virtuous circle in EU defence investment. In practice, securing €100 billion in investment would send a powerful signal to the defence industry that the EU is ready to seriously support the sector beyond the €8 billion it directly invests via the EDF and the €1.5 billion it will initially invest under the EDIP until 2027. Should this be combined with more ambitious investments from the EIB into defence and dual-use technologies, more private investors may be attracted too. This would provide the capital required to ensure that Europe's defence industry has large and sustainable contracts for defence systems and equipment over the next decade, at least.

Of course, increased EU-level spending will not be enough to ensure efficient joint capability development. Member state procurement agencies involved in developing EU-sponsored capabilities will need to ensure

[19] *PESCO*, 'Binding Commitments: List of Ambitious and More Binding Common Commitments Undertaken by Participating Member States'.

proper coordination with industrial and government partners. Additionally, the EU should be making life easier for industrial partners and governments by evaluating existing EU defence-industrial legislation to ensure that there are no needless obstacles to cooperation. More broadly, the EU needs to continue its work on the security of the defence supply chain by ensuring that trade policy and partnerships are geared to securing critical raw materials. Additionally, it would make a lot of sense for the European Commission to work hand-in-hand with the EIB on the issue of skills shortages, as the Bank has extensive expertise and experience in developing strategies to plug knowledge gaps. This will be critical in the coming years, as no ramping up of defence production can occur without technicians, engineers and/or scientists.

Conclusion

Russia's war on Ukraine has led to fundamental shifts in how EU member states view the health of Europe's capability inventories and defence-industrial base. If the EU is to meet the challenge of defending Europe, supporting Ukraine and deterring Russia, then further investment in defence is vital. This policy brief has noted that the EU has already started to be much clearer about the types of military capabilities it should help develop. Still, more can be done to streamline the Union's capability prioritisation, and this should include closer cooperation with NATO, whenever possible. However, a clearer focus on the capabilities needed for defence and deterrence needs to be complemented by large-scale defence investment. Only in this way can the EU help unlock defence production and contribute to ramping up defence manufacturing capacity. Finally, this policy brief has also shown how greater defence investment and production should be galvanised by increased joint procurement. This is a critical moment for European defence. Without the measures underlined in this policy brief, Europe will find it much harder to defend itself.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Making a meaningful contribution to defence and deterrence in Europe	**Increasing joint investment for EU defence capabilities**	**Ramping up defence production capacity in the EU**
Project 1	Focus the EDF, PESCO and the future EDIP on the production of air and missile defences, naval equipment, main battle tanks, and space and cyber capabilities.	Increase national defence spending to at least 2% of GDP. At least 20% of this should be invested in equipment, and ideally jointly, in accordance with PESCO's binding commitments.	Invest in new defence manufacturing sites and fill skills shortages in the defence labour market using the EIB and by leveraging private investment
Project 2	Build on current EU investments in existing strategic enablers such as space, cyber-defence and military mobility.	Agree swiftly to an EDIP that is backed by substantial financial means (approximately €100 billion) for the next MFF (2028–34).	Place large and sustainable pre-orders for ammunition and defence equipment to stimulate demand and ensure production for at least the next decade.
Project 3	Continue streamlining the EU's capability development processes (CDP and CARD), providing more effective linkages to NATO (NDPP).	Experiment with existing and new EU legislation to ensure that the Union's procurement and transfer regulations aid production.	Use EU trade tools to secure strategic supplies of critical raw materials and to invest in secure supply chains with strategic partners.

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European Civil Protection Service

Paola Tessari

Summary

Crisis management is traditionally an internal matter, which rests within state competences. However, in recent years, natural and man-made disasters have been characterised by transboundary impacts. Consequently, the need for strong coordination beyond the national level has increased. Many initiatives have been launched at the EU level, the main one being the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, an essential and successful tool in the domain. At the same time, efficient and effective crisis management should remain vigilant, flexible, and open to expanding its toolkit and potential in advance of the emerging challenges and evolving scenarios. Among the possible additional measures, crisis anticipation should be enhanced, coupled with expanded situational awareness, building upon the contributions of expertise from diverse domains, and considering new and emerging scenarios. Additional mechanisms, outside of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, could also be implemented to allow willing countries to provide additional capacity. A whole-of-society approach and civil defence measures could also increase the empowerment of all participants in society, increasing the resilience of systems and making citizens more responsible for the successful prevention of and response to certain threats.

Keywords Civil protection – Civil defence – Societal resilience – Crisis management

Introduction

Extreme events and unprecedented emergencies have demonstrated the need for a coordinated approach to crisis management which goes beyond the national dimension. Indeed, while crisis management is traditionally an internal matter, the competence for which rests with national governments,[1] states have increasingly faced overwhelming emergencies, challenging their ability to handle such situations effectively.[2] Thus, there is an emerging need for coordination so that prompt and effective support can be delivered to the affected country/countries. At the EU level, many initiatives have been launched to encourage collaboration, increase support and coordinate assistance among the member states. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM), a system that collects and coordinates the assets made available by the participating states, represents the core of the EU's involvement in civil protection. The mechanism has proved to be an essential and successful tool in the domain, but the increasing complexity of the scenarios, with emerging challenges disrupting societal functions and well-being in general, leaves room for potential improvements. This policy brief aims to provide an overview of the state of play of the mechanism and attempts to formulate additional measures and prospects for even more robust action.

Background

The legal basis for EU action in crisis management is found in Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, where the 'solidarity clause' is introduced, which mandates that member states

[1] C. Pursiainen and K. Eero, 'From European Critical Infrastructure Protection to the Resilience of European Critical Entities: What Does It Mean?', *Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure* 8/51 (2023).

[2] A. Boin, M. Busuioc and M. Groenleer, 'Building European Union Capacity to Manage Transboundary Crises: Network or Lead-Agency Model?', *Regulation and Governance* 8/4 (2014).

intervene to support other states in the circumstances of a terrorist attack or a natural or man-made disaster. In addition, Article 196 of the same treaty attributes a supplementary competence to the Union, to encourage cooperation between member states to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing and protecting against natural or man-made disasters.

To better support cooperation among countries in the event of major emergencies, the EUCPM was established in 2001, and includes all EU member states and a further 10 participating countries.[3] The mechanism is comprised of a pool of assets voluntarily made available by the participating states, with the EU co-financing the transportation and operational costs. In 2019 an additional reserve of assets was established, the so-called rescEU, which is 100% funded by the EU.[4] These assets comprise medical items, decontamination supplies, protective equipment and detectors.

State of play

The EUCPM has been activated 700 times since its launch in 2001.[5] Assistance through the EUCPM can be provided in multiple ways: through the delivery of equipment, the deployment of experts, or via consular assistance and repatriation.[6] The capacities are made available by states participating in the EU Civil Protection Pool and are dispatched by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre. Currently, the EU Civil Protection Pool includes more than 100 assets.[7] With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the largest operation undertaken by the Mechanism was launched. Medical supplies, fuel and shelter equipment have been delivered to Ukraine, building up the reserves for treating patients exposed to hazardous materials such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents. The value of the in-kind assistance provided to and emergency operations carried out in Ukraine via the EUCPM so far amounts to €796 million.[8]

In addition, it is worth noting the recent policy measures taken with the aim of increasing the resilience of the whole society, which address both critical infrastructure and the citizenry. In this regard, the key instrument is the Critical Entities Resilience Directive (CER Directive), which entered into force on 16 January 2023.[9] The Directive replaces and expands the previous framework, extending its scope of application from 2 to 11 critical entities sectors, and improving response capacities and coordination between the various actors at the national and EU levels.

Other key measures have been adopted to counter hybrid threats such as the disinformation campaigns that interfere with EU citizens and society at large, including institutions and democratic processes. Lessons can be learned from Finland and Sweden, as reported in the INGE Committee[10] study *Best Practices in the Whole-of-Society Approach in Countering Hybrid Threats*.[11] The approaches described therein are characterised by the engagement of various groups, from the government to the private sector and civil-society organisations, with courses provided at the national and regional levels to teach civil preparedness and defence. Disinformation

[3] *European Commission*, 'European Civil Protection Mechanism'.
[4] *European Commission*, 'EU Funds Further Strategic Reserves for Medical, Chemical, Biological and Radio-Nuclear Emergencies Worth €690 Million' (20 December 2023).
[5] *European Commission*, 'European Civil Protection Mechanism'.
[6] Ibid.
[7] *European Commission*, 'Emergency Response Coordination Centre'.
[8] *European Union External Action Service*, 'Over 140,000 Tonnes of Life-Saving and Critical Supplies Sent to Ukraine via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism' (1 February 2024).
[9] European Parliament and Council Directive 2022/2557/EC on the resilience of critical entities and repealing Council Directive 2008/114/EC, OJ L 333 (14 December 2022), 164.
[10] Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation.
[11] M. Wigell, H. Mikkola and T. Juntunen, *Best Practices in the Whole-of-Society Approach in Countering Hybrid Threats*, European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, PE 653.632 (May 2021).

and misinformation are specifically targeted, with courses and training for journalists and the media.[12] Special attention is paid to maintaining self-sufficient supplies and stockpiling, and training is given to citizens on how to cope in emergency situations, including in the absence of state assistance.[13]

Prospects

Recent events, such as the conflict in Ukraine and, before that, the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrate the need for a renewed debate on society's preparedness for crises and for a system that is adequate to face current threats and future crises. Such emergencies have increasingly had a cross-border dimension, with severe consequences transcending national territories and requiring coordination among multiple actors.

With the aim of finding possible ways to enhance the emergency management protocols, a few lessons learned can be identified. At the local and supranational levels, it has become paramount to reinforce preparedness by anticipating crises as far as possible. Crisis anticipation should be coupled with expanded situational awareness and paying more attention to all kinds of events, including those considered less likely but that could have potentially extreme impacts, the 'high-impact, low-probability' (HILP) events. An example is the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has brought the spotlight back onto the threat of nuclear weapons after more than 70 years of diminished risk. To this, the danger of the spread of hazardous materials, due to the presence of industrial facilities in the war zone, should be added.

In addition, attention should be paid to the fragile safety and security of such facilities in the current circumstances. Even before the conflict in Ukraine, experts were concerned about the smuggling and trafficking of hazardous, and specifically radiological and nuclear, materials in the Black Sea region. The dual-use character of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear agents, with applications in the pharmaceutical, medical and agricultural domains, makes them widely produced and easily available. In addition, due to their very nature, such materials are usually difficult to detect and identify. For this reason, the need for enhanced threat-detection measures is becoming more pressing, especially in exceptional circumstances, such as those we have witnessed over the last two years in Ukraine. Rapid detection capacities would enable a fast response, allowing the collection of information that could be shared swiftly through early warning and alert systems, both with operators and the general population.

The prevention and management of such events would also benefit from the contributions of expertise from diverse domains: the knowledge of scientific and technical experts, as well as social science professionals, would enable an extended and comprehensive understanding of events, embracing all intertwined aspects. This would help to ensure realistic situational awareness, allowing for rapid and informed decision-making that addresses the extended operational requirements of such situations.

There is no doubt that the EU has significantly increased its crisis-management capacity thanks to the assets pooled by the participating states. Nevertheless, the crisis-management community needs to remain vigilant for extreme events, some of them emerging and evolving, which may necessitate more and more contributions from states. With this in mind, suggestions have already been made with regard to the establishment of additional mechanisms, outside of the EUCPM, to allow willing countries to provide additional capacity. Numerous experts have highlighted how the launch of closer cooperation mechanisms, such as Permanent Structured Cooperation, have the potential to foster closer operational collaboration beyond the existing procedures.[14]

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 S. Blavoukos and P. Politis-Lamprou, 'A European Civil Protection Union: Maturing out of Necessity', *Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy* 89 (2021).

Looking at the evolving threat landscape, it is essential to pay attention to the use of hybrid operations, which combine multiple techniques with the aim of exploiting a society's vulnerabilities. Among the techniques used, there has been an increase in the dissemination of fake news and disinformation. The impact of such methods is amplified due to the ease with which they can reach society via online channels, especially social media platforms. With this in mind, a reinvigorated civil protection system should also consider taking a whole-of-society approach towards resilience, in which all actors, private and public, are ready to act to ensure a state's security.[15] Informed citizens can be security actors, able to identify and spot a potential incident, react accordingly and inform the authorities. A knowledgeable citizen can adopt the correct behaviour and contribute individually and jointly with the community, helping to limit the consequences of and, in the long term, facilitate the recovery from an emergency.[16] To give people the skills needed to respond to disasters jointly and therefore to be more resilient, a few measures can be applied. A first step could be to work on awareness and communication, not only at the national level but also through supranational coordination via the EUCPM. As regards awareness raising, an information campaign could prove a useful tool to empower individuals and the wider public, both with the ability to act in the case of emergencies and knowledge of where to find reliable information. Empowering society and making citizens more responsible represent tools for the successful prevention of and response to certain threats.[17]

With regard to emergency communication, clear institutional communication strategies are imperative for fostering resilient systems and communities and promoting security, again not only locally but also at the supranational level. Such strategies are necessary at a time when hybrid warfare techniques have the potential to hit all elements of society with cascading effects. A recent example was given during the Covid-19 pandemic, when we witnessed the spread of sometimes contradictory or unclear information, and even disinformation, which risked jeopardising crisis-management efforts.

The resilience of the whole society can only be achieved by taking measures to ensure the safety of those sectors essential for the well-being and functioning of the community. This is where distinct measures for the safeguarding of critical infrastructure come into play: emergency plans for critical infrastructure should identify specific vulnerabilities and conduct risk assessments. The latter should adopt a comprehensive approach that considers how various systems and facilities are interconnected and interdependent. The EUCPM can play a role in harmonising national measures that ensure the resilience of critical entities, an area which is now regulated by the above-mentioned CER Directive. The skills and competences made available through the EUCPM make it a precious forum for knowledge exchange and for ensuring an approach that takes into consideration the interconnection of systems beyond the national dimension. The dialogues that arise through the mechanism could also improve the coordination and integration with the normative frameworks and measures applicable in the field of emergency management, thereby boosting the benefits of the actions of all relevant organisations. Overall, this could lower the risk of duplication, thus ensuring that the interoperability of existing resources from different states and actors is maximised.

Indeed, due to their complexity, certain events require an approach that is based on interdisciplinary insights and the knowledge of multiple stakeholders. Such knowledge might come from existing EU initiatives, among them the outcomes of EU-funded projects. Dedicated financing to follow up research outcomes to create sustainable solutions that serve the EU, even after projects have ended, would be useful, especially when technological solutions have been developed but cannot be easily launched into the market.

[15] H. Pillai, 'Protecting Europe's Critical Infrastructure From Russian Hybrid Threats', *Centre for European Reform* (April 2023).

[16] P. Tessari and K. Muti, *Strategic or Critical Infrastructures, a Way to Interfere in Europe – State of Play and Recommendations,* European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, PE 653.637 (July 2021).

[17] Ibid.

Conclusions

The EU plays a crucial role in protecting and assisting people and countries hit by major emergencies. While crisis management has traditionally happened outside of supranational regulation, numerous advances have been made in recent years as a result of the involvement of the EU in a broader coordinating role. Thus, EU action in this field has evolved and improved due to increasing evidence that crises demand coordinated action, with a supranational component working in conjunction with the traditional role of the state as the main provider of security. An EU-level approach does and will continue to play a key role in harmonising crisis-management capacities, facilitating coordination and supporting the coherent development of crisis-management schemes. Equally, efficient and effective crisis management should remain vigilant, flexible, and open to expanding its toolkit and potential, with the security and protection of society the priority above all other objectives.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Enhancing civil-defence preparedness	**Reinforcing the resilience of the whole society, with specific measures focusing on people and infrastructures**	**Avoiding duplication at the EU and international levels by building on existing initiatives and resources**
Project 1	Expand decision-makers' situational awareness, anticipation and coordination of HILP events.	Establish awareness campaigns at different levels to empower individuals and the wider public with the tools to act in emergencies and to know where to find reliable information.	Launch measures to build upon the outcomes of EU-funded projects and facilitate dedicated financing to ensure that these produce sustainable solutions that serve the Union.
Project 2	Enhance threat- and risk-detection measures, especially for those threats which are not immediately visible or easy to recognise, to feed into early warning and alert systems.	Establish communication strategies, with a clear identification of roles, to inform the public during emergencies. These strategies should have two aims: (1) to ensure the correctness of information, and (2) to identify an official spokesperson to avoid the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation.	Establish common standards to ensure the interoperability of procedures and equipment from different member states to prepare for events which may have cross-border effects.
Project 3	Enable member states to contribute additional resources, beyond those available via the EUCPM, by establishing additional pooling mechanisms.	Produce emergency plans for critical infrastructure, starting with risk assessments and the identification of vulnerabilities, including proper consideration of the interconnection and interdependency of different systems and facilities.	Improve coordination and integration with the normative frameworks and measures applicable in the field of emergency management to maximise the actions taken by all relevant organisations.

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Designing a European Military Model

Michael Benhamou

Summary

Given the rise of military threats faced by Europeans, new European military concepts should be debated and agreed upon urgently. These concepts would then shape a European defence model that drives capabilities and institutional reforms in the right direction in terms of the distribution of tasks between European countries, establishing a hierarchy of internal and external threats, and more realistic defence planning with Europe's NATO allies.

Keywords Doctrines – Concepts – Planning – NATO – Europe

Introduction

Most European countries—and all of Europe's adversaries—possess a team or a department tasked with the demanding work of merging military means, field doctrines and threat assessments into one defence model. That model then enables broad understanding in the ranks, industrial or geographic prioritisation, and the distribution of tasks across all domains.

As wars multiply and the US means allocated to NATO and to Europe continue to decline, as they have been doing since the 1990s,[1] it is time for the EU to step up its conceptual output in order to shape Europe's new defence architecture to meet its own specific needs. NATO remains the cardinal security provider, but Europeans should break away from their post-1945 habits and seek a new long-term formula with the US that redefines how they want to fight together in a way that aligns with the partners' common values, perceptions and interests.

Worryingly, the EU is today rushing into crisis-driven capabilities silos and institutional conversations about the future without the conceptual basis that would provide a clear foundation for all players. Consequently, most policymakers and industry representatives fail to understand Europe's core defence plan. Today's decisions are typically based on hazy assumptions, feel-good narratives or national short-termism.

In this difficult transition, EU institutions have a responsibility to bring together all actors—EU27 countries, regional allies and partners—while respecting the primacy of nations in this high-stakes defence realm. Let us now address the matter of how the EU could proceed.

Defining the 'military model'

What is a 'military model'? Essentially, it is a long document in which European armies define their priorities and procedures. The thought process involved in the creation of a military model is necessary as armies develop defence policies over decades. In practice, developing a military model means tackling issues such as the distribution of tasks among European nations according to means and scenarios at the strategic level. It may also imply addressing issues of a more operational nature: for instance, reactions to warfare scenarios in our immediate neighbourhood (Russia and the Middle East) and to internal threats

[1] M. Allen, M. Flynn and C.-M. Machain, 'US Global Military Deployments (1950–2020)', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 39/3 (2021).

(jihadism). Tactics also come into play: for instance, establishing targeting processes against all types of adversaries; agreeing chain of command structures among air, land and maritime components; or integrating new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) into decision-making processes.

The aim of creating such a model is to enable like-minded European nations to solve defence equations within the complex triangle of means, doctrines and threats. To come up with the ideal security responses, European delegates need to provide the most honest data possible: the budgets allocated at the national level, energy and climate forecasting, the quality of their troops, a dispassionate analysis of the enemy and so on. It is the accumulation of such preparatory work that generates the necessary confidence within a coalition to launch a military operation.

Yet such a model should not be too rigid either. 'No formula should shackle decision-making', US diplomat George Kennan used to say.[2] German thinker Clausewitz also doubted those military analysts who built geometric castles out of thin air back in the nineteenth century: 'war has a grammar but little logic', he often used to write.[3] Once again, what matters here is the confidence that comes from acknowledging and repairing gaps and vulnerabilities—and doing so collectively.

Finally, one should bear in mind that Europe's adversaries have conducted similar intense reviews over the past decades. The Islamic State, for instance, studied Bin Laden's and Al-Zawahiri's operations before making decisive tactical shifts: it ultimately assessed that hitting America was counterproductive, while Europe was a softer target, particularly when it came to border areas where police control was weaker.[4] As early as the 1990s, Russia initiated similar research by financing numerous assessments of the reasons behind the collapse of the USSR. Breaking away from Communist habits and from a certain 'Stalingrad heavy infantry nostalgia', the country switched to a more indirect, flexible and multifaceted concept of warfare.[5] Before its return to a conventional invasion with the assault on Ukraine in February 2022, this concept had led to numerous successes from the Kremlin's vantage point: private military companies taking over Africa's security, Donald Trump's election in 2016 and Bashar Assad being kept in power in Syria.

Ignore concepts if you will, but do so at your own peril. Military models may not appeal to politicians or to the public—who both want quick, visual solutions—but they are the starting point for laying the solid defence foundations that will bear fruit in the 2030s and 2040s.

EU defence concepts today

The EU is not entirely passive when it comes to military concepts. Returning to the triangle of means, threats and doctrines, one notices that (1) means or capabilities have been dealt with by the European Defence Agency (EDA) since its 2004 inception; (2) threats are now addressed in the 'Strategic Compass' document[6] produced by the European External Action Service (EEAS); and (3) military doctrines are addressed by the European Union Military Service (EUMS) within its 'concept and capabilities' unit.[7]

These organisations have the merit of demonstrating 'group dynamics' and of 'forging shared norms',[8] but they fail to provide any sense of direction. The EDA's latest *Capability Development Priorities*[9] provides

2 G. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925–1950* (New York: Pantheon Publishing, 1983), 322.
3 R. Aron, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*, vol. II (Paris: éditions Gallimard, 1976), 37.
4 H. Micheron, *La colère et l'oubli – les démocraties face au djihadisme européen* (Paris: éditions Gallimard, 2023), 165.
5 D. Minic, *Pensée et culture stratégiques russes* (Paris: éditions de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 2023), 64.
6 EEAS, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (2022).
7 EU *WhoisWho*, 'Deputy Head of the European Union Military Staff (EUMS.DEP)'
8 J. Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union* (Brussels: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 212.
9 *EDA*, 'EU Capability Development Priorities' (2023).

a list of 22 priorities without suggesting any hierarchy for them or establishing any connection between them and ongoing conflicts or threat scenarios. The Strategic Compass also resembles a shopping list written by someone who has failed to provide any thematic or geographic focus—with the EEAS covering all levels of tension from domestic terrorism to maritime squabbles in the Pacific without offering any specificity on the means required for each scenario. As for military doctrines, the EUMS does not publish official documents on its own at the moment, relying on NATO's battle-proven manuals. Finally, the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System proposes the production of high-quality foresight analyses, but this inter-institutional EU group has employed few military staff so far and has therefore covered defence only marginally.

This quick EU tour displays the already closely packed field of agencies involved in security matters, yet none with the ability to match goals with budgets, procedures with legislation or postures with actual mass. This has three immediate consequences for Europe. The first is an overreliance on NATO standards, which are sometimes not adapted to the European context. The counter-offensive of 2023 led by Ukraine against Russia—one pushed for by US advisers—has shown the limits of US tactical concepts without air dominance.[10] The second is a dependency on US tactical support in defence planning—a support that the diversification of American society and trade no longer guarantees at the same level. For instance, the defence plans of many Eastern European countries are too rigid in the event of a Russian attack, because they all expect massive support from Washington. The third consequence is a lack of trust from elected representatives with regard to the ability of European institutions to produce military-related laws. Most politicians prefer to bypass EU courts and legislative procedures. One recent example of this trend can be seen with AI: 'there is no EU-wide legal and ethical framework for the military uses of AI. Consequently, Member States may adopt different approaches, leading to gaps in regulation and oversight'.[11]

Defence norms are therefore dictated by allies and partners—but also by adversaries. After 20 years of arid policy debates on hybrid warfare and conventional tactics, Russia is now leading defence thinking in Europe.

Such intellectual leadership is dangerous as military victories are initially the fruit of simple ideas. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have witnessed the impact of poor force design and concepts: disbanding the Iraqi army in 2003, for instance, or asking untrained NATO soldiers to manage billions of dollars of farming or rule-of-law projects in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2014. We have also seen more cunning military management practices: using the opponent's social media to enable an election outcome favourable to one's own interests, creating autonomous and decentralised for-profit military units to reinforce friendly regimes with discretion, and maintaining a strong engineering and industrial culture to revive military production quickly, if necessary.

Unfortunately, Russia and China have been the countries producing these effective military concepts in the past decades, while NATO countries have often chosen the wrong path. Consequently, Europe is now approximately 20 years behind in military thinking.

Practical recommendations

We recommend the launch of a comprehensive European military conceptual effort as soon as possible. The EUMS should be expanded in order to start adapting the hundreds of NATO tactical manuals for European use and for all realistic scenarios: low to high intensity, classic warfare to post-conflict, permissive

[10] F.-S. Gady, 'Making Attrition Work: A Viable Theory of Victory for Ukraine', *Survival* 66/1 (2024); M. Benhamou, 'Next for Europe: Defining Its Own Battlefield Tactics, *European View* 22/2 (2023).

[11] R. Fanni, 'Why the EU Must Now Tackle the Risks Posed by Military AI', *Centre for European Policy Studies*, 8 June 2023.

to non-permissive; and also in terms of intelligence practices; logistics; the relationship between air, maritime and land components; and so on. Even though the EUMS is able to use NATO's material, this work will take time and require a lot of war-gaming.

We anticipate three main tasks:

1. *Designing a European concept for intelligence*. Establish a European Crisis Response Process. The fusion centres operating under it should be tasked with the detection of weak signals and determining planning principles prior to the launch of an operation. Put European targeting principles in place to address the dilemma of tactical opportunity versus civilian casualties, in close coordination with the European Parliament, the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court for Human Rights. Define European cyber and AI standards for military surveillance and influence, whether defensive or offensive. The future of human–machine teaming should be outlined here.
2. *Designing a European concept for operations*. Define coordination and capability balances between the air, land and maritime components in case of any non-permissive military scenarios—all based on Europe's current wars and threats. Establish European manoeuvring guidelines (defence versus offence, attrition, centre of gravity definition etc.) for air, maritime, land, space and special forces operations, always drawing from existing NATO standards. Establish civilian–military principles in line with Europe's philosophy—that is, field coordination of the military with aid and development projects.
3. *Designing a European concept for logistics*. Establish a European concept for the use of all sources of energy (oil, gas and renewables) and modes of transport (plane, train and truck) within the European military forces and for all scenarios. Define a European approach to medical support in low- to high-intensity scenarios involving numerous wounded and casualties—all based on actual European medical means. Set up European rear-zone principles for use during high-intensity battle—these should define staging areas, the mobility and location of headquarters (HQ) and units, ammunition rules, speed criteria and so on.

Conclusion

The twenty-first century began with a lot of conceptual and battlefield defeats for the US and Europe: Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, the Sahel and Crimea. Ukraine's future is more uncertain than ever. Given these setbacks, the time has come for Europeans to reflect and react.

EU institutions are currently providing European capitals with a framework that would allow defence thinking to occur at the right level of discretion and trust. We believe such conceptual discussions to be urgent given that wars are won primarily by imposing your own principles on others. Guilt, denial or external dependencies can no longer be the driving forces for Europeans.

Designing a military model is not one of those activities that produces a quick, satisfying 'ribbon-cutting' result, but it is imperative to undertake this work if we wish to reach the decade of the 2030s with confidence and unity.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Designing a European concept for intelligence	**Designing a European concept for operations**	**Designing a European concept for logistics**
Project 1	Establish a European Crisis Response Process. The fusion centres operating under it should be tasked with the detection of weak signals and determining planning principles prior to the launch of an operation.	Define the coordination and capability trade-offs between air, land and maritime components for all scenarios—permissive to non-permissive. This assessment should be based on Europe's current wars and threats to the east and the south.	Establish a European concept for the use of all sources of energy (oil, gas and renewables) and modes of transport (plane, train and truck) by European military forces and for all scenarios.
Project 2	Put in place European targeting principles to address the dilemma of tactical opportunity versus civilian casualties. This should be done in close coordination with the European Parliament, the CJEU and the ECHR.	Establish European manoeuvring guidelines (defence versus offence, attrition, centre of gravity definition etc.) for air, maritime, land, space and special forces operations, always drawing on current NATO standards.	Define a European approach to medical support in low- to high-intensity scenarios involving numerous wounded and casualties—all based on actual European medical means.
Project 3	Define European cyber and AI standards for military surveillance and influence, whether defensive or offensive. The future of human–machine teaming should be outlined here.	Establish civilian–military principles in line with Europe's values—for example, field coordination of the military with aid (DG ECHO) and development projects (DG INTPA, DG NEAR).	Develop European rear-zone principles for use during high-intensity battle. These principles should pertain to staging areas, the movement and location of HQs and units, ammunition, speed criteria and so on.

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The Reform of EU Military Operations

Alessandro Marrone

Summary

This policy brief outlines how EU military operations need to change to address the international security environment and support the security interests of the member states. It first summarises the limited deployments undertaken by the Union so far. It then examines the state of play in terms of operational theatres, where situations are worsening due to a number of factors. EU strategies such as the 2022 Strategic Compass, military structures and financing mechanisms are also considered. Finally, the brief presents a set of detailed policy recommendations grouped under three overarching headings: establishing a proper standing EU headquarters, providing sustainable forces and capabilities, and ensuring wider support for European military operations. Following through on these recommendations would enable EU militaries to operate in more high-intensity scenarios, which in turn would improve the combat readiness of European armed forces also with a view to Europe's collective defence.

Keywords EU – Balkans – Africa – Middle East – Eastern neighbourhood – Escalations – Headquarters – Equipment – Naval operations – NATO

Background

Since 2003 the Union has launched around 40 military or civilian operations, often of limited scope and long duration.[1] EU military deployments have so far focused mainly on crisis management, stabilisation, peacekeeping, disarmament, and training and capacity building in Africa, the Middle East and Europe. As of 2024 there are 10 military operations and 1 military–civilian operation ongoing, involving around 3,500 Europeans in uniform. These include three naval deployments—one each in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden—and the presence of land forces in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and Mozambique, as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova.

These operations are one of the most visible pillars of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), but have remained limited in scope and relevance compared to the NATO, UN, and ad hoc coalition or bilateral military endeavours undertaken by EU members over the last two decades.

State of play

Instability and conflicts in the regions surrounding Europe are set to worsen due to increased geopolitical competition and the uncertainty of the US's global posture. The operational theatres in Africa, the Middle East, the Caucasus and the EU's eastern neighbourhood are already far less permissive environments than in the past. From Libya to Moldova and Yemen, both state and non-state actors are deploying capabilities that could challenge European militaries. In the naval domain, militias and transnational criminal organisations pose serious military threats in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Guinea, as epitomised by the recent Houthi attacks. The direct involvement of regional powers such as Iran also needs to be taken into account by EU operations, as local conflicts could well escalate into regional ones—particularly since Hamas's 2023 attack against Israel. Furthermore, the stability of host-nation

[1] European Defence Agency, *2022 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence Report* (November 2022).

governments cannot be taken for granted, as demonstrated by the series of coups in the Sahel in 2022 and 2023. This more hostile environment is likely to coexist with more permissive theatres, such as the Western Balkans, where security and defence capacity-building missions will be able to take place.

European interests are at stake in Europe's neighbourhood—these include stability, energy supplies, economic interdependence, the management of migratory flows, and critical infrastructure, such as underwater pipelines and Internet cables. Neither geography nor economics allows the EU to take a more isolationist position, as the US, to some extent, is able to due to being shielded by two oceans. And any ambition of the Union to become a security provider necessarily starts by addressing conflicts and instability in the regions surrounding the EU, including through crisis-management and stability operations.

Today, EU executive operations[2] are mostly led by the operational headquarters (HQ) provided by major member states.[3] EU training missions in the Central African Republic, Somalia and Mozambique are run by the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) in Brussels. The MPCC is a permanent command and control structure at the strategic level, currently responsible for the operational planning and conduct of non-executive missions.[4] However, it suffers from systematic understaffing by member states[5] and, as of today, it is not capable of running command and control for large, complex CSDP missions.[6]

The 2022 Strategic Compass set out a few important goals that need to be achieved to enable the EU to 'act' militarily. First, it established the need for a Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) of 5,000 military personnel plus the related enablers, encompassing land, naval, air, space and cyber elements. The RDC builds on the EU Battlegroups, established in 2007 and as yet never used, by mobilising further force packages according to specific operational scenarios. The EU Battlegroups are multinational military units, usually composed of 1,500 personnel provided by the member states on a rotational basis every year. The RDC goes beyond the Battlegroups set-up, since it provides a more flexible framework that can generate a swift military response.[7] As such, its establishment has raised significant expectations.[8] The RDC was tested via a live military exercise in 2023 and should be fully operational by 2025.[9]

The Strategic Compass also set the goal for the MPCC to be able, by 2025, to run two small and one medium-sized executive operations simultaneously. Moreover, it established a Troop Rotation Cycle Register to facilitate force generation for CSDP operations.[10]

Since 2022 the EU and its members have focused mostly on the Russian war against Ukraine. The European Peace Facility (EPF) budget has been increased to 17 billion for the 2021–7 period, and this has already largely been allocated to reimburse member states for the military aid sent to Kyiv.[11] Nevertheless, the need to protect the sea lines of communication crucial for the EU's economy from Houthi attacks prompted the launch in February 2024 of Operation Aspides in the Red Sea. The operation involves four

[2] A non-executive operation is an operation conducted to support a host nation in an advisory capacity; all others are executive operations.
[3] Except in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the EU has used NATO command structures under the Berlin Plus agreement.
[4] *EEAS*, 'The Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)' (November 2023).
[5] Y. Reykers and J. Adriaensen, 'The Politics of Understaffing International Organisations: The EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)', *European Security* 32/4 (2023).
[6] M. B. Arjona, *European Command and Control Capabilities in Executive CSDP Missions and Operations*, Finabel (6 December 2022), 1.
[7] F. Barbieux, *The EU's Rapid Deployment Capacity Initiative: Developments, Prospects, and Challenges – True Marker of a Strategic Shift or Spectre of the Past?*, Finabel (24 July 2023).
[8] C. Meyer, T. Van Osch and Y. Reykers, *The EU Rapid Deployment Capacity: This Time, It's for Real?*, European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, PE 702.568 (28 October 2022).
[9] *EEAS*, 'European Union Rapid Deployment Capacity' (October 2023).
[10] *EEAS, A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (2022).
[11] *EEAS*, 'The European Peace Facility' (March 2024).

warships, one aircraft and around one thousand units,[12] and has already shot down a number of drones launched from the Yemeni territory. The need for Aspides is indicative of a scenario in which Europeans may have to be more proactive to protect the global sea lines of communication.[13] In any case, its launch, distinct from but in coordination with the Anglo-American Operation Prosperity Guardian, demonstrates two key points: NATO is almost totally focused on collective defence and not willing to engage in crisis-management operations, and EU countries can act militarily through the Union's mechanisms to protect their shared interests. In this specific case, EU members had been negatively affected by the diversion of international shipping from the Red Sea to the Horn of Africa as this had caused an increase in costs for the import–export of goods and energy supplies, thus worsening inflation and damaging trade. The deployment of Aspides, together with Prosperity Guardian, has contributed to making the Red Sea route safe again, and this has rapidly and significantly reduced the negative impact in terms of both inflation and trade disruption. Similar circumstances may well occur again in the near future.

Prospects

Against this backdrop, reforms of EU operations should maintain the expertise developed so far while enabling forces to cope with greater threats on the ground, at sea and in the air. Namely, future military deployments should ensure higher levels of force and base protection, freedom of manoeuvre and air superiority; utilise more special forces capabilities and strategic enablers; and provide reinforcements and escalation management. EU operations should also be ready for rapid, large-scale evacuations if necessary. At sea, deployed European fleets must be fit for naval combat and escalation dominance. Such adaptations would ensure the EU's military operations are adequate for the current international security environment and appeal to those member states willing and able to act militarily. Moreover, this would have a positive side effect of making European armed forces readier for high-end combat contingencies, including those in Europe and under the NATO umbrella.

Moreover, the RDC could potentially be converted to rapidly deploy EU military capabilities on the Union's eastern border to contribute to collective deterrence against Russia in the event of further escalation from Moscow. However, this would require adjustments to the RDC itself. Since it is still in the early stages of formation, the RDC would benefit from a stronger EU defence posture in terms of HQ, forces and wider support. Progress should be made in three areas:

1. establishing a proper, standing EU military headquarters;
2. providing sustainable forces and capabilities; and
3. ensuring wider support for European military operations.

The following part of the brief expands on each of these three areas.

Establishing a proper, standing EU HQ

The MPCC will use the military exercise scheduled for September 2024 to achieve full operational capability, which is an important step in the right direction. Still, turning the MPCC into a proper HQ first requires the allocation of adequate resources in terms of (1) personnel, whose numbers need to be more than tripled; (2) the communication and information technology system, which also needs to have

[12] *EEAS*, 'Eunavfor Operation Aspides' (February 2024).
[13] J. J. Andersson, 'Into the Breach! EU Military CSDP Mission and Operations', *EUISS* (March 2024), 3.

the ability to exchange classified information with NATO; and (3) facilities. Moreover, the MPCC should enhance relations with the EU Satellite Centre in order to receive timely satellite intelligence. Altogether, these measures entail very little financial cost and would offer a high return on investment in terms of the EU's ability to act.

At the same time, the MPCC should run annual major training activities and live military exercises in all domains, including jointly with NATO and other partners, employing the RDC as much as possible in order to test, develop and refine its structure. Last but not least, the strategic and operational command of all current CSDP operations, both executive and non-executive, should gradually move from national HQs or from operating under the Berlin Plus agreement to the MPCC. This will be the most challenging step, but it is necessary to make the MPCC fit for and familiar with real, demanding operations. Altogether, these measures should put meat on the bones of the MPCC and make it a proper, standing EU HQ.

Providing sustainable forces and capabilities

A standing EU HQ will not alone suffice to deploy adequate military operations. Widening, deepening and better structuring the force-generation process for CSDP missions is necessary, which requires the implementation of the Troop Rotation Cycle Register as soon as possible. This should be done in synergy with the new NATO Force Model, which represents the main point of reference for European allies when it comes to Europe's collective defence.[14]

At the same time, the EU should implement the RDC in a timely manner. There are still some question marks and obstacles to be addressed in this regard.[15] Moreover, the Battlegroups do not align with the majority of the ongoing military operations. This is an issue as CSDP missions are going to face a less-permissive environment and more powerful opponents, meaning that the Battlegroups may have to be deployed. The Battlegroups therefore need to be fully integrated into a robust and sustainable RDC.

The RDC is rightly built using a modular approach to leverage member states' input and enable the force to be tailored to mission requirements. In this context, it should benefit from at least three ongoing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects: the European Medical Command, the Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations, and the Crisis Response Operation Core. These projects need to move forward and deliver results that will definitively support the RDC. The same applies, to a varying extent, to other PESCO projects. Here there is a more fundamental issue, however: in 2017 most EU member states launched this initiative with a 'view to the most demanding missions';[16] seven years later, they have yet to live up to their commitments to deploy on these missions with robust, sustainable forces and capabilities.

Ensuring wider support for European military operations

Devoting most of the EPF budget to reimbursing member states' military donations to Ukraine has been a reasonable emergency measure, but it cannot represent the new normal for a tool meant to finance both operations' common costs and train-and-equip activities for EU partners. Crisis and instability in Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans have not gone away, rather there is a risk that they are worsening.

[14] Since the accessions of Finland and Sweden to NATO, more than 95% of EU citizens live in countries that are part of the Atlantic Alliance. On the Force Model's impact on European allies see, among others, E. Calcagno and A. Marrone, *NATO's Posture vis-a-vis Russia: Features and Challenges*, Istituto Affari Internazionali (2024).

[15] D. Zandee and A. Stoetman, *Realising the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity: Opportunities and Pitfalls*, Clingendael Institute, Policy Brief (2022), 2–3.

[16] European Council, *Notification on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to the Council and to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy* (13 November 2017).

Moreover, local partners have placed trust in the Union's operational and financial commitments, and the EU's credibility as a security provider—as well as its influence—would be seriously undermined by any backtracking. Therefore, EPF funding should be restored to pre-Ukraine-war levels for both the current and the next multiannual financial framework in order to provide adequate support for EU military operations and exercises, as well as to finance defence capacity building and other relevant activities with partners.

Beyond financial support, EU military operations should benefit from other elements of the rather complex landscape of European defence initiatives. First, the needs and requirements of these deployments should influence in a more decisive way the EU Capability Development Plan (CDP). The CDP is regularly updated by member states within the European Defence Agency to make European armed forces more able to conduct these kinds of operations. Second, the upcoming PESCO review should increase the operational relevance of this framework. Similarly, the European Air Transport Command should improve its support of current and future EU military deployments.

A third complementary way to widen support for these operations would be to leverage the European missions undertaken by ad hoc groups of member states, such as the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz or the Coordinated Maritime Presence. This would mean ensuring coordination, information sharing and mutual logistical support between EU and other European operations acting in the same region.

Conclusion

Each of the aforementioned measures, that is, (1) to establish a proper, standing EU HQ, (2) to provide sustainable forces and capabilities, and (3) to ensure wider support for European military operations, is necessary and useful per se. However, their value would be multiplied if they were taken together to reform the way the EU approaches crisis-management and stability operations in the regions crucial to its security, stability and common interests.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Establishing a proper EU military HQ	**Providing sustainable forces and capabilities**	**Ensuring wider support for European military operations**
Project 1	Turn the EU MPCC into a proper military HQ by providing adequate resources, including personnel, communications and IT systems (for the exchange of classified information, etc.), facilities and so on.	Widen, deepen and improve the structure of the force-generation process for CSDP missions in synergy with the new NATO Force Model. To achieve this goal, implement the Troop Rotation Cycle Register agreed in the Strategic Compass.	Restore stable EPF funding to cover the vast majority of the operational costs for EU military operations and exercises, as well as to finance train-and-equip projects with partners in Africa, the Middle East and the eastern neighbourhood.
Project 2	Move the operational command of all current CSDP operations, executive and non-executive, from the national level to the EU MPCC HQ level.	Implement the RDC and the related enablers envisaged by the Strategic Compass.	Provide EU endorsement for actions by groups of member states (e.g. the Coordinated Maritime Presence), and ensure coordination, intelligence sharing and logistical support between EU and ad hoc European missions acting in the same region.
Project 3	Run annual major training activities and live military exercises in all domains, including jointly with NATO and partners. For these activities use both the EU HQ and the EU Battlegroups as much as possible.	Establish and deploy the European Medical Command, the Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations, and the Crisis Response Operation Core—three existing PESCO projects.	Link EU military operations better with doctrine development, the Capability Development Plan, and PESCO and European Defence Fund projects, as well as with the European Air Transport Command.

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Addressing the EU's Collective Action Problem in Defence Through Institutional Reform

Steven Blockmans

Summary

Europe has a collective-action problem in the area of defence. Without an integrated architecture, the risk is that European fragmentation in defence will continue. This policy brief reviews a number of ideas for reform within the EU's three main political institutions. It does so cognisant of the fact that the appetite for treaty change is low. The author argues that scaling up the Defence Council to a monthly ministerial meeting, assigning a European Commissioner and Directorate General for 'Defence Cooperation' (DefCo), and endowing the European Parliament with a fully fledged Committee on Security and Defence would restore the EU's institutional balance and help make strategy and defence planning more cohesive, achieving economies of scale and stimulating specialisation. Further proposals are made regarding the role of the High Representative, including in the European Council; the gradual participation of candidate country representatives; and inter-service coordination.

Keywords EU – Defence – Institutional reform

Introduction

History has shown that rogue leaders with bad intentions only understand the language of diplomacy if backed by force. If the EU wants a voice in addressing instability and the political problems that blight its neighbourhood, then it urgently needs to grant itself the means to be a strategic player.

While member state leaders have at set intervals reconfirmed their intention to accelerate capability generation, the reality is that the necessary dynamism is lacking. Most member states restrict defence contracting and do not invest sufficiently in innovation. In this way they are condemning themselves to buying from overseas in the long term, thereby also reducing the EU's ability to regulate its way towards the much-touted goal of strategic autonomy. So far, 'market' forces (including new wars on the EU's borders) have not led the EU to achieve the aims laid down in its 2022 Strategic Compass. Plainly stated, Europe has a collective-action problem in the area of defence.

Despite an emerging decline in popular support for Ukraine as the war barrels into its third year and other crises divert public attention, the EU is nevertheless expected to reach an inflection point for defence integration in 2024—the year of EU institutional renewal. In fact, public demand for a common defence policy has never been greater, with a whopping average of 87% of EU citizens in favour of this proposition.[1] If Eurosceptic and pro-EU parties agree on one thing, it is that the way to address citizens' concerns is primarily by developing an agenda that restores a keener sense of security. But without an integrated architecture, the risk is that European fragmentation in defence will continue.

[1] I. Hoffman and C. E. de Vries, 'The War and the Vote: Europeans Head to the Ballot Box as Ukrainians Fight for Freedom: How Will the War Shape the Vote?', *EU Opinions*, 14 February 2024.

Jean Monnet once wrote, 'Nothing is possible without men; nothing is lasting without institutions'.[2] Keen to show leadership ahead of the European Parliamentary elections, several politicians have given away their positions on this matter in terms of defence. Most eye-catching was European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's proposal at the Munich Security Conference to create the post of commissioner for defence. Generally speaking, this would be a welcome innovation. Yet, the EU's current institutional set-up leaves much to be desired: a cumbersome decision-making process, the absence of a harmonised defence budget and resistance to treaty change collectively undermine the EU's capacity to address emerging geopolitical threats with agility and result in fragmented efforts among the member states.

While institutional (re)arrangements do not in and of themselves provide a silver bullet for the EU's deep-seated collective-action problem, which has political, economic and military dimensions, they may help with making strategies and defence planning more cohesive, achieving economies of scale and stimulating specialisation.

This policy brief reviews a number of existing and new ideas for reform within the EU's three main political institutions—the Council, the Commission and the Parliament—among which balance ought to be restored. It does so cognisant of the fact that the appetite for treaty change is low and that the double bind in which EU foreign and security policymaking usually finds itself, that is, between the absence of unity among member states and a lack of coherence in inter-institutional action, is likely to remain during the next EU policy and legislative cycle. Other institutional innovations, for instance, at the level of force deployment, are equally important but are covered elsewhere in this series.[3]

Towards a fully fledged Defence Council

State of play

As regards the Council, there is a disconnect between what member state leaders declare in the European Council and execution at the level of the defence ministries. Defence ministerials are irregular and follow-up by the High Representative (HR), supported by the European External Action Service (EEAS), insufficient.

Prospects

Ensuring that Foreign Affairs Council meetings composed of defence ministers occur on a monthly basis should help to accelerate member state negotiations on matters of life and death (capabilities, operations and industry). The HR, who chairs the Defence Council and also sits at the table of the European Council, should act as a bridge between the institutions. He or she should provide more cognitive input—and technical support to the European Council president—to define clearer EU defence policy priorities. The HR could suggest to the European Council that he or she be invited to submit initiatives to update the 2016 EU Global Strategy and 2022 Strategic Compass. This could lead the European Council to adopt these strategic documents as formal decisions, thereby opening up the possibility of using qualified majority voting in the Defence Council to implement measures. To this end, the EEAS should stimulate a more active use of the HR's power of initiative and lead the process through the Council machinery.[4] This would increase the number and strengthen the authority of HR/EEAS proposals.

[2] J. Monnet, *Memoirs* (London: Collins, 1978), 304.
[3] See Marrone, p. 69.
[4] P. Vimont, C. Hillion and S. Blockmans, *From Self-Doubt to Self-Assurance: The European External Action Service as an Indispensable Support for a Geopolitical EU*, Centre for European Policy Studies (Brussels, January 2021).

The HR, assisted by the EEAS, should capitalise on member states' political support for the following-up of (European) Council conclusions, for instance through the operationalisation of Defence Council decisions and reporting-back, with the EEAS taking a more active monitoring role to secure the member states' fulfilment of commitments (cf. the Permanent Structured Cooperation model or Community methods of monitoring). Acting under the authority of the HR, the EEAS should also actively use the inter-service coordination platforms (see below) to help mobilise Commission resources to initiate and/or implement Defence Council decisions. This element ought to feature prominently in the mission letters of the next Commission president to her/his HR and line commissioners, especially the one responsible for the defence portfolio.

Finally, the HR should also facilitate the participation of candidate countries in the Council and its working groups (including the ad hoc working party on the defence industry) in 'stages', whereby participatory rights are upgraded if and when higher levels of alignment are met.[5] EU law permits the granting of observer status to third countries in the Council as long as the principle of autonomy in decision-making is preserved. Standardising the occasional presence of candidate country representatives in the (European) Council constitutes a pragmatic step that would allow these future members to socialise with their peers and progressively contribute to complex decision-shaping processes on EU defence policy. Indeed, the EU stands to gain from the battle-tested expertise of Ukraine and below-threshold experiences of other candidates to bolster the resilience of their common European home.[6]

A European Commissioner and Directorate General for Defence Cooperation

State of play

With the introduction of the Directorate General (DG) for Defence Industry and Space, the Commission's role in defence has increased, but it is still constrained by the focus of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on economic matters, leaving a gap in experience, expertise and, therefore, authority with the military. This problem with authority is a matter of widespread concern, notably among the defence ministries of the larger member states, which hold similar opinions regarding the European Defence Agency (EDA).

Prospects

One way of increasing the authority of the Commission in this field is to lift the DG from under the wings of the commissioner responsible for the internal market and to assign a separate college portfolio to it. This idea has gained currency in recent months, with small variations. Rather than introducing a 'commissioner for defence',[7] which sounds grand but erroneously suggests that the person would be commanding an EU army, or devaluing the post to that of an 'armaments commissioner',[8] which suggests too limited a scope of activities (however key to the next Commission), the president-designate should, after the June 2024 European Parliament elections, propose the inclusion of a 'Commissioner for Defence Cooperation' (DefCo) in the design of the college. The nomenclature would stress that the powers of the new commissioner would be derived from the internal market provisions on industrial cooperation, which are 'supporting' competences to those exercised by the member states, and thus would avoid ruffling feathers in the European capitals. At the same time, the title would indicate that the remit of the DG DefCo's activities would be broader than

5 S. Subotic, *Enabling Gradual Access to EU Institutions With the Staged Accession Model*, Centre for European Policy Studies (June 2023).
6 *European Commission*, 'The European Defence Industrial Strategy at a Glance'.
7 A. Brzozowski, 'EU Defence Commissioner Proposal Gains Traction', *Euractiv*, 19 February 2024.
8 G. Wolff, 'What We Need Is a European Armament Commissioner', *Politico*, 26 February 2024.

harmonising public procurement in the defence sector, and not specialised in the field of space—as the current name suggests. The task at hand would include working through the institutions to raise investment, increase innovation and ensure inclusive integration—that is, the five *I*s of EU defence—in all operational domains: maritime, land, air, space and cyberspace.[9]

Another way of increasing the authority of the Commission in the field of defence cooperation is by appointing the right people. Entrusting the assignment to a straight-shooting politician of international renown, with first-hand experience in the military and hailing from a member state that has met NATO's 2% of GDP spending target, would be a good first step. Continuing the recruitment drive to staff the DG with talented and experienced hands attracted from defence ministries, executive agencies and the private sector would be a second prerequisite.

The next HR, who will be simultaneously vice-president of the European Commission, will have a double-hatted position. This is enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and cannot simply be revoked.[10] As long as the treaty-based 'specificity' (i.e. the intergovernmental mode of governance) of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remains, it will be incumbent on the HR to chair the Defence Council and engineer an integrated approach to boosting Europe's defence industry, capability development, and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations. To bridge the divide between the treaties (the TEU for CFSP and the TFEU for all other policy areas), instruments and budgets that cross La rue de la Loi, and close collaboration between the HR and the new commissioner for DefCo will be required. While the TEU implicitly dictates a formal hierarchy between the two, the HR—qua vice-president—should in practice defer to the line commissioner for all supranational approaches to security and defence. This division of labour should be spelled out in the Commission president's mission letters to both appointees.

The intergovernmental nature of defence decision-making often sidelines the Commission and the European Parliament, hindering these institutions' ability to drive cohesive defence policies and boost democratic legitimacy. Rather than the controversial idea of imposing a US-style 'European security adviser',[11] whose authority and personality might override that of the Commission president should the individual be selected by consensus among the Council, Commission and Parliament, inter-service policy coherence should be bolstered through bureaucratic means. Following the introduction of the Groupe des Relations Inter-institutionnelles (GRI) and the Group for External Coordination (EXCO) in 2019, the 'Working Methods' document of the next Commission should task both collegial bodies (which bring together all cabinets and are served by the Secretariat-General) with preparing the relevant (in this case, defence-related) aspects of college meetings on a weekly basis. Each cabinet, including that of the new commissioner for DefCo, would have to designate a standing member for each group. To monitor legislative processes, the GRI would be tasked with making preparations for the Commission's participation in the Council and the European Parliament—and maintaining relations with national parliaments. Commission positions on non-legislative matters related to external relations would be left to EXCO. To ensure full political coordination with the Council, whose positions are shaped by the EEAS under the authority of the HR, EXCO should be co-chaired by the diplomatic adviser to the Commission president and the deputy head of cabinet of the HR. The EEAS should advise the co-chairs on CFSP and CSDP developments, including giving early warning of upcoming issues and events, and through the input of non-papers. Within the EEAS, the Managing Directorate for Security and Defence Policy would be the logical counterpart for DG DefCo.

[9] D. Macchiarini Crosson and S. Blockmans, *The Five 'I's' of EU Defence: Inclusive Integration for Effective Investment, Innovation and Institutions*, Centre for European Policy Studies, Policy Brief (2022).

[10] A. Pugnet, 'EPP Wants to Cancel EU Top Diplomat Job, Create Dedicated Defence Commissioner', *Euractiv,* 20 January 2024.

[11] D. Fiott, 'Grand Designs: The EU's Future Political Structure in Times of Crisis and Geopolitical Transition', *Daniel Fiott*, 10 November 2023.

European Parliament: from SEDE to CEDE

State of play

In theory, the European Parliament fulfils a wide range of functions in the defence realm, commensurate with its formal right to information, and its supervisory, deliberative, advisory, law-shaping, law-making and budgetary competences. In practice, however, the Parliament's role in defence policy has not kept pace with the rapid transition witnessed in other EU institutions. In light of the significant increase in defence initiatives and taxpayers' money being channelled through the EU to cover military expenditures, questions have arisen regarding the compatibility of current practices with certain general principles of EU law, starting with the right to information.

The primary conduit for information runs between the EEAS, which communicates on behalf of the HR, and the Parliament's Sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE). While the extent and quality of information provision may vary depending on the specific policy issue, the overall collaboration between SEDE and the EEAS is generally viewed as constructive.[12] Moreover, an inter-institutional agreement pertaining to the European Parliament's access to sensitive information within the realm of the CSDP, concluded in 2002, bestows upon the Parliament the right to consult some classified (CSDP-related) information. However, with '*restreint UE*' documents off-limits and a culture of over-classification, the utility of sensitive information for the Parliament's purposes (e.g. drawing up an own-initiative report or resolution) remains limited.

Even when the Parliament participates as a co-legislator in defence-related developments, such as the European Defence Fund or ammunition production initiatives, its competences remain constrained. While this outcome aligns with the expectations set by the intergovernmental governance regime applied to the CFSP/CSDP, it signifies a departure from the trajectory seen in other policy domains, where the European Parliament's functions have grown in tandem with the expansion of existing or conferral of new decision-making powers to the EU level.

Prospects

A more expansive reading of the formal reach of the competence of the European Parliament in CSDP would not only be logical but is also necessary to accommodate the gradual supranationalisation of defence policy.[13] This is particularly evident in the coordination of budget spending and the efforts to consolidate the defence industry market. Principles of EU law, especially those emphasising democratic accountability and maintaining institutional balance, furnish the Parliament with invaluable normative tools to clarify the contours and content of its various competences, and to exercise them more effectively.

As part of the new organisational plan to reduce the number of Parliamentary committees,[14] SEDE should therefore be upgraded to a fully fledged committee, on a par with the foreign affairs, budget, legal and other committees. It should combine all aspects of defence, including industry (currently under the Committee for Industry, Research and Energy) and foreign interference and disinformation (currently under two specialist committees). The Parliament should recruit and bolster the defence, regulatory and budgetary expertise needed for the upgraded Committee on Security and Defence (CEDE) to play a full part in the institutionally rebalanced European Defence Union. In the same vein, the chair of CEDE should be granted the permanent right to participate in meetings of the Defence Council.

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12 C. Moser and S. Blockmans, *The Extent of the European Parliament's Competence in Common Security and Defence Policy*, European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, PE 702.559 (June 2022).

13 Ibid.

14 E. Vasques, 'LEAK: European Parliament Gets Ready to Shake up Internal Committee Structure', *Euractiv*, 18 October 2023.

Conclusion

EU defence integration is expected to reach an inflection point in 2024: new and existing instruments will need to be further developed, financed, implemented, monitored and complied with. With the necessary institutional upgrades recommended in this policy brief, the incumbents of the next Commission, Parliament and Council, in collaboration with the EDA, should be able to keep the momentum going by applying the functional mode of integration, *à la méthode* Monnet. With the necessary political momentum and funds, there is arguably plenty of gas in the tank to boost Europe's defence industry, ramp up the production of much-needed capabilities, tackle procurement issues, harmonise technical and operational standards, and thus overcome the EU's collective-action problem in defence.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Ensuring Foreign Affairs Council meetings of defence ministers occur monthly	**Creating the position of a European Commissioner for Defence Cooperation**	**Turning SEDE into a full EP Committee (CEDE)**
Project 1	The high representative, assisted by the EEAS, should secure member states' support for the follow-up of conclusions and decisions by the Defence Council and the European Council (cf. the PESCO model and Community methods of monitoring).	After the June 2024 EP elections, the Commission president-designate should include a Commissioner for DefCo in the design of his or her college; this portfolio currently falls under that of the Commissioner for the internal market.	As part of the new organisational plan to reduce the number of EP committees, SEDE should be upgraded to a fully fledged committee, on a par with AFET, BUDG, JURI and so on. It should combine all aspects of defence, including industry (currently under ITRE) and foreign interference and disinformation (currently under INGE and ING2).
Project 2	The high representative and the EEAS should facilitate the participation of candidate countries in the Council and its working groups in stages, whereby participatory rights are expanded when higher levels of alignment are met.	The next high representative/ vice-president of the European Commission should focus on CFSP and chair the Defence Council, in close cooperation with the new commissioner. Economic security and hard security will need to be better blended, though not in a single US-style European security adviser role.	Grant the chair of CEDE the permanent right to participate in Defence Council meetings.
Project 3	Transform the MPCC into a real operational headquarters, capable of commanding operations at the highest level of intensity by unifying disparate surveillance, tracking and monitoring capacities. Establish specialist command centres for cyber, space, maritime and so on.	Within the EEAS, SECDEFPOL is the logical counterpart for the DG DefCo and would coordinate inter-service consultations, including with the EDA.	Recruit and bolster the defence, regulatory and budgetary expertise needed for CEDE to play a full part in the institutionally rebalanced EP and the European Defence Union.

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Why Europe Needs a Nuclear Deterrent

Adérito Vicente

Summary

This policy brief examines the argument that Europe needs to develop its own nuclear deterrent. The rationale for this reappraisal stems from evolving security dynamics, particularly Russia's war against Ukraine and its nuclear sabre-rattling, concerns regarding US commitment to European defence and China's rapid nuclear expansion, which presents an emerging two-peer challenge for Euro-Atlantic security and extended nuclear deterrence. This brief outlines four potential options for a European nuclear deterrent: a French-led deterrent, pan-European collaboration, a Eurodeterrent and a German indigenous deterrent (as a last resort). Each option presents challenges, including the need for political consensus, credibility and infrastructure development. To address these challenges and establish a European nuclear deterrent that enhances collective security, strategic autonomy and bargaining power, the brief recommends fostering strategic dialogue, conducting feasibility studies, and establishing clear doctrinal criteria and decision-making procedures. It urges EU policymakers to actively reconsider, promote and establish a European nuclear deterrent, emphasising its urgency and strategic importance.

Keywords European Union – Nuclear weapons – Deterrence – European defence – European security

Introduction

Nuclear weapons remain the unquestioned core of European collective defence. Most European countries currently rely on NATO's nuclear umbrella for collective defence, primarily under the leadership of the US.[1] A few, such as France, continue to address nuclear issues on a strictly national basis. While the current arrangement has historically provided security guarantees for most of Europe, the changing security landscape has prompted a re-evaluation of the role of nuclear weapons on the continent. This has led to academic and political discussions on the need for Europe to establish its own nuclear deterrent.[2]

Two important events are driving this imperative. The first is Russia's war against Ukraine, which has exposed Europe's security vulnerabilities and the potential for a nuclear threat over the Black Sea region.[3] The second is that the unpredictable nature of US politics, as witnessed in former President

[1] 'Nuclear umbrella' is a security arrangement under which the participating states consent or acquiesce to the potential use of nuclear weapons in their defence. The related concept of 'extended nuclear deterrence' may be understood as the intended effect of a nuclear umbrella. A 'nuclear umbrella state' is a state without nuclear weapons under the protection of the nuclear weapons of another state. In the case of NATO umbrella states, the US provides extended nuclear deterrence to all member states.

[2] For a comprehensive exploration of the academic discourse, see A. Mattelaer, *Rethinking Nuclear Deterrence: A European Perspective*, Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy, 13/2022 (2022); M. Terhalle and K. Klompenhouwer, 'Facing Europe's Nuclear Necessities', *Politico*, 22 April 2023; T. Erästö, *More Investment in Nuclear Deterrence Will Not Make Europe Safer*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (5 December 2023); J. Lanxade et al., 'Europe Needs a Nuclear Deterrent of Its Own', *New Atlanticist*, 11 July 2023; M. Ruhle, *German Musings About a European Nuclear Deterrent*, National Institute for Public Policy, Report no. 571 (Fairfax, VA, 2024); M. Verstraete, 'Anticipating Europe's Nuclear Futures', *The Washington Quarterly* 47/1 (2024); and S. Cimbala and L. Korb, 'Even in the Face of Russian Aggression, a Nuclear "Eurodeterrent" Is Still a Bad Idea', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 14 February 2024. Additionally, insights from the European political debate can be found, for example, in J. Fischer, 'The Great Revision', *Project Syndicate*, 31 March 2023; J. Fischer, 'Ich schäme mich für unser Land', interview by F. Reinbold and G. Löwisch, *Zeit Online,* 3 December 2023; T. Huhtanen, 'The War in Ukraine Is Forcing Europe to Develop Its Own Nuclear Deterrence', *Euractiv.com*, updated 14 October 2022; J. Vela and N. Camut, 'As Trump Looms, Top EU Politician Calls for European Nuclear Deterrent', *Politico*, 25 January 2024; and P. Wintour, 'UK Could Contribute to Nuclear Shield if Trump Wins, Suggests German Minister', *The Guardian*, updated 15 February 2024.

[3] L. Horovitz and M. Stolze, '*Nuclear Rhetoric and Escalation Management in Russia's War Against Ukraine: A Chronology*, Stiftung Wissenschat und Politik, Working Paper no. 2/2023 (August 2023).

Trump's rhetoric, is raising doubts about the US's enduring commitment to European security.[4] In this context, a rigorous political dialogue is essential to explore the potential need for a common European nuclear deterrent while prioritising the preservation of both the North Atlantic Alliance and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime.

As the debate surrounding a European nuclear deterrent re-emerges, this policy brief delves into the complexities of this critical issue. The primary focus is on unravelling a fundamental question: *Why does Europe need a nuclear deterrent?* To address this research question, the brief examines the historical context, the current security environment and the rationale for establishing a European deterrent. It then explores various potential options, ranging from French-led initiatives to a 'Eurodeterrent' proposal. Subsequently, the brief outlines policy recommendations, offering an in-depth analysis of the commonality, credibility and feasibility of a European nuclear deterrent, thereby providing policymakers with information to consider as they navigate this complex decision. The final section summarises the debate and suggests reasons why EU policymakers should reconsider, discuss, promote and establish a European nuclear deterrent.

Historical and political context

The idea of a European nuclear deterrent has a long and complex history. After the Second World War, the European integration movement gained momentum, leading to proposals like the European Defence Community, which aimed to establish a European army. However, challenges, including France's concerns over national sovereignty, led to the rejection of the proposal in 1954. During the Cold War, NATO and the Western European Union oversaw European defence, leaving the idea of an independent European nuclear deterrent unexplored.[5]

Following the failure of the proposed European Defence Community, discussions on European security resurfaced. Events such as the Suez Crisis in 1956 prompted debates on whether Europe should seek an independent nuclear deterrent or continue relying on NATO.[6] In the late 1950s, discussions among France, Italy and Germany about creating a European nuclear force—commonly referred to as the FIG protocol or agreement—stalled as France focused on a national nuclear programme, while the UK maintained its independent nuclear force and also cultivated a close nuclear relationship with the US.[7] Despite concerns, most European nations opted for security assurances under the US/NATO 'nuclear umbrella'.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the advent of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and détente, culminating in the NPT in 1968. The treaty acknowledged a potential future nuclear option, contingent on the formation of an EU with full sovereignty over defence and foreign policy.[8] The 'European clause' appears as the third item in the written declaration of ratification submitted by Germany to the NPT.[9]

The post–Cold War era witnessed a gradual but increasing interest in an EU perspective on nuclear

4 A. Laya et al., 'Trump-Proofing Europe', *Foreign Affairs*, 2 February 2024.
5 B. Heuser, *NATO, Britain, France and the FRG: Nuclear Strategies and Forces for Europe, 1949–2000* (Basingstoke: St Martin's Press, 1997).
6 E. Kustnetsov, *The Multilateral Force Debates*, European University Institute (2004).
7 M. Trachtenberg, 'France and NATO, 1949–1991', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9/3 (2011); L. Nuti, 'The F–I–G Story Revisited', in L. Nuti and C. Buffet (eds.), 'Dividing the Atom. Essays on the History of Nuclear Proliferation in Europe', Special Issue, *Journal Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali* 13/1 (1998).
8 A. Vicente, 'The EU's Foreign Policy in the Field of Nuclear Disarmament: How Does It Work and Why Does It Often Not Work?', D.Phil. thesis, European University Institute, 2022, 79.
9 UN, *No. 10485. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Opened for Signature at London, Moscow and Washington on 1 July 1968. Ratifications and Accession. 2 May 1975. Federal Republic of Germany*, UN, Treaty Series, 729/10485 (1976), 414–17.

deterrence.[10] While the Lisbon Treaty established the Common Security and Defence Policy, it did not envisage a nuclear capacity. NATO, for those EU member states which are members, remains the primary instrument for collective defence and deterrence under Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union.[11]

The 2010s brought renewed focus on a European deterrent, triggered by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Donald Trump's election in 2016. In Germany, discussions emerged among some prominent politicians, journalists and scholars on the need for a deterrent, either an indigenous national nuclear weapons programme or a Eurodeterrent, to address concerns about a potential US retrenchment of its security guarantees.[12] In February 2020 President Macron proposed a 'strategic dialogue' to explore the role of French nuclear weapons in European defence.[13]

Current status of nuclear deterrence in Europe

At the core of Europe's collective defence and security architecture lies NATO's extended nuclear deterrence strategy, which is heavily reliant on the pivotal role of the US and its security guarantees to European allies. This strategy aims to deter potential aggressors by threatening retaliation with US nuclear weapons in the event of an attack on any NATO member underArticle 5 of the Washington Treaty. The effectiveness of NATO's deterrence strategy hinges on the robust capabilities of the US strategic nuclear forces. These comprise approximately 1,770 deployed warheads, including 400 land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, 970 submarine-launched ballistic missiles and 300 carried by strategic bombers.[14]

Moreover, the deployment of US non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe further strengthens NATO's nuclear deterrence. Approximately 100 US B61 nuclear bombs are strategically stationed in non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWSs), including Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Türkiye and Greece, under NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements.[15] These weapons, remaining under US control, involve the contribution of personnel and infrastructure from participating states for potential delivery. These six 'nuclear sharing states' contribute 'dual-capable aircraft' to the nuclear mission, further enhancing the alliance's nuclear capabilities.[16]

Six additional NATO members, including Czechia, Denmark, Hungary and Poland, contribute to the alliance's nuclear posture through the 'SNOWCAT' mission, supporting aircraft operations related to nuclear missions.[17] All members, except France with its own arsenal, participate in the Nuclear Planning Group, shaping collective policy and decisions regarding NATO's nuclear strategy.

Notwithstanding a unified NATO strategy on nuclear deterrence, diverse perspectives and singularities persist among European states.[18] First, while the UK and France maintain independent nuclear arsenals

[10] B. Tertrais, *The European Dimension of Nuclear Deterrence: French and British Policies and Future Scenarios*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper no. 106 (2018), 4; U. Jasper and C. Portela, 'EU Defence Integration and Nuclear Weapons: A Common Deterrent for Europe?', *Security Dialogue* 41/2 (2010).

[11] In terms of scope, while art. 5 of the Washington Treaty applies uniformly to all NATO members, affirming that an attack on one member constitutes an attack on all, art. 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union specifies that 'this shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.' This provision is commonly interpreted as affording certain member states, such as neutral states Malta, Ireland and Austria, a special status that allows them to opt out of mutual defence assistance. Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty, however, does not contain such an opt-out clause.

[12] U. Kühn, T. Volpe and B. Thompson, 'Tracking the German Nuclear Debate', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2018).

[13] E. Macron, 'Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy', Paris, 7 February 2020.

[14] H. Kristensen et al., 'United States Nuclear Weapons, 2024', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 80/3 (2024), 182–3.

[15] H. Kristensen et al., 'Nuclear Weapons Sharing, 2023', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79/6 (2023), 395–6.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] E. Maitre, 'Nuclear Deterrence in Europe: Points of Convergence, Singularities and Prospects for Cooperation', *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, 04/2021 (2021).

as recognised Nuclear-Weapon States under the NPT, their non-shared combined forces contribute indirectly to the overall security of the nuclear alliance. Following Brexit, France is the sole EU member with Nuclear-Weapon State status, and neither the UK nor France shares its weapons with allies. The second grouping encompasses most European NNWSs that rely on the US/NATO nuclear umbrella. Conversely, some EU member states, such as Austria, Ireland and Malta, all NNWS parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, reject nuclear weapons and NATO's deterrence approach. Finally, the case of Cyprus presents a unique and complex situation.

Although not fully recognised by NATO due to Türkiye's objections concerning the unresolved reunification issue, Cyprus has signed but not ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, leaving its security position potentially vulnerable within the EU bloc.

Russia poses a significant nuclear threat to Europe with its vast arsenal of 1,710 deployed nuclear strategic warheads (intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, as well as nuclear-capable bombers) and an estimated 1,558 non-strategic ones.[19] Since the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty ended in 2019, Moscow has upgraded its non-strategic arsenal, solidifying its perceived nuclear superiority over Europe.[20] Recently, Russia developed a hypersonic glide missile with a 2,000 km range, challenging existing defences.[21] The recent deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus represents a novel development in the post–Cold War European nuclear order.

Rationale

Given the current status of nuclear deterrence in Europe and the political context, renewed interest has emerged in the possibility of a European nuclear deterrent. This interest can be attributed to four key factors. First, uncertainties regarding the future level of US commitment to NATO raise questions about the continued reliability of the US nuclear umbrella, prompted by apprehensions about the potential re-election of Donald Trump in November 2024. Second, recent events such as the war in Ukraine and nuclear signalling by Russian President Vladimir Putin have fuelled anxieties about Moscow's willingness to use nuclear weapons. Third, there are concerns about the asymmetric advantage of Russia's large inventory of 'tactical' nuclear weapons in contrast to NATO's limited deployment of nuclear assets on European territory.[22] This setting raises questions about the effectiveness of the US nuclear umbrella in Europe's deterrence strategy.[23] Fourth, China's rapid nuclear expansion, propelling it to be the world's third nuclear superpower, likewise raises fears about the strain placed on the US extended nuclear deterrence strategy for Europe, now tasked with deterring both China and Russia simultaneously.[24]

Thus, a European nuclear deterrent could bolster European security and regional stability by supplementing NATO and diversifying deterrence options, reducing reliance on the US. This could foster a more balanced 'partnership of equals' in which Europe actively contributes to its security.[25]

19 H. Kristensen et al., 'Russian Nuclear Weapons, 2024', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 80/2 (2024b), 118–19.
20 Ibid.
21 K. Sayler, *Hypersonic Weapons: Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, R45811 (Washington, DC, 2024).
22 Cimbala and Korb, 'Even in the Face of Russian Aggression'; J. Bolton, 'Both Parties Can Agree on America's Nuclear Peril', *Wall Street Journal*, 25 October 2023.
23 Ibid.
24 H. Kristensen et al., 'Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2024', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 80/1 (2024a); Mattelaer, *Rethinking Nuclear Deterrence*; Terhalle and Klompenhouwer, 'Europe's Nuclear Necessities'. The emerging two-peer problem compels significant adaptations to both the hardware (physical components such as nuclear warheads and delivery platforms) and software (planning and consultation between the protector and its protégés) of extended nuclear deterrence. See Center for Global Security Research Study Group, 'China's Emergence as a Second Nuclear Peer: Implications for U.S. Nuclear Deterrence Strategy', *Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory* (Spring 2023), 8.
25 Action Committee for the United States of Europe, *Joint Declaration* (Bonn, 1 June 1964).

Furthermore, a European deterrent could grant greater control over security policy, allowing Europe to make independent decisions aligned with its interests while also enhancing its bargaining power in international negotiations. Additionally, the European clause, uncontested by the three NPT depositary states (the US, the UK and Russia), provides a legal framework within the non-proliferation and disarmament regime for a European nuclear deterrent.

While there are political, military and legal arguments for supporting a European nuclear deterrent, concerns about its credibility and feasibility persist, as does scepticism regarding political will and organisational challenges, such as the chain of command over a multinational nuclear force. Even if the challenges were addressed, the extended development time frame needed to establish a European nuclear deterrent, even under the most optimistic projection of a two-year breakout time, raises concerns about its effectiveness. The swiftly changing geopolitical landscape might make the deterrent obsolete by the time it becomes operational. Addressing these concerns requires analysing the diverse options for such a deterrent as a first step.

Options

As discussions on a European nuclear deterrent evolve, various options are being considered, each with its own approach. One possibility centres around a French-led strategy, given that France is the sole EU member possessing nuclear weapons, currently holding about 290 operational warheads deployed by naval and air forces.[26] This option envisages two roles for France: providing complementary insurance for European NATO members and offering reassurance to non-NATO EU members.[27] In this context, in an interview with the author on 8 November 2023, a senior official from an EU NATO member state said that 'France is open to discussing deterrence proposals with any European country.' Macron expressed this sentiment during a speech at L'École de Guerre in 2020, emphasising the 'European dimension' of the French nuclear forces.[28] This process could be conducted on a voluntary basis. In this arrangement, European partners could contribute financially to the French nuclear forces in exchange for their nuclear protection.

However, challenges abound, including feasibility, trust issues in identifying beneficiaries, and issues about credibility, particularly against Russia's larger arsenal. Concerns exist regarding whether expanding France's deterrent, currently considered minimal compared to Russia's, would result in a credible enough force, leaving the entire proposal a complex and highly debated issue.[29]

Another option could entail multiple EU and non-EU states jointly controlling a pan-European deterrent, potentially involving nuclear-armed nations like France and the UK, along with NNWSs. This collaborative approach would entail pooling resources and expertise for a more robust deterrent capability across Europe.[30]

While the UK's Trident system carries approximately 225 strategic nuclear warheads in submarines, enhancing both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the French nuclear deterrent capabilities, concerns persist about the credibility of a France- and/or UK-based deterrent.[31] However, the UK's role post-Brexit and the issue of continued reliance on the US (a heavier reliance for the UK than for France)

[26] H. Kristensen, M. Korda and E. Johns, 'French Nuclear Weapons, 2023', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79/4 (2023), 272.
[27] Tertrais, *European Dimension of Nuclear Deterrence*, 9.
[28] E. Macron, 'Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy', Paris, 7 February 2020.
[29] B. Tertrais, *French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, and Future: A Handbook,* Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, Recherches & Documents, no. 4, (2020), 29.
[30] Vela and Camut, 'As Trump Looms'; Wintour, 'UK Could Contribute to Nuclear Shield'.
[31] H. Kristensen and M. Korda, 'United Kingdom Nuclear Weapons, 2021', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 77/3 (2021).

also raise concerns, namely about the inclusion of non-NATO European states. Furthermore, coordinating decision-making and transparency among diverse participants poses a significant challenge.

Conversely, a Eurodeterrent option refers to EU member states jointly developing and maintaining a credible nuclear capability to deter adversaries and safeguard security interests, supported by the legal viability of the European clause. This option encompasses two possibilities regarding NATO's existing nuclear umbrella. One variant aligns with NATO, potentially strengthening collective defence through contributions to existing capabilities or separate forces operating under NATO's strategy, exemplified by the Berlin Plus framework.[32] Alternatively, a non-aligned Eurodeterrent could be developed as an alternative outside of NATO. This approach would aim to establish strategic autonomy for European security by creating an independent nuclear arsenal.

Both modalities of Eurodeterrent could operate within a security framework allowing EU member states outside of NATO, such as Malta, Ireland and Austria, to opt out of this nuclear deterrent option. Conceptually, an option akin to the Schengen area or the eurozone, in which only select EU countries participate in these arrangements, could be considered. However, only the non-aligned Eurodeterrent model would extend protection to Cyprus. This is because Cyprus remains the sole EU member state that is neither fully recognised by the North Atlantic Alliance nor a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace, a programme of bilateral security cooperation between individual countries and NATO. Nonetheless, both modalities face challenges, including and primarily the necessity of establishing forceful decision-making structures within the EU.

As a fourth and last option, if both the US and France are considered unreliable security guarantors against Russian threats, and if the development of a Eurodeterrent proves unfeasible, Germany could theoretically pursue an indigenous nuclear deterrent.[33] Its intended purpose, whether for national defence or broader EU-wide security, would need to be considered when shaping decisions regarding size, deployment and doctrine. Despite being an NNWS, Germany possesses technical capabilities that could allow for the development of a limited nuclear arsenal within a relatively short time frame.[34] However, the advancement of a German nuclear deterrent faces significant technical, legal and political challenges.[35] Furthermore, renouncing the NPT as an NNWS could have adverse implications for the security of Germany and Europe. Additionally, it could undermine the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime. In light of these significant barriers and potential costs, a German nuclear deterrent remains largely unfeasible for the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, it could be considered as a last resort if the other three options prove unachievable.

Policy recommendations

Regardless of the chosen option, any European nuclear deterrent must be common, credible and feasible. To achieve these objectives, the following policy recommendations should be considered.

First, achieving commonality among European nations regarding a nuclear deterrent requires addressing political and strategic considerations. On the one hand, fostering political consensus necessitates overcoming the significant divisions within the EU regarding nuclear deterrence. On the other hand,

[32] Senior official from the European External Action Service, interview by the author, Brussels, 15 November 2023.
[33] Fischer, 'Great Revision'.
[34] B. Kunz and U. Kühn, 'German Musings About a Franco–German or German Bomb', in U. Kühn (ed.), *Germany and Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 123.
[35] Ibid.

strategic collaboration is crucial to ensure the deterrent aligns with the collective security interests of Europe. Therefore, we recommend the following actions:

Recommendation 1. Initiate a systematic and open debate among EU member states on the concept and implications of a shared European nuclear deterrent while building a common understanding of the strategic role of nuclear deterrence in addressing contemporary geopolitical challenges and security vulnerabilities.

Recommendation 2. Conduct, within a year, a comprehensive intergovernmental feasibility study on establishing a European nuclear deterrent.

Recommendation 3. Foster political consensus and determine the most credible and feasible option for establishing a European nuclear deterrent among participating states by mid-2025, following a thorough consideration of the findings and recommendations outlined in the feasibility report.

Second, ensuring the credibility of a European nuclear deterrent is vital for deterring potential threats or attacks on the continent. This credibility can be bolstered through the establishment of a robust and capable arsenal, harmonised doctrine and structure, effective command-and-control mechanisms, and a clear and unambiguous deterrence message. Additionally, any European nuclear deterrent must seamlessly complement, rather than compete with, NATO's existing nuclear deterrence strategy. For this, we propose the following actions:

Recommendation 4. Outline the specific threats to be deterred, the parameters of the deterrence posture and the conditions under which nuclear weapons hypothetically would be used; this step encompasses target selection and communication protocols.

Recommendation 5. Establish clear criteria for the size and composition of the European nuclear arsenal, with specific milestones for the development of a nuclear command-and-control system, technological advancements, nuclear warheads and delivery systems.

Recommendation 6. Align, if possible, the European nuclear deterrent doctrine with NATO's overall collective defence strategy to ensure it reinforces NATO's deterrence position. Include cooperation mechanisms for working with non-NATO European states.

Third, the creation of a feasible European nuclear weapons infrastructure is a pivotal step and requires at least the following policy recommendations:

Recommendation 7. Draw upon existing European capabilities and establish a European-led nuclear deterrent that involves the transfer, acquisition or development of nuclear warheads and delivery systems.

Recommendation 8. Allocate a specified percentage of the member states' defence budgets to the development and implementation of a credible European nuclear command-and-control, including warheads and delivery systems, with annual progress assessments.

Recommendation 9. Develop a clear, swift and unambiguous decision-making procedure for the deployment of nuclear weapons, with a European final decision-maker possessing sole authority to order their use.

Conclusion

The re-emergence of the debate on and the rationale for a European nuclear deterrent is driven by Russia's nuclear sabre-rattling amid its war against Ukraine and China's strategic challenge to the Western-led liberal order with the abrupt expansion of its nuclear arsenal. Concurrently, concerns over US security commitments and the potential for a Trump re-election have brought fresh urgency to the issue.

Despite most member states relying heavily on the US and NATO for collective defence, the EU bloc still faces security vulnerabilities. For example, the absence of a cohesive EU approach to nuclear deterrence leaves many nations exposed, lacking a common nuclear deterrent and contributing unevenly to NATO's Extended Nuclear Deterrence strategy. One potential solution to tackle this issue could involve establishing a flexible European nuclear deterrent within an EU security framework. This setup would allow EU member states outside NATO, like Malta, Ireland and Austria, to opt out of participating in this joint nuclear deterrent initiative.

This policy brief has explored various options, including a French-led approach, a pan-European initiative, a Eurodeterrent complementary to NATO and an indigenous German nuclear deterrent. This complex issue requires a thorough analysis and a concerted effort to address the identified challenges among EU policymakers. Only through such a comprehensive approach can European leaders determine whether, and under what configuration, a joint nuclear deterrent aligns best with the continent's security interests and the existing security architecture.

The proposed policy recommendations underscore the importance of fostering dialogue among European leaders, conducting a feasibility study, securing political consensus, and establishing clear criteria for arsenal size and funding. They offer a structured framework for navigating the intricate decision-making process involved in establishing a European nuclear deterrent. While the path towards a European nuclear deterrent is fraught with challenges, these recommendations serve as an initial guide for policymakers.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Promoting political cohesion on the idea of a common European nuclear deterrent	**Establishing a credible European nuclear deterrent doctrine (strategy and policy)**	**Creating a feasible European nuclear weapons infrastructure**
Project 1	Initiate a systematic and open debate among EU member states on the concept and implications of a shared European nuclear deterrent, while building a common understanding of the strategic role of nuclear deterrence in addressing contemporary geopolitical challenges and security vulnerabilities.	Outline the specific threats to be deterred, the parameters of the deterrence posture and the conditions under which nuclear weapons hypothetically would be used; this step encompasses target selection and communication protocols.	Draw upon existing European capabilities and establish a European-led nuclear deterrent that involves the transfer, acquisition or development of nuclear warheads and delivery systems.
Project 2	Conduct, within a year, a comprehensive intergovernmental feasibility study on establishing a European nuclear deterrent.	Establish clear criteria for the size and composition of the European nuclear arsenal, with specific milestones for the development of a command-and-control system, technological advancements, nuclear warheads and the establishment of delivery systems.	Allocate a specified percentage of the member states' defence budgets to the development and implementation of a credible European nuclear command-and-control, including warheads and delivery system, with annual progress assessments.
Project 3	Foster political consensus and determine the most credible and feasible option for establishing a European nuclear deterrent among participating states by mid-2025, following a thorough consideration of the findings and recommendations outlined in the feasibility report.	Align, if possible, the European nuclear deterrent doctrine with NATO's overall collective defence strategy to ensure it reinforces NATO's deterrence position. Include cooperation mechanisms for working with non-NATO European states.	Develop a clear, swift and unambiguous decision-making procedure for the deployment of nuclear weapons, with a European final decision-maker possessing sole authority to order their use.

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About the Authors

Michael Benhamou is the Executive Director of OPEWI – Europe's War Institute. He is also a research associate at the Martens Centre. Formerly, he was a political adviser deployed with NATO and EU field operations and exercises in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya and Gulf countries within land, air and maritime headquarters.

Steven Blockmans is a Senior Research Fellow, and previously Director of Research, at CEPS—the Centre for European Policy Studies (Brussels). He is also Senior Fellow at the International Centre for Defence and Security (Tallinn), Visiting Professor at the College of Europe (Bruges and Natolin) and Editor-in-Chief of the *European Foreign Affairs Review*.

Mihai Chihaia is a Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme at the European Policy Centre, where he covers EU security and defence policies. His work focuses primarily on the implementation of the Strategic Compass, military mobility and maritime security. Previously, Mihai was part of the Security and Defence Programme of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and prior to that he worked in the Secretariat General of the European Commission.

Ionela Maria Ciolan is a Research Officer at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, focusing on European foreign policy, security and defence. In addition, Ionela is a 2023–4 ReThink.CEE Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Previously, she worked as a security and defence researcher at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Prior to that, she was a research fellow at the European Policy Centre in Brussels and a James S. Denton Transatlantic Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis in Washington.

Daniel Fiott is Head of the Defence and Statecraft Programme at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, where he researches most aspects of European defence policy with an emphasis on defence industrial policy, capability development and defence innovation. He is also a Non-Resident Fellow at the Real Instituto Elcano, where he analyses defence industrial issues.

Alessandro Marrone is Head of the Defence Programme at Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rome. Since 2016 he has been a member of the Scientific Board of the Armament Industry European Research Group and has acted as a mentor at the NATO Defence College. Furthermore, since 2018 he has been a Professor at the Istituto Superiore di Stato Maggiore Interforze of the Italian Ministry of Defence.

Christian Mölling is the Research Director of the German Council on Foreign Relations, and heads the Security and Defence Programme. For more than two decades, he has been researching and publishing on geopolitics, security and strategy, with a special focus on defence, armaments, industries and technology. Christian advises top-level stakeholders in the German ministries and parliament on these topics, as well as partner countries, international organisations and civil society. Christian studied politics, history, economics and law at the Universities of Duisburg, Germany and Warwick, UK. He holds a Ph.D. from the Ludwig Maximillians University of Munich.

Paola Tessari is a Senior Researcher in the Security Programme at Istituto Affari Internazionali in Rome, where she leads EU projects on non-conventional threats. Her research focuses on CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) threats and the protection of critical infrastructures. Since March 2022 she has also been involved in the Institute's activities in the framework of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium. In 2016–18 she served as an advisor to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Directorate General for Political and Security Affairs.

Adérito Vicente is a nuclear policy scholar who holds a Ph.D. in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Currently a Non-Resident Fellow at the Odesa Center for Nonproliferation and an External Researcher at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, he has held academic positions at James Madison University, the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. Additionally, Dr. Vicente held other professional and diplomatic positions at the European Parliament, NATO, the European External Action Service and the Portuguese MFA. His scholarly contributions focus on European security and nuclear politics, including co-editing the Springer volume *Russia's War on Ukraine: Implications for the Global Nuclear Order* (2023).

Klaus Welle is the Chair of the Martens Centre's Academic Council and former Secretary General of the European Parliament (2009–22). He is also a Guest Professor in Practice at the London School of Economics, a Visiting Professor at KU Leuven and a Leader in Residence at the Moynihan Center of the Colin Powell School for Global Leadership in New York.

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