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A "military pillar" in the European Union:
Crisis management, Capabilities and Coherence (3 Cs) – And EU-US Cooperation (a 4th C)

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Just like after WWI and WWII, we are now facing the dawn of a new strategic era, a «Zeitenwende" in Europe. We need to assess what metamorphosis the European Union needs to undergo in terms of defence and security to become a relevant actor in crisis situations when size and defence matter.

We are witnessing a competition among superpowers to be "leaders". In this, Europe is no longer the kingmaker. However, some certainties do hold. The US and EU are condemned to cooperate structurally if they want to maintain a somewhat "rules-based international order". The challenges that will cause global shock waves in the near future - even more so than those triggered by the war in Ukraine - are by now well-known: climate, migration, pandemics, the rush for critical raw materials and political polarisation questioning democracy. All too often sources for the eruption of violent conflict. Without a sound EU security and defence policy, the Union, and thus all its member states, will degenerate into a passive spectator. And that will not benefit transatlantic cooperation. The question is not "if" but rather when Europe will once again face crises - short of war – in which its own interests will be central and when it will be up to the EU (and only the EU and its member states) to deploy military means. This requires action.

This policy brief does not focus on the measures that NATO's European partners should take now so that their forces can soon do their part in solidarity to "re-establish" a credible territorial defence. This is largely "work in progress" in the NATO context, urgent and highly justified.

This paper focuses on the "non Art. 5" EU crisis management policy, which now also needs to be expanded , in particular in terms of specific capacities required for this purpose. The maxim "Qui peut le plus (territorial defence) peut le moins (peace-keeping and peace-enforcement operations)" does not apply here.

It analyses the flaws in the EU architecture that make its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) once more in need of an update. What lessons can we learn from the US security policy and the way it incorporates NATO? How does NATO manage to largely accumulate the required military capabilities and remain politically credible, in contrast to the EU? How should European defence relate to NATO? How to build a "military pillar in the EU" to give substance to the EU Global Strategy?

"ZEITENWENDE" FOR THE US

Coherence

Even before WWI, the United States of America decided to maintain a "united" security and defence policy. That permitted them to play a decisive role in geopolitics to this very day. In 1949 the US aimed to construct the same "unity" in (Western) Europe through NATO. The objective was that after a decade, the European partners would be responsible for their own "territorial" defence. If not, NATO would have failed in its purpose. When the "Cold War" broke out history gave it a different "twist". As a result, most European partners took advantage of this lasting American military protection not to invest sufficiently in their own military capacity to obtain NATO's original purpose. They saw a military "vassaldom" as an

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acceptable political cost and mainly as a non-negotiable saving on their own defence expenditure.

Crisis management?

Meanwhile, the US faces another Zeitenwende in which China will henceforth take centre stage. The US insists on NATO as "a pillar of US national security strategy", part and parcel of its integrated security policy.

It is equally clear that Washington does not see NATO as an umbrella insurance policy that would cover the "crisis management operations" of its Allies in addition to Article 5 guarantees. In the NATO context, the slogan "Out of area or out of business" is now increasingly "out of sight", at least for crisis management operations in which mainly European interests are at stake. The signal from Washington has been crystal clear for decades: "Dear European friends, at times you will be on your own. Time to get your act together on crisis-management operations". And this is where the shoe pinches in the EU.

AN EU PILLAR IN NATO?

It is aberrant to note that as yet several EU member states - which are also members of NATO - reject the construction of a European defence because it would go against Washington's vision. An almost sacred interpretation of the concept of "an EU pillar in NATO" prevails in these member states. It has become "the" political pretext for not building a "European Defence" in the EU context. From this point of view, the EU should, on the one hand, position itself as a subcontractor (a pillar) of NATO that should only provide well-defined civilian capabilities, with the EU "military mobility" project as its flagship and, on the other hand, limit itself to financially supporting the defence industries of these countries. That is all it should be. This would benefit NATO.

This concept of "an EU pillar in NATO" underlies a number of institutional woes within the EU architecture that benefits neither the EU, NATO nor the participating countries, including the US. This explains why for decades we in the EU have faced very precisely identified gaps in military capabilities required to credibly underpin an all too limited European military Level of Ambition for crisis management operations. More so, it also explains why a number of EU countries are not meeting their commitments made in NATO to provide military capabilities. Or: how well-intentioned EU-NATO cooperation is counterproductive in practice.

A benchmarking on how the US underpins its security strategy and how NATO gains political credibility is therefore appropriate.

## NATO: A PILLAR OF THE US SECURITY STRATEGY

Capabilities

The way NATO amasses the required military capabilities is inspired by the way the US gives substance to its National Security Strategy.

First, Washington unambiguously articulates its geopolitical objectives. Then, "top-down" it is up to the military authorities to translate the political level of ambition into military terms, starting from the Pentagon and going through strategic HQ to the tactical units stationed anywhere in the world, including US troops in Europe. Then, "bottom up" the necessary military capabilities are identified. In a bundled report addressed to parliament, the required budget is added. A budget that is usually allocated, sometimes even increased.

It is clear that in the US we are facing top-down steering and bottom-up input, with the military voice being heard. Throughout this process, NATO is invariably labelled as "a pillar of US National Security Strategy", as an alliance in which the US positions itself as the guiding partner to build a transatlantic strategy in line with its own political objectives. This coherent view is in itself a crucial US political and military capability.

Coherence

The NATO strategy determines on the basis of a security strategy - which is regularly updated - which capabilities
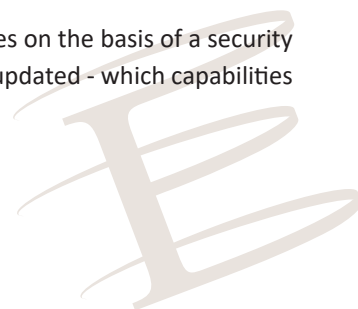
are required and which country should contribute what share. Ditto for budgetary contribution. However, it does not stop at non-binding requests. A culture of top-down steering peer pressure is present here. This is part of NATO's DNA.

However, institutional supervision goes further: the military units that countries make available for NATO operations must take part in life-exercises, where they are evaluated by a multinational team of military experts. This provides NATO with an effective "Coordinated Permanent Review of its Defence Capabilities".

This is what it takes to make NATO politically credible for the participating countries, for its partners and dissuasive for its adversaries: strategy, capabilities, permanent review of the force and leadership.

"ZEITENWENDE" FOR THE EU

Fortress Europe?

It is remarkable that EU in its "defence policy" always shifts political attention to the most recent military conflict and the specific military capabilities that the Union should have had in place for it in order to respond appropriately. At the same time, the lessons - drawn from previous conflicts - are afterwards just conveniently put aside. The recent decision to create a European Rapid Deployment Capacity (EU RDC) with the deployment of up to 5,000 soldiers illustrates this once again. The Headline Goal (a relatively rapid deployment of 60,000 soldiers - required at the time to deal with a crisis in the former Yugoslavia) is still only paid lip service to.

The EU RDC is at best a first entry force. Where is the main force? What military level of ambition for EU is demanded in the current context? It remains unclear.

The recent EU Strategic Compass still gives limited consideration to the "Battle Group" concept, which was inspired by EU Operation Artemis, which deployed a very specific and very limited military force to the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2003 and

successfully put a provisional end to the violence at the time. It was up to the UN to enforce this further. Now, when in the same region, the population is again facing similar abuses with many innocent victims, a possible EU intervention is not even being considered. This is more than worrying.

Will the EU henceforth leave Africa, the Middle East and the rest of the world to their own devices? Will the 360° approach to EU security policy presupposed by the " EU Strategic Compass" henceforth be interpreted very restrictively: preventing the impact of violent conflicts "elsewhere" from crossing its own borders? Will military action outside its own borders henceforth be limited to repatriating EU citizens? In theory, no.

What about practice? Is the EU becoming more and more "inward-looking"? No longer willing to assist its partners on the ground with preventive military aid and, when necessary, to proceed with peace-enforcement operations to nip a nascent violent conflict in the bud? Is there still room here for an "integrated" security policy? A policy of also providing emergency aid in the wake of military intervention, followed by humanitarian assistance and development aid, followed by economic investment as instruments for an overall diplomatic process?

The answer to all these questions is simple. Until the EU has a solid EU military pillar in place, it is condemned to shelve its "global" or "integrated" EU security strategy as yet another EU document and its security policy will by default be: "Fortress Europe". A very porous fortress.

Coherence

The adagio for building a European defence was and still is its "bottom-up approach", averse to any "top-down" control. This, of course, keeps you on the bottom. The current state of the CSDP confirms this. Defence, war and peace, and military crisis management operations, however, are primarily "Chef Sache".

A European Security Council

How can we explain that even one year after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the EU still does not have a "European Security Council" with an appropriate decision-making process, immune from "Qualified Minority Vetoes" and where only the "vital" interests of the member states - in the strictest sense - are on the agenda? The latter is paramount. The Union is safe only when every member state is safe. In this configuration, forcing a "quid pro quo" to enforce a national advantage in other Union policies ought no longer to be possible. At most, a Member State can constructively abstain when the deployment of its national armed forces is invoked. A member state that cannot accept this form of decision-making de facto denies itself - with an opt-out - access to EU Security Council meetings. The analogy with the Monetary Union and Schengen agreements is clear. In the prospect of an inevitable - and highly desirable - EU enlargement, it is of "vital" importance not to grant such an "opt-out" to candidate member states. "Deepening before enlargement" should no longer be an empty slogan. This practice will eventually lead to the extinction of any "opt-out" within the Union. All this needs no Treaty change.

The active involvement of the Commission in this Security Council is crucial here. Likewise, the input of the HR/VP, assisted by the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, treaty-wise his first military adviser.

It is up to this Council to outline the guidelines for launching crisis management operations and the commitments to be made with EU partner countries and organisations such as NATO, UN, or in ad hoc coalitions.

Formal council meetings of Ministers of defence

Both EU foreign ministers and their defence counterparts (MOD's) should play their full role in the preparation and follow-up of decisions taken in European Security Council meetings. Diplomacy and Defence are each one side of the same coin when it comes to war or peace. It therefore falls to defence ministers to make their appropriate inputs in formal EU council meetings. If we want to eliminate the structural woes and turf battles within EU structures, coherence from the member states is also a must. The HR/VP should also chair these Defence Council Meetings. The agenda items of these meetings are the quintessence: acquiring state-of-the-art military capabilities. When is "joint procurement" appropriate for this in a multinational context or via the European Defence Agency (EDA)? Which R&D projects deserve the Commission's support? Can the European Defence Fund be involved? These questions should be addressed here.

It is also up to the defence ministers to jointly agree in this forum on the military personnel to be made available to bring EU military HQ up to standard to manage crisis management operations. Being able to act or not, that is the question here.

European Defence Agency: driven by both the HR/VP and the MOD's

The EDA is and remains a valuable agency, not only because it can and even must become the EU's joint procurement agency for defence, but also because it is the appropriate forum for the participating countries to permanently consult on all kinds of cooperation scenarios - not only on R&T but also on production and updates of weapon systems.

Currently, the EDA has no less than four steering boards. This is perhaps too much of a good thing, often creating a vacuum that is smoothly filled by private national industrial interests. This has led to good results as well as disappointments and even failures.

Knowing that the defence industry is a very private industry that does not operate in a classic free market, it is appropriate for the EDA to be tightly managed by one steering board : to be chaired by the HR/VP - henceforth assisted by the Director General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) and, as always, the CEUMC - and in addition the defence ministers - assisted by their CHODs. This is where the knots need to be cut and guidelines provided to the other "EDA -boards", for implementation. Crucially, the financing of the various EDA projects should

also be addressed. "Money is the name of the game". This is what makes the entry of DG DEFIS into the EDA Steering Board so important. In short: these should not be informative and non-committal meetings of the EDA Steering Board, in the wake of EU MOD meetings.

More bang for the buck with "an EU last supper"?

In 1993 the then US Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, invited the CEOs of America's largest defence contractors for dinner. They were urged to become more efficient, read cheaper. The "economy of scale" was central to this. It led to an impressive series of mergers. It worked. The EU is not the US. Nevertheless, it is appropriate now - 30 years later - to invite the VP/HR to explore whether this can also lead to results in the EU.

To measure is to know: with a Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD) and the EU Military Staff (EUMS) coordinating.

A genuine coordinated annual or biannual review of EU defence is an indispensable tool to achieve a capable European Defence. Currently, the CARD report is prepared by the EDA "in coordination with the Commission and the EUMS". This always provides us with a very useful EDA publication. But it is too descriptive in nature. It does not give an overall picture of the state of play in CSDP and does not offer enough concrete recommendations to address gaps - of any kind.

In the EU architecture, the EU Military Staff (EUMS) is well-placed to take the lead "in coordination with the Commission and the EDA", with weapons systems acquisition being only one aspect. This is in line with the method used by member states to assess the state of their defence.

It is up to the EUMS, through EU Military Committee (EUMC), to gather data from member states on these aspects that matter for further analysis in the EU.

However, gathering data is not enough. "Live exercises" are an indispensable gauge in this set-up. These should

examine both the functioning of EU institutions and the deployment of forces on the ground. It is therefore up to the EUMS to participate in the evaluation teams of these live exercises.

Such a CARD makes it possible to call a cat a cat. That this requires additional personnel for the EUMS is obvious. This brings us seamlessly to the next point.

**Crisis-management operations without HQ?**

Any military crisis-management operation - including a non-executive mission - initially requires a military chain of command with fully-fledged headquarters at strategic and at tactical level. An HQ that can immediately call upon military contingents that MS put on permanent standby. So: permanent HQ and assigned forces.

Those who, at the start of a military crisis-management operation, still have to level up their HQ with "augmentees" or are forced to improvise the command structure after the event, know the consequences by now (courtesy of Moscow).

A military HQ doesn't fit in the organisational chart of a foreign ministry, nor should it report directly to the political level, sidelining both CHODs and MODs. This maxim applies in all the EU member states and is to be applied to the EU as well. It was a strategic aberration to detach the EUMS (the EUMC's staff) from the EUMC to subsume it into the EEAS. The end of the Cold War did not lead to a world without warfare.

It is up to the EUMC - a committee where CHODs' military positions are addressed - to determine how a military strategic EU HQ should be built, as part and parcel of an overarching diplomatic political structure. For the tactical military HQ, EU countries should make several HQ permanently available. It is up to them to make arrangements for this, on a national basis or through NATO.

Does a permanent EU strategic HQ require member states to allocate additional personnel for this? Yes and no. The
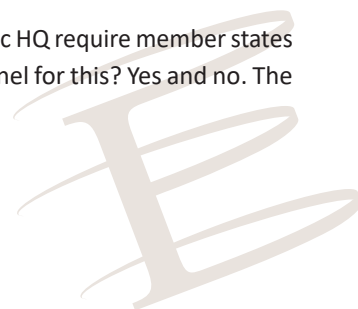
staffing required for this EU HQ will be modest compared to that of NATO. Intensive cooperation between EU and NATO HQ will lead to greater efficiency and may overall amount to a modest shift of workplaces or a very modest increase.

The integrated approach

A crisis management operation is always an "and-and" event, ranging from relief to economic reconstruction and all driven by an overarching political-diplomatic process to consolidate peace. It is up to the EEAS to bring together all the relevant actors within the EU for this purpose in a single structured forum. Liaison officers from the EUMS should participate in this. This is - as mentioned above - not a military HQ. We are at a diplomatic consultative forum.

EU-US COOPERATION

In crisis situations, "size and defence matters", in the transatlantic context, the US and EU are the actors that matter. They are partners in NATO for Article 5 matters. NATO is both part and parcel of the US security strategy and the EU Global Strategy. Military security is an important aspect in this set-up, among many others.

It is therefore clear that a global debate on "Security and Defence" should be held in US-EU meetings. The analogy with US-EU talks on trade and technology will not escape anyone.

In short, labelling the EU as a pillar in NATO is a delusion. There are multiple pillars in NATO. As many as there are participating countries. Cooperation between international organisations is of a different nature.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

History teaches us that for a country or region that is only "indirectly" involved in a war or violent crisis - and for sure when it requires the deployment of military resources - the impact on its economy and public debt is not so limited. Not to mention the inherent human suffering all around and the reception of refugees.

Having a credible territorial defence (Art. 5) and, at least as importantly, effective crisis management underpinned by a powerful military pillar, is, in the final analysis, an investment. A saving. Even in "peacetime". It provides political freedom.

Again, the question is not "if" but rather when Europe will again face crises - short of war - where it will be up to EU countries to deploy military means.

The time has come to return to the DNA envisioned by the founding fathers of a European unification. Based on the subsidiarity principle - the EU's maxim - "defence" was to be part and parcel of the unification process from the start, a precursor to a series of other policies that urgently needed to be unified. It was not to be.

Now - 71 years later - we face another "Zeitenwende" in Europe. After the single market and the Euro, the EU should have a "military pillar in the EU" without delay, observing "3 Cs and a 4th one with the EU and the US as mutual indispensable partners". Hope is justified this time. Hopefully "Just in Time".

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