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EPIS REPORT ON SECURITY POLICY AND DEFENSE

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPH VON MARSCHALL

US Correspondent Tagesspiegel

Trilateral Security Model

How can European states improve regional security cooperation against emerging threats? A trilateral model combining NATO, the EU, and NORDEFCO offers more agile and localized defense capabilities. Institutionalizing this model would enhance Europe's resilience through interoperable and complementary security strengths.

The Cybersecurity Capability Gap

What cyber capability gaps does the EU grapple with? The EU lacks operational coherence, offensive capabilities, and personnel infrastructure to combat complex cyberthreats. Institutional fragmentation, national sovereignty concerns, and an overreliance on civilian regulation hinder cybersecurity policy and legal development. To become a credible and effective cyberpower, the EU must improve coordination, invest in technical and human skills, and become more assertive.

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Felix Heuner

Felix Heuner has completed a B.A. in European Studies at Maastricht University (NL). His research focuses on international security and the defense industrial base. After completing internships at the German Foreign Ministry in New York and the German Ministry for Economic Affairs in Berlin, he is currently working in the department for geopolitical risk analysis at the BMW Group.

EPIS Report Editorial

Dear reader,

During the last decades, security policy and defense have mainly been associated with counterinsurgency operations that happen far away from the borders of the European Union. With the desire to reap the peace dividend of geopolitical stability and western hegemony, European states have not only scaled back their defense budgets but also pushed the issue of national defense from the public discourse. The result of this geopolitical negligence is a continent unsure of its geopolitical position in the world, which is currently lacking the necessary structures and capabilities to present a credible deterrence against its geopolitical rivals.

This geopolitically vulnerable Union has now been confronted with the most severe security crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The war in Ukraine has entered its third year since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, with mounting civilian and military casualties. At the same time, Europe's long-time ally, the United States, has become increasingly unreliable as a security guarantor, with a mercurial President in the White House, who openly questions the US commitment to NATO's Article five.

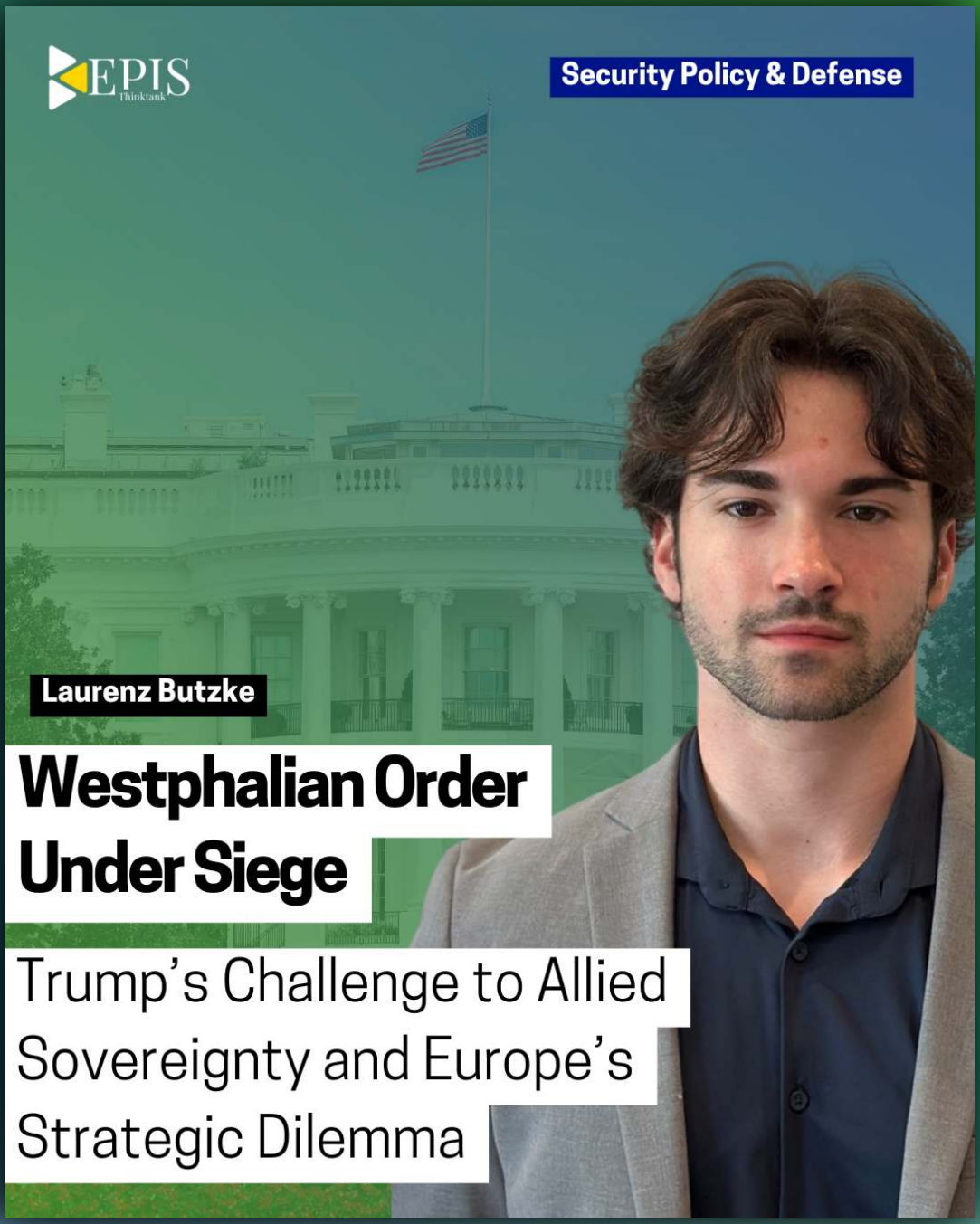
However, this changing geopolitical environment not only presents a challenge to Europe. It is also an opportunity for the EU to move forward, to integrate more closely and to become a more resilient Union. Forced by external pressures, we now have the chance to reshape our security posture and become the independent security actor that one of the wealthiest and politically influential groups of states in the world should be. As Jean Monnet said, "Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises."

This report analyses different facets of the European security architecture and explores possible future concepts that can guide European security in a time of geopolitical conflict.

In the first section of the report, Laurenz and Césarine analyse the influence of the Westphalian State System on the normative aspects of Europe's security policy and the historical ties between the United States and Europe in the realm of security. In the second section, Denisa, Julia and Anton present existing capability gaps in Europe's security architecture and discuss ideas on how to address these gaps. In the last section, Duncan and I explore different initiatives that could shape the European security architecture in the coming years.

This report would not have been possible without the hard work of all the writers and the support of the EPIS board and our graphics designer, Cira. A big thank you to everyone who has contributed to this first report of the report group on Security Policy & Defense!

We hope that you will enjoy the read!



About the Article

How does Donald Trump's rhetoric challenge the foundational Westphalian principles underpinning the Western alliance? Trump's rhetorical imperialism, seen in his statements on Greenland and Canada, undermines the transatlantic norm of territorial integrity and reveals a shift from collective security to unilateralism. Europe must confront this erosion by pursuing strategic autonomy to uphold the postwar order

About the Author

Laurenz Butzke studies Political Science at Leiden University, specialising in International Relations and Organizations. As a scholarship holder of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, his academic focus lies in security policy, international development cooperation, and transatlantic relations. Alongside his studies, he serves as Deputy Chairman of MusicWays Germany e.V., where he leads transnational educational and cultural projects. Laurenz has been deeply involved in South Africa, advising NGOs and promoting political education and community development in Cape Town's townships.

„The crisis consists precisely in the fact, that the old is dying and the new cannot be born."
(Gramsci, 1971, p. 276)

Introduction

For nearly four centuries, the Westphalian state system has served as the foundational grammar of modern international relations. Most students entering the field of political science are still introduced to its core principles - sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference - as the normative bedrock of the modern international order, shaping how international institutions and alliances are constructed and understood. Especially within the transatlantic relationship that evolved after the Second World War, these principles became the cornerstone of trust and institutional cohesion. Within NATO and later the European Union, Westphalian norms were not merely abstract ideals, but operating assumptions: essential to mutual recognition, legal equality, and the strategic predictability that underpinned the alliance - particularly the guarantee of territorial integrity among member states (NATO, 2022). Although often criticized as hypocritical - given the West's history of intervening in other sovereign states' affairs - these principles remained largely uncontested within the Western alliance itself. As Henry Kissinger (2014, p. 11) observes in World Order, "the contemporary, now global Westphalian system - what colloquially is called the world community - has striven to curtail the anarchical nature of the world" through legal and institutional mechanisms. While not universally upheld, this framework has provided the normative foundation for modern diplomacy, and alliance-building. Within the transatlantic context, it has served not only as a theoretical model, but as a pragmatic logic of unity - one grounded in the mutual respect for sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity among allies. Today, however, one of the core Westphalian principles - the respect for territorial integrity - is increasingly under strain. Violations of this principle have always occurred globally, and this paper does not attempt to argue for the universal consistency or legal applicability of Westphalia. Rather, it focuses on the rhetorical rupture within the Western alliance itself and the caesura this second Trump administration presents - and how Europe, in response, is confronted with the erosion of a normative foundation it long considered stable. What follows is an exploration of how Westphalian principles, while often mythologized in theory, became structurally embedded in the postwar European security order - and how that very order is now being unsettled from within.

The Westphalian Myth and the Institutionalization of Sovereignty in NATO and the EU

Signed in 1648 in the cities of Osnabrück and Münster, the Peace of Westphalia marked the end of one of Europe's most bloody periods, the Thirty Years' War - a conflict that had devastated the continent and caused nearly 20% of its population to perish. Since then, the treaty has taken on a near-mythical status in international relations theory and has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis, often interpreted as the symbolic origin of the modern state system. As Henry Kissinger (2014) noted, the European powers that emerged from this conflict would go on to export elements of the Westphalian model across the globe - yet this "export" often occurred through conquest and colonization, revealing a central contradiction between the principles of sovereignty and the means of their dissemination. This contradiction was especially visible in the 19th century, when European powers increasingly operated according to a realist understanding of international politics. As Clausewitz famously argued, war was considered a legitimate extension of political strategy. In this context, state sovereignty was frequently subordinated to imperial ambition and great-power competition. Yet despite such contradictions, Westphalian norms continued to serve as a legitimizing framework - a rhetorical anchor that would later be institutionalized in the postwar Euro- Atlantic security order. Yet, scholars such as Stephen Krasner (1999) and John Gerard Ruggie (1993) have critically reassessed this mythologized view of Westphalia. Opposing the scholarly view of Westphalia as a sort of "natural order", Ruggie (1993, p. 148) describes the

modern state system as socially constructed, rooted in a specific transformation of political authority. Westphalian sovereignty, according to Ruggie (1993), emerged under particular conditions characterized by exclusive territoriality and mutual recognition. Extending this critique, Krasner (1999, p. 3) famously labeled sovereignty as "organized hypocrisy", arguing that while states routinely violate principles of non-intervention and territorial integrity, they continue to invoke them rhetorically as sacred to legitimize their actions and aspirations. Applied to the modern international system, Westphalia should therefore be understood not as a consistent empirical reality, but as a selectively upheld normative framework - more symbolic than structural in many global contexts. Nevertheless, Westphalia, as both a normative framework and empirical reality, served as the foundation for the European post-WWII order. Drawing lessons from the failures of the past, European and North American states wove its core principles into the newly created institutions designed to ensure that war on the European continent should remain a relic of the past. Nowhere was this more evident than in the foundational treaties of NATO and the European Union, which codified Westphalian norms as a shared consensus among member states, providing the foundation for an institutional framework in which allies no longer needed to fear encroachment, coercion, or territorial contestation from within the alliance itself. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty operationalizes the protection of territorial integrity by affirming that an armed attack against one member shall be considered an attack against all, thereby offering a mutual defense guarantee rooted in the inviolability of each member's borders (NATO, 1949, Article 5). Similarly, the Treaty on European Union obliges the Union to respect "the equality of Member States before the Treaties" and their "essential state functions," including the safeguarding of national territory and political identity (European Union, 2012, Article 4(2)). This section sought to demystify the often mythologized role of Westphalia in international relations - not as a universal or natural order, but as a historically situated framework, shaped as much by power as by principle. By tracing its evolution from symbolic origin myth to functional foundation of postwar alliance structures, it becomes clear that Westphalian norms were selectively embedded in NATO and the EU not out of pure legal consistency, but to serve the strategic need for predictability and mutual recognition among allies. It is precisely this selective but stabilizing role that makes their present-day erosion - rhetorical or otherwise - so consequential.

Rhetorical Imperialism: America First, Territorial Integrity Last

„Essentially, it's a large real estate deal."
Donald J. Trump (Haberman & Rogers, 2019)

From as early as August 2019 (Haberman & Rogers, 2019), this quote set the tone for what was to come. Reiterating an idea the United States had last proposed - albeit secretly - in 1946 under President Harry S. Truman, Trump's offer to buy Greenland from Denmark was met across the transatlantic alliance with skepticism and quiet resentment. At the time, the proposal was largely dismissed as a humorous mishap - another instance of Trump's unorthodox style rather than a serious shift in strategic posture. Yet the world kept turning. By the end of Trump's first term in 2021, the geopolitical landscape had grownincreasingly unstable: China was asserting itself more aggressively in the Pacific, while Russia was advancing its vision of the 'Russkiy Mir'- a civilizational sphere justified through cultural and linguistic ties (Snyder, 2018). Instead of a humorous eccentricity, his transactional aspiration was in hindsight a harrowing harbinger: a desire to expand American influence, and early expression of what would become a sustained campaign of rhetorical imperialism. This campaign would soon undermine and threaten these very political frameworks of the rule-based international order, that had defined the postwar West.

Rhetorical imperialism:
The use of language to assert dominance over another state's sovereignty.

Greenland:

Greenland has been of American interest since the mid-19th century. Long regarded as a strategic necessity, President Truman's secret 1946 proposal to purchase the island ultimately led to a bilateral defense agreement (Associated Press, 2019; Yale Law School, n.d.), which granted the U.S. military the right to establish bases in Greenland at its discretion (even though the US had troops stationed there already) - without transferring the island's sovereignty or control over its vast natural resources. Situated in the North Atlantic, Greenland provides the United States with a critical forward operating position: it enables power projection into the Arctic, forms part of early missile defense systems, and offers strategic surveillance capabilities over both Europe and Russia. As climate change continues to melt Arctic sea ice and open new shipping lanes, Greenland's military and economic significance has only increased, placing it at the center of American defense planning. The island has been part of the Kingdom of Denmark since 1814, and is thereby part of NATO but not of the European Union, while enjoying broad political autonomy under its own government in Nuuk. Since Trump was inaugurated as the 47th President of the United States, his previously stated aspirations to acquire Greenland have evolved into open challenges to the island's - and by extension, Denmark's - sovereignty. In statements issued by the administration or by Trump himself, Greenland has once again been described as "essentially a real estate deal" (Haberman & Rogers, 2019). More alarmingly, when asked whether Denmark's rejection of U.S. annexation would be accepted, Trump refused to rule out the use of force, stating only that the United States "would do what it takes to secure its national interests" (Heath, 2025). Diplomatic ties between Denmark and the United States have since remained frosty (Shuster, 2025) and uncertainty looms over how far the administration is willing to go. Nevertheless, Trump's statements are more than just rhetorical power games. As laid out above, they openly challenge the territorial integrity of a NATO ally - threatening the use of military force to acquire allied territory and subordinating collective norms to unilateral American interest. In doing so, Trump's language places U.S. strategic behavior in unsettling proximity to the justificatory logic used by rivals like Russia and China, whose own challenges to sovereignty often begin not with tanks, but with the reframing of territorialclaims as transactions.

Trump's statements are more than just rhetorical power games.

Canada:

Trump's bid to purchase Greenland marked a symbolic return to imperial logic, invoking 19th-century colonial reasoning in the language of transactional sovereignty. While that episode exposed cracks in the U.S.-Danish relationship, it is the case of Canada - Washington's closest ally and neighbor - where rhetorical imperialism struck more deeply, rupturing a bilateral relationship nurtured over the course of two centuries. Canada and the United States are deeply interwoven both economically and politically, through shared membership in NATO and regional trade frameworks such as the USMCA. In 2024, total U.S. goods trade with Canada reached approximately $762.1 billion, making Canada one of America's most significant and integrated trading partners (Office of the United States Trade Representative [USTR], 2024). Canada is also home to vast deposits of rare earth elements, critical minerals, and some of the world's largest oil reserves - resources that are increasingly vital in the context of geopolitical competition. Its proximity to the Arctic, a region of growing strategic significance amid rising tensions with China and Russia, further enhances its importance to U.S. defense planning - planning that would typically take place within the frameworks of mutual consultation and collective security under NATO. Instead of seeking cooperation, President Trump stated in numerous posts on his platform "Truth Social" as well as in press conferences, that Canada should rather become the 51st U.S. state (Samuels, 2025), questioning the legitimacy of the 49th parallel as a border between the two countries. Following abstruse

posts of land maps that showed Canada as a territorial part of the United States, his administration imposed unprecedented economic pressure, beginning with a 25% tariff on Canada's car industry and later expanding the measures to include a broader range of goods (Michael, 2025). Trump thus exerted pressure on its economy, inflicting damages that raised concerns about political overreach - unsettling the assumptions of mutual respect and sovereign equality that have long underpinned the bilateral relationship. According to then–Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, these actions were part of a deliberate strategy: "What he wants is to see a total collapse of the Canadian economy, because that'll make it easier to annex us, is the second half of his thought" (Taylor-Vaisey, 2025). Trump's narratives were swiftly met with significant backlash from the Canadian public and political establishment. Trudeau dismissed the idea outright, stating that there was "not a snowball's chance in hell" of it happening (Reuters, 2025). Both the Greenland and Canada cases highlight the extent to which Trump has steered U.S. foreign policy toward imperialist aspirations - with his provocative proposals concerning Panama or Gaza not even accounted for here. In the context of postwar history, this rhetorical turn constitutes an unprecedented threat to the foundations of the Western alliance network. Statements following Trump's reasoning erode the very pillars upon which the transatlantic order has long rested: sovereignty, mutual respect, and territorial integrity. Across the Western world, each ambiguous or incendiary comment emanating from the Oval Office leaves allied capitals increasingly unsettled. This raises urgent questions about whether NATO can still be considered a credible framework of collective security - and whether Trump might ultimately act on his threats against allied territory, given that the current administration now appears to prioritize national interest over the territorial integrity of even its longest-standing allies.

Figure 2: Map of an "American Empire" if Trump's rhetorical imperialism would become reality (Source: Own Work)

Westphalia in Retreat: Europe in a World of Disorder

As rhetorical imperialism creeps into the heart of the Western alliance, Europe stands at a disorienting juncture. Westphalia - so long the cornerstone of the post-WWII security landscape - is slowly eroding from within, destabilized by the very actor that once championed its principles among allies. Krasner's (1999) critique of Westphalia as "organized hypocrisy" is not merely a commentary on inconsistency anymore. Under Trump, this hypocrisy has become a governing logic: norms like territorial integrity and sovereignty are no longer sacred, but transactional and conditional, reframed in terms of national interest rather than collective security. Europe, right now, seems to be holding its breath - waiting out Trump's presidency in the quiet hope that everything will somehow return to normal. While sparks of ambition have surfaced - from calls for closer inter-European integration to proposals aimed at reducing overreliance on U.S. security guarantees, such as expanding the nuclear umbrella under French or British leadership - these have yet to coalesce into a coherent strategic shift. Though developments in the European defense industry signal that change is underway, political momentum remains cautious and uneven. Trump still seems to be treated as an anomaly, rather than as a symptom of a deeper strategic and ideological reorientation in the United States, with no guarantee that future administrations will reverse course. Meanwhile, Washington increasingly echoes the very narratives long deployed by authoritarian expansionist powers such as Russia, depriving Europe of the moral leverage of condemning those, and emphasizing the urgency for decisive action, band wagoning, and moves towards strategic autonomy. Westphalia is in retreat - disenchanted, eroded, and now abandoned not by its historical adversaries, but its very architects – and it is time for Europe and Canada to move swiftly to retain decisive weight on the global stage. In the aftermath of rhetorical imperialism, the burden of adapting to a changing global order, to stand for our values and principles, no longer lies in D.C. - but in Brussels and Ottawa. As history reminds us, words have a way of becoming policy - and silence, too often, becomes complicity.

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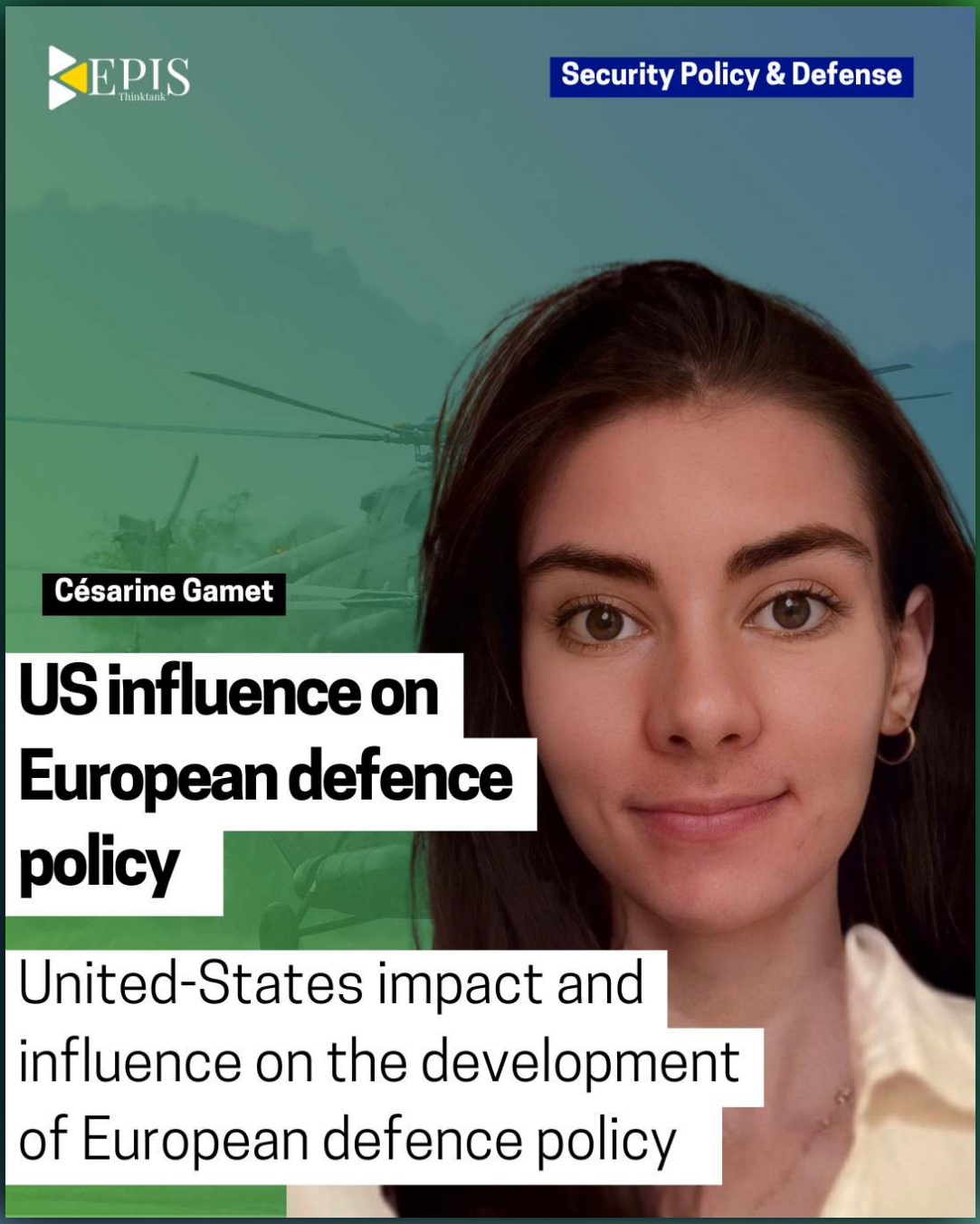

About the Article

What influences have the United-States on the development of the European Defense Policy ? The American influence on the development of European policy in recent years, the present developments and future prospects. These approaches give us a better understanding of some of the issues at stake in the development of European security policy.

About the Author

Césarine is currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Security at Sciences Po Paris. Her interest in security issues is grounded in a broad academic background in the humanities and social sciences, with a particular emphasis on political science and international relations. She has further deepened her expertise through a specialization in European Studies. Eager to contribute her knowledge and grow through collaboration, Césarine looks forward to engaging with the EPIS team and its mission.

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, the United States has played a crucial role in the development and security of Europe. From the establishment of NATO in 1949 to modern strategic partnerships, the U.S. has consistently demonstrated its commitment to European stability through military alliances, economic aid and cooperative defense initiatives. This long-standing partnership has evolved in response to global threats, geopolitical shifts, and technological advancements. The future of European defense will likely involve a blend of deeper EU collaboration and continued reliance on NATO, with entities adapting to the changing global dynamics and ensuring that Europe remains secure in the face of emerging threats. Russia's aggression in Ukraine has brought the largest war to Europe since 1945. Russia's actions, along with Chinese assertiveness, questions around American leadership, political discontent throughout the West, and much else besides, have weakened the international order and impacted transatlantic relations. This article aims to explore the trajectory of U.S. support for European defense, highlighting key milestones, challenges and the ongoing importance of transatlantic security cooperation and European defense policy development. We will begin with an overview of the American impact on the development of European policy in recent years, before looking at present developments and, finally, future prospects. These approaches will give us a better understanding of some of the issues at stake in the development of European security policy.

A continental DITB: Defense Industrial and Technology Base

Historic cooperation

The devastation of the Second World War has been a cornerstone of European security and defense. The devastation of the war left Europe vulnerable, prompting the U.S. to take an active role in rebuilding and safeguarding the continent. They played a leading role in establishing the Marshall Plan (1948) to provide economic assistance to war-torn European nations to promote recovery and prevent the spread of communism. In 1949, under president Truman, the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) provided a collective defense framework, pushing European nations to rearm and helping them to develop a collective defense mindset. The deployment of U.S. troops in Europe and the establishment of military bases further solidified this commitment. The US leadership in NATO helped European forces adopt standardised training, equipment and logistics, improving the ability of European militaries to operate together. For Europeans, NATO guarantees collective security, but it is accompanied by strong American leadership. This dependence, accepted out of necessity, nevertheless hampered the first attempts at autonomous European defense. The failure of the European Defense Community (EDC) in 1954 illustrates these internal contradictions, but also the difficulty for Europe to organise itself outside American influence. US influence has imposed itself as a structuring framework, but also as a constraining one: national defense policies remain aligned with Washington's priorities, and European initiatives struggle to emerge. The strategic balance clearly rests on the commitment of the United States. After the Cold War, Washington played a key role in trying to convince European nations to invest more in their own defense. Instead of disengaging, the US led NATO interventions in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999), which helped to reinforce commitment to European stability. They helped Europeans to modernise and expand their military capabilities, invest in their defense infrastructure and reinforce the importance of high-tech military advancements. In maintaining military bases in Europe, the U.S. facilitated joint military exercises, which improved European defense readiness and cooperation. Europe invested in its own security. In 2017, especially, the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), the European Union's instrument for security policy, was created. This policy was cautiously supported by the United States and initially conceived as a complement to NATO, not in

competition with it. The Europeans then felt a contradictory injunction: to be more responsible without questioning American leadership. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, decided unilaterally by the United States, created a rift within Europe and with Washington. Some Europeans criticised American policy, while a debate began on the need for European strategic autonomy. Despite this, NATO remained the dominant architecture. European dependence on American resources was flagrant, especially in areas such as intelligence, air defense systems, etc. For many Europeans, autonomy remained a distant ideal. In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and more importantly, the war since 2022, the U.S reinforced its military presence in Eastern Europe. Their commitment reinforced the idea that European security still depends on U.S. military power. While the U.S. wants Europe to take more responsibility, Washington has increased its military presence in response to Russian threats. They continued to push for European allies to meet the NATO defense spending target of 2% of GDP. This pressure has led to increased investments in European defense capabilities, with countries like Poland and the Baltic states having gone beyond 2% after 2023. Under the first Trump presidency (2017-2021), the redeployment of US troops raised concerns about US reliability, influencing European defense policy discussions on independence. In other words, Russia's war against Ukraine has revealed the deplorable state of Europe's armies and defense industries after decades of peace dividends, and their deep dependence on the United States.

The development of European Security Policy in the coming years

Current development and political shift

The US commitment to deterrence, particularly against Russia, influences European defense spending and military strategy. Currently, the European dependence on the United States in terms of defense remains strong. The Draghi Report, published in September 2024 by the EU Commission, shows that 78% of the weapons purchased by EU member states were coming from outside Europe, with 63% coming from the United States. The new Trump administration signalled a decreased commitment to NATO in the last months, with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth suggesting a reduction in U.S. troops stationed in Europe. This move indicates a strategic pivot, urging European allies to take greater responsibility for their own security. In a notable policy shift, President Trump engaged directly with Russian President Vladimir Putin, including a summit in Riyadh on February 18, 2025, to discuss the Ukraine conflict. Notably, Ukrainian and European representatives were excluded from these discussions, raising concerns among European leaders about being sidelined in critical matters. The European Union reacted in an unprecedented way. The EU is already gradually putting in place and accelerating the functioning of instruments to structure its defense policy. Among other things, the Strategic Compass (2022), for example, is an ambitious policy document setting out defense and security priorities up to 2030; the creation of the Rapid Deployment Capacity (planned for 2025) with the capacity to deploy up to 5,000 soldiers for crisis operations. For the first time, the Union has financed the purchase and delivery of arms to a country at war through the "European Support Fund for Ukraine". Defense budgets have been significantly increased: many Member States, starting with Germany (with its 100 billion euro fund), have taken measures to increase their military capabilities. Industrial cooperation initiatives have also been stepped up, with joint projects on ammunition production, air defense and the future Franco-German tank (Main Ground Combat System). In response to the shifting US stance, European nations increased mechanisms of dialogue. The Weimar+ alliance, for example, was formed in February 2025, expanding the original Weimar Triangle (France, Germany, Poland) to include in discussions the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and the European Commission. This alliance aims to promote European sovereignty and coordinate defense efforts independent of US influence. Despite all of these evolutions, key challenges are pre-

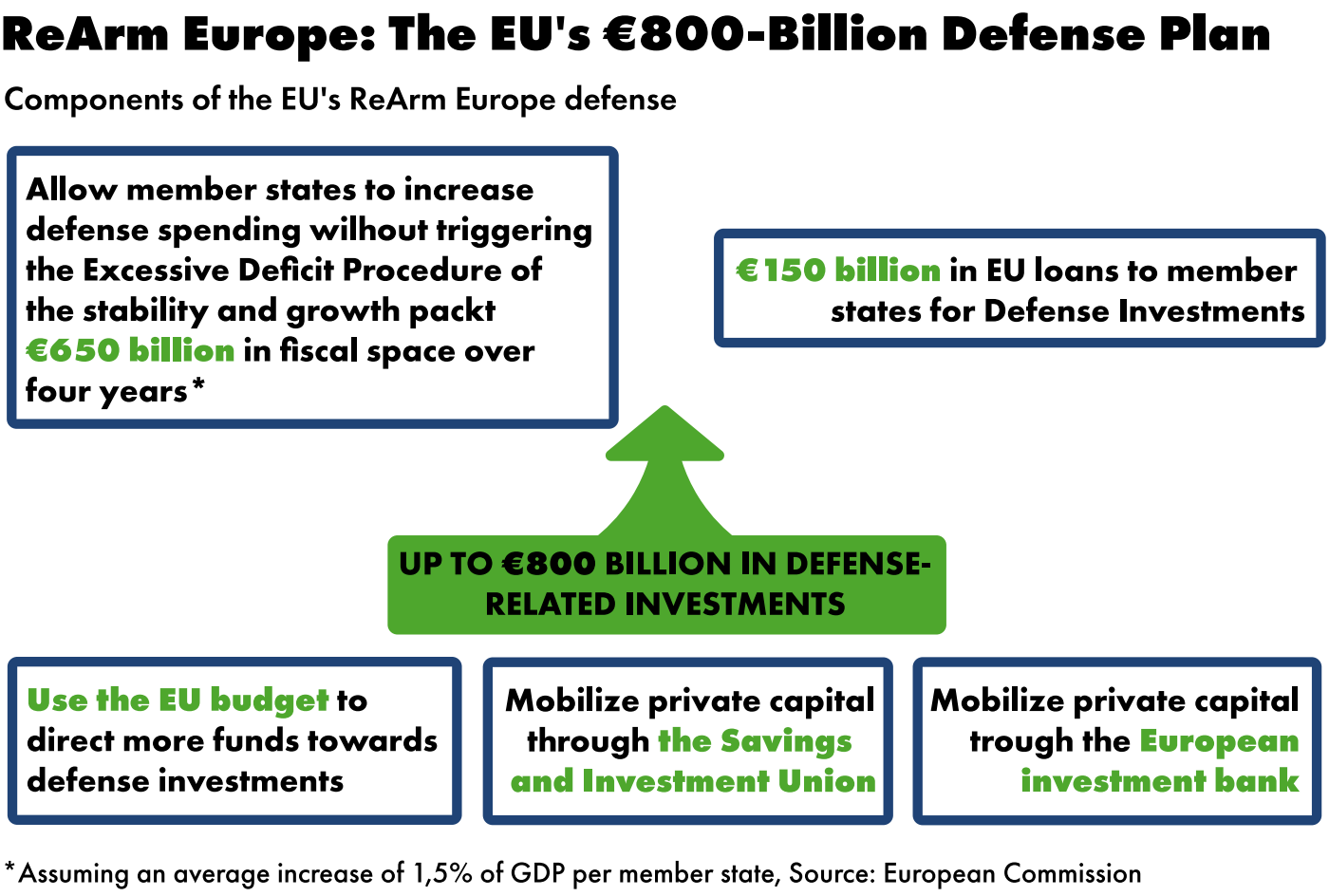

Figure 1: Chart showing the components of ReArm Europe (Own Work)

venting the development of common policies and initiatives. Europe's defense industry is too fragmented, needs to achieve greater coherence between its defense programmes, standardise its processes and needs more financial resources. The Draghi Report argues that "Europe's defense industry remains insufficient to meet emerging security threats". Among other things, the report called for a radical transformation of the EU's government financing model, arguing that insufficient public and private investment has led to a spending gap of approximately five per cent of the EU's GDP per year. In March 2025, the European Commission revealed a plan called "ReArm Europe" consisting of height hundred billion euros in additional defense investments to address the next decade gaps exposed by the war in Ukraine and to prepare for future security challenges. This plan recommends this level of expenditure, but at present, no funding has been secured. To facilitate investments, the European Commission also proposed to activate the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact, allowing member states to increase their defense spending up to 1.5% of GDP per year for four years, without violating the EU's budgetary rules. These exceptional plans should have direct consequences on the ability of states to invest in their national defense. The impact of these plans remains to be determined and discussed. States like France or Italy can't afford much higher deficits and are thus proposing to take on collective debt as EU member states. However, states such as Germany or the Netherlands were opposed in the past to such a mechanism. This rift in financial resources could prove to be a key issue in European rearmament.On another level, the US continues to support a large number of EU initiatives, such as the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), created right after the annexation of Crimea. They expanded their participation in joint exercises and the creation of infrastructure to enhance European defense readiness. They provided advanced weapons systems to European allies, including F-35 fighter jets, Patriot missile systems, and tanks. They are also supporting regional European security initiatives

such as the French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which aims for rapid crisis responses without NATO involvement. In a nutshell, the deteriorating European security environment and the changing priorities of the United States mean that Europe must be prepared to assume greater responsibility for its own defense. Europeans require a sustained plan that combines immediate efforts to support Ukraine and rebuild readiness, and long-term goals to develop a "full force package", including the combat support capabilities and key enablers that are currently provided primarily by the US.

Future perspectives: Towards American uncertainty and European strategic autonomy

As seen previously, in the last few years, the U.S. has encouraged European nations to take greater responsibility for their security while reinforcing NATO's role. However, the degree to which Washington supports European strategic autonomy (e.g., EU defense initiatives) depends on geopolitical developments. The U.S. remains the leading force in NATO, providing military capabilities, intelligence, and nuclear deterrence. However, the commitment to NATO's deterrence and defense posture is likely to fluctuate as successive administrations reassess the extent of US involvement. Donald Trump has already openly questioned the nuclear umbrella over eastern European states, thereby significantly weakening the credibility of NATO Article 5. Two major issues will continuously be evaluated for the next months and years: The need to build a European pillar within NATO, and the need to create a continental defense technological and industrial base (DTIB). On their own, European countries are significantly boosting their defense budgets. Denmark announced an increase to 3% of its GDP for defense, and Estonia plans to allocate over 4% by 2026. These measures reflect a collective effort to enhance military capabilities amid concerns over reduced US support. A commitment to maintain a high level of effort for as long as necessary will be essential for rebuilding European militaries. A comprehensive, scenario-based study by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in 2019 estimated that European countries "would need to invest up to $357 billion to build a force capable of addressing a serious Article 5 contingency" in the Baltic region, without significant U.S. support. While the lessons learned from Ukraine will influence the precise amount required, this figure highlights both the scale of the effort and the fact that it remains achievable. European nations are already spending over $100 billion more per year than they were in 2019. The critical challenge lies in maintaining this sustained effort over the long term to build and sustain the necessary capabilities, ensuring a capable and ready force model over time. Furthermore, it will be a challenge to demonstrate the EU's capacity to coordinate defense

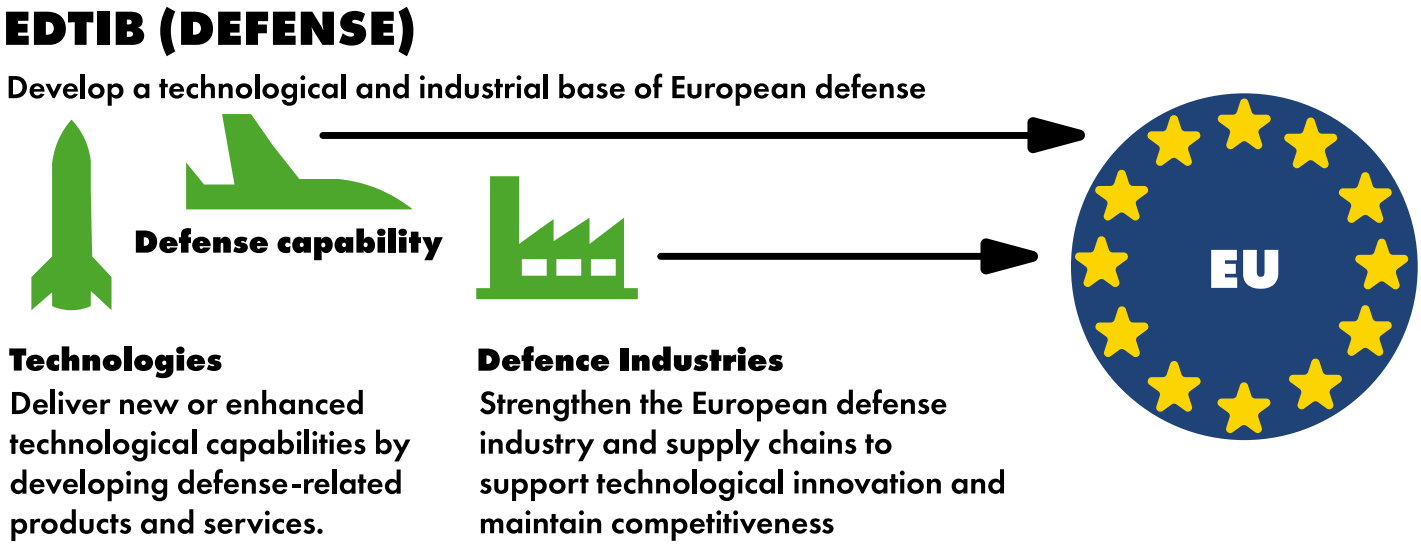

Figure 2: Chart showing EDTIB (Own Work)

industrial decisions, while ensuring that military planning remains within the purview of member states and NATO. While NATO leads in defense planning and resource allocation, it does not manage procurement. The European Union, on the other hand, plays an economic role, including coordinating defense spending across member states. The key challenge will be synchronising NATO strategic planning with the EU's defense spending decisions, ensuring that Europe develops a more self-sufficient and competitive defense sector while maintaining transatlantic cohesion. Early in 2024, the EU released the European Defense Industrial Strategy (EDIS), which aims to strengthen the European defense technological and industrial base (EDTIB). EDIS sets out a vision for the EU's defense policy through 2035. In theory, the goal is to produce more, quicker. In reality, it means that by 2030, intra-EU defense trade should represent at least 35 per cent of the value of the EU's defense market and at least 50 per cent of member states' defense procurement should be procured from the EDTIB (with 60 per cent by 2035). According to Andrius Kubilius, European Commissioner for defense and Space and the defense industry will have to evolve significantly in the next years, member states 'need investment and financing capacity, and the President's announcements are a first step', referring to the 800 billion 'Re-Arm Europe' programme announced at the beginning of March by Ursula von der Leyen. For Andrius Kubilius, it is necessary to 'invest more, invest better, invest European'. In short, to achieve significant policy progress, Europeans need to focus on a short list of priorities - ranging from immediate objectives to long-term efforts to addressing capability gaps and fixing organisational challenges - to prepare for the future without dodging some of the difficult debates. As seen, European defense industries are struggling to meet demand and deliver within a reasonable timeframe. To this end, the EU aims at mobilising its toolbox to structure the European defense technological and industrial base and support joint acquisitions.

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About the Article

What cyber capability gaps does the EU grapple with? The EU lacks operational coherence, offensive capabilities, and personnel infrastructure to combat complex cyberthreats. Institutional fragmentation, national sovereignty concerns, and an overreliance on civilian regulation hinder cybersecurity policy and legal development. To become a credible and effective cyberpower, the EU must improve coordination, invest in technical and human skills, and become more assertive.

About the Author

Denisa Cepoiu is finishing a BSc in International Relations and Organizations at Leiden University and is starting a MA in International Relations at the Central European University. Her research acknowledges the discursive construction of politics, be it in relations to social movements or social media propaganda; furthermore, she is interested in matters related to security and intelligence.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) is becoming increasingly exposed to cybersecurity threats that target both its civilian infrastructure and military security regimes. Cybersecurity refers to the protection of information networks, key infrastructures, and digital assets from malicious activity that disrupts social and government functioning. Rising geopolitical tensions have increased the frequency of malicious activity, which can range from ransomware assaults on healthcare systems to coordinated cyber operations against key infrastructure (Dekker et al., 2025). Recognising the changing threat landscape, the EU has implemented extensive regulatory measures such as the NIS2 Directive, the Cyber Resilience Act, and the Strategic Compass to improve cyber resilience and collective defense (European Commission, 2022). However, major competence gaps remain between these strategic goals and their operational implementation. While the EU has succeeded at developing legal and normative frameworks, it faces challenges in translating these frameworks into operational capabilities, particularly in terms of speed, interoperability, and deterrence (Carrapico & Barrinha, 2017; Sliwinski, 2014). This review essay evaluates scholarly and policy perspectives to examine these capability gaps. The essay will first present the governance structures responsible for the EU's cyber-related regulations; then it will dive into concrete cyber capability gaps, both in terms of the civilian aspect and the military aspect; finally, the essay will offer a brief comparative perspective to major players in the cyber stage—NATO, Russia, and China. The essay observes recurring themes of institutional fragmentation, competing national interests, skill shortages, and the EU's normative preference for regulation over aggressive action. By employing ideas from both academic and policy sources, this essay aims to show that unless these weaknesses are addressed systematically, the EU risks remaining strategically vulnerable in an increasingly contested digital space.

Conceptual Framework

A thorough assessment of the EU's cyber capabilities gaps requires a solid understanding of core cybersecurity concepts and the theoretical foundations that underpin this discussion. Cybersecurity broadly refers to the safeguarding of information systems, networks, and digital data against harmful threats such as illegal access, destruction, and disruption. Cyber defense expands on this notion by emphasising both passive security measures and active defensive operations aimed at countering cyber threats before or during a cyber assault (Ducaru et al., 2024). Cyber resilience refers to a system's or society's ability to maintain vital functions and recover quickly after a cyber incident (Dekker et al., 2024). Finally, offensive cyber capabilities refer to acts aimed at disrupting, degrading, or destroying an adversary's information systems, either proactively or reactively. In contrast to cybersecurity and cyber defense, which are primarily reactive, offensive cyber operations are proactive. The European Union's self-perception as a „civilian power" has a significant impact on its cybersecurity strategy. The EU had placed great value on regulatory frameworks, diplomatic commitment, and the promotion of international norms over military solutions, even in security sectors (Carrapico & Barrinha, 2017). However, scholars such as Sliwinski (2014) argue that the EU's liberal intergovernmental framework, which stresses member states' sovereignty, provides barriers to further integration in defense-related cyber activity. Hence, the looming threat of cyberattacks, which are frequently orchestrated by states such as Russia or China, calls into question the efficacy of a solely regulatory strategy.

The Governance of the EU's Cyber Capabilities

Institutional fragmentation significantly weakens the European Union's cybersecurity governance. This concept refers to the distribution of responsibilities, mandates, and

competencies across several EU entities and member states in the absence of adequate centralised oversight. The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), the Cybersecurity Service for the Union (CERT-EU), Europol, and national Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs) all play roles in cybersecurity, but their tasks overlap, and their performance varies (Dekker et al., 2025; European Commission, 2022). For example, ENISA concentrates on advisory and normative tasks such as developing standards and conducting risk assessments, but it lacks the operational capabilities required for incident management and cyber defense. Meanwhile, CERT-EU's role is limited to protecting EU institutions rather than coordinating member states responses. Carrapico and Barrinha (2017) contend that the EU's narrative of cohesion conceals major structural gaps that impede operational efficacy, particularly during cross-border crises. Similarly, Bendiek and Bund (2024) point out that plans such as the Cyber Solidarity Act, while ambitious in establishing a „European Cyber Shield," rely heavily on national implementation and voluntary collaboration. Dewi and Nugrahani (2024) posit that, while legislative frameworks have developed, actual operational integration remains difficult due to member states' reluctance to sacrifice sovereignty. As a result, cyber incident response in the EU is inconsistent, delayed, and reactive rather than proactive. Furthermore, member states frequently prioritise national interests over collective EU action, particularly in sensitive areas like cyber intelligence and military operations (Iancu, 2024). This tendency intensifies the fragmentation at the governance level, challenging coordinated attribution of cyberattacks and collective response actions. Thus, institutional fragmentation not only impairs the EU's cyber defense but also undermines trust among member states, creating a systemic vulnerability that adversaries might exploit. To strengthen governance, voluntary coordination must be replaced by binding commitments to share threat information, conduct joint exercises, and respond collectively.

Concrete Gaps in Cybersecurity Capabilities

Civilian cybersecurity capabilities in the EU demonstrate certain weaknesses, which expose vital infrastructure and services to systemic cyber risk. Capability gaps are inadequacies in basic cyber hygiene, incident response readiness, vulnerability management, and technical resilience across multiple sectors. ENISA's NIS360 Report (2025) depicts critical weaknesses in healthcare, transportation, energy, banking, and information and communications technology (ICT) sectors, where security maturity is still imbalanced. For example, the healthcare industry's reliance on old systems and insufficient incident response planning has made it a regular target of ransomware attacks, with potentially fatal implications. The Cyber Resilience Act and NIS2 Directive seek to address these weaknesses by establishing baseline cybersecurity standards, breach reporting requirements, and supply chain risk assessments (European Commission, 2022). However, Kamara (2024) criticises these legislative measures for placing disproportionate compliance obligations on small and medium-sized businesses, which frequently lack the means to achieve high cybersecurity standards. Small and medium-sized enterprises make up a considerable percentage of Europe's digital economy, and their cyber vulnerability ripples throughout bigger supply chains. Furthermore, Hernández (2024) emphasises that the EU's digital sovereignty remains fragile because of its reliance on non-European vendors for essential technologies such as cloud computing, semiconductors, and telecommunications. This dependence creates strategic weaknesses that regulatory measures alone cannot address. The European Commission (2025) underlines that establishing operational resilience necessitates not just stronger laws but also significant investment in indigenous technical capabilities, public-private collaborations, and cross-sector threat intelligence sharing. Sector-specific capa-

Cyber resilience:
societies' ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from cyberattacks.

bility gaps are especially worrying, given the increasing sophistication of adversarial strategies. Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs) that target financial systems, healthcare networks, and energy grids are specifically designed to take advantage of these gaps in readiness (Mueller et al., 2023). As long as sectors are fragmented in their preparation for cyber incidents, the EU's overall civilian resilience will be insufficient to resist or mitigate catastrophic cyberattacks. Bridging civilian capability gaps calls for a holistic approach that includes legislative coordination, targeted investments, personalised support for small and medium-sized enterprises, and constant threat monitoring and adaptation.

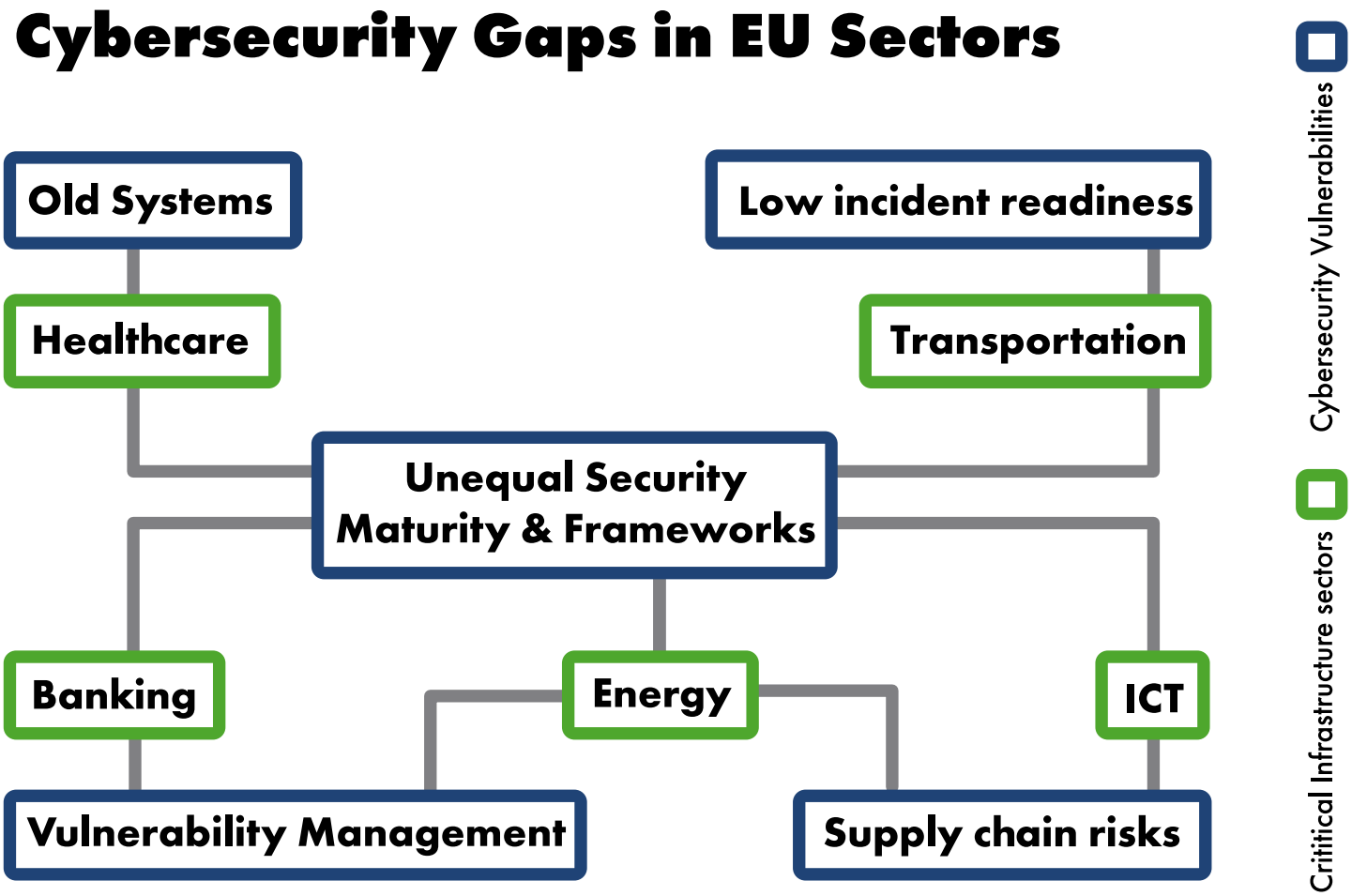

Figure 1: Chart showing Cybersecurity Gaps in EU Sectors (Own Work)

An additional impediment to fulfilling the European Union's cyber resilience goals is the shortage of cybersecurity personnel. Workforce shortages are best defined as the difference between the demand for competent and specialised cybersecurity-schooled experts and the restricted supply available within member states and EU institutions. According to Catal and co-authors (2022), over 300,000 cybersecurity posts remain unfilled across Europe, exposing serious risks in public administrations, vital infrastructure sectors, and commerce. Almeida (2025) further emphasises that present educational programs frequently fail to meet industry needs, focusing on theory rather than real, applicable skills. Additionally, Hernández (2024) contends that varied certification standards across member states hinder cross-border labour mobility, making it harder to deploy competent experts quickly. The Cyber Solidarity Act calls for improvements in cross-border cyber training and cooperative exercises, but implementation is still in its early stages (Dewi & Nugrahani, 2024). This mismatch between policy ambition and workforce preparation jeopardises the EU's capacity to implement cyber-related frameworks like the NIS2 Directive or the Cyber Resilience Act. Given the lack of investment in cybersecurity education, certification systems, and cross-sector professional development programs, the EU's regulatory cyber frame-

works remain underutilised. As a result, the shortage in cyber experts is not only an operational issue but also a weakness that could be exploited by malicious actors to undermine European cybersecurity. Regarding the cyber side of the EU, its cyber capabilities are still fragmented, underdeveloped, and mostly defensive, limiting the EU's ability to strike effectively in cyberspace. Military cyber capabilities include the structures, doctrines, and resources required to secure military assets, project force, and support missions via digital means. The 2022 EU Cyber Defense Policy calls for „full-spectrum capabilities," but it leaves offensive operations and strategic cyber deterrence largely up to individual member states (European Commission, 2022). Mueller and co-authors (2023) show that during the Russia-Ukraine war, effective cyber operations required strong integration of military, information, and digital warfare domains—a paradigm the EU has yet to replicate. According to Katagiri (2024), inside the EU, the political sensitivity surrounding cyberspace militarisation has stalled efforts to build unified offensive guidelines, cooperative exercises, or centralised cyber commands. Furthermore, Hernández (2024) critiques the lack of designated cyber units in several European armed services, claiming that ad hoc cyber defensive measures are insufficient to face persistent, well-coordinated adversary attacks. Without the establishment of structured, interoperable military cyber units capable of supporting CSDP missions and NATO operations, the EU's aspiration to be a credible digital security provider will remain unfulfilled. Military cyber deficiencies significantly impair the EU's ability to project force or defend its strategic autonomy. Developing offensive cyber capabilities poses additional significant strategic, legal, and normative difficulties to the EU. Offensive cyber operations involve pre-emptively or reactively disrupting or destroying hostile information systems. Despite offensive cyber capabilities being increasingly regarded as crucial to credible deterrence measures, the EU has historically avoided using such tools because of legal limits and political considerations (Ducaru et al., 2024). Taillat (2024) suggests that conceptual difficulties about what constitutes a „cyberattack" versus „cyberwarfare" make it difficult to define red lines and proportional responses within the EU framework. The Tallinn Manual and NATO's cyber defense policies provide some direction, but the EU has not formally established comparable doctrines (Ducaru et al., 2024). Furthermore, Miadzvetskaya (2024) observes that while the EU has implemented cyber sanctions regimes, it lacks the practical tools to undertake direct action against its possible adversaries in cyberspace. Without a clear offensive posture, the EU risks remaining a „soft target" for ongoing low-intensity cyber operations that erode strategic stability. Thus, resolving offensive cyber capability deficiencies is more than just a technological challenge; it is also a matter of the EU's determination to redefine its identity as a civilian power in a disputed digital space.

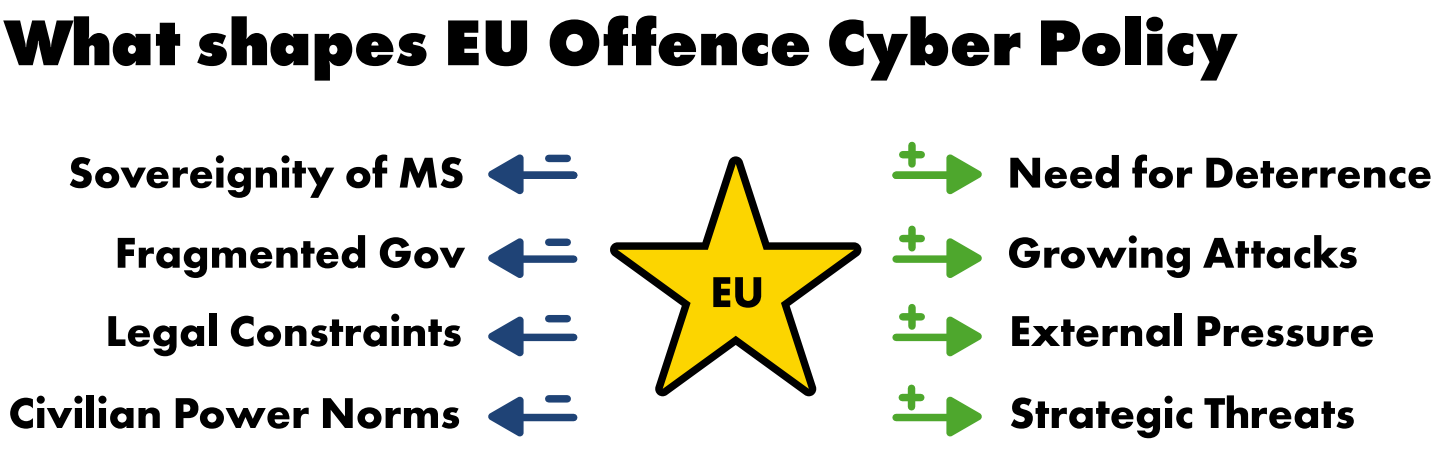

Figure 2: Chart showing What shapes EU Offence Cyber Policy (Own Work)

A Comparative Analysis: EU vs. NATO, China, and Russia

When comparing the EU to other prominent players within cyberspace, some strategic vulnerabilities in both civilian and military cybersecurity stand out. For instance, NATO has designated cyberspace as an operational domain and established a dedicated Cyber Operations Centre to coordinate member reactions to major cyber crises (Ducaru et al., 2024). NATO also has collective defense mechanisms in place, such as Article 5, which can theoretically be implemented in the event of a serious cyberattack. In contrast, the EU's cybersecurity architecture continues to be a mix of sectoral legislation and non-binding frameworks, making it difficult to ensure timely and coordinated responses across member states. Meanwhile, China has established a cyber sovereignty strategy that combines digital monitoring, civil-military cooperation, and the development of indigenous technology to maintain state control over its digital infrastructure (Sliwinski, 2014). Hernández (2024) underlines that China's strategy allows for integrated offensive and defensive operations, establishing it as a considerable actor in the cyber stage. Similarly, Russia has exhibited strong skills in hybrid cyber operations, particularly during its war against Ukraine, wherein cyberattacks support traditional military activities (Mueller et al., 2023). On the other hand, the EU's commitment to multilateral principles, privacy, and market openness is becoming an obstacle to the establishment of a coordinated and effective cyber policy. According to Bendiek and Bund (2024), while the EU excels at regulation, it falls short of its competitors in terms of quick coordination and deterrence. Without better integration of civilian and military cyber capabilities and a stronger doctrinal commitment to active defense, the EU risks falling further behind. So, when taking a comparative look at the EU and its main competitors in cyberspace, it becomes apparent that the EU needs to move beyond its existing regulatory framework and toward more unified and operationally capable cybersecurity governance.

Cyber incident response in the EU is inconsistent, delayed, and reactive rather than proactive.

Diverging Perspectives in Literature and Policy

There is a significant difference between academic literature and EU policy directives on the bloc's cybersecurity trajectory. On the one hand, academics argue that the EU should continue to support international cyber rules, diplomacy, and capacity-building rather than creating military cyber capabilities that could jeopardize its identity as a civilian-centric union (Carrapico & Barrinha, 2017; Taillat, 2024). Hence, scholars advocate for strengthening the EU's normative impact by promoting cyber-peace efforts, investing in digital rights protections, and encouraging multistakeholder governance. On the other hand, without an effective cyber deterrence, the EU could remain vulnerable to asymmetric cyber threats which fall short of conventional warfare. According to Ducaru and co-authors (2024), cyber deterrence involves not just legal instruments but also the practical capacity to impose sanctions on enemies. However, such tactics remain politically controversial in the EU because member states have different legal and ethical limits when it comes to cyber operations (Backman, 2022). Furthermore, scholars such as Bygrave (2024) consider that the fragmentation of EU cybersecurity law, which includes several rules, directives, and national transpositions, generates compliance issues and undermines bloc-wide policy coherence. Miadzvetskaya (2024) expresses concern about the efficacy of EU cyber sanctions due to the lack of direct enforcement tools. These opposing viewpoints reflect a deeper strategic concern inside the EU: whether to maintain its civilian-centric identity or adapt to an evolving geopolitical landscape that has moved within the realm of cyber. Resolving this contradiction is important to the EU's strategic coherence and relevance in the digital age.

Conclusion

The EU's cybersecurity infrastructure has ongoing flaws that limit its efficacy as both a civilian and military cyber actor. Fragmented governance structures, undeveloped offensive capabilities, sectoral vulnerabilities, and labour shortages all contribute to a security posture that is more aspirational than practical. Despite policy improvements when it comes to frameworks such as the Cyber Resilience Act, NIS2 Directive, and Cyber Solidarity Act, implementation is inconsistent; important functions like collective cyber defense and quick threat response lack institutional backing. Thus, to address these capability gaps, the EU must balance its intrinsic moral obligations with the strategic considerations raised by an increasingly aggressive cyberspace. By complementing the strength of its policy frameworks with practical skills, the EU can strengthen its resilience, protect digital sovereignty, and establish itself as a credible cybersecurity actor on a global scale.

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About the Article

European Nuclear Umbrella - Macron's proposal is based on growing concerns regarding US credibility in NATO. The proposal is politically strong yet regarding capabilities Europe still cannot match the US. Macron's proposal vs. NPT - the extension of the French nuclear deterrent, especially regarding nuclear weapon sharing proposed by Macron undermines to some extent the efforts of NPT. Is the plan feasible? - given European current arsenal in numbers, the US is still indispensable.

About the Author

Julia Konarzewska is a third-year BSc Political Sciences: International Relations and Organisations student at Leiden University in The Hague. She is keen on diplomacy, international security, the European Union, the dynamics of the Middle East, and the overall power structure within the broad subject of geopolitics. Julia is a former intern in the Political Affairs department at the Polish Embassy in Paris and she is cooperating with Global Weekly, a geopolitical research agency, as an editor.

Introduction

Following the start of Donald Trump's presidency in January and the third anniversary of the outbreak of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, the talks about security, peace negotiations in Ukraine and the influence of the new administration in the White House on both of those matters were in the limelight of political discussions. Especially after Donald Trump's criticism over burden-sharing costs in NATO, Europe started to consider existential questions about Washington's commitment, summarised in Art.5 of NATO, to help Europe in a military conflict and the transatlantic relationship in general (Reuters, 2025). One of the reactions came from Paris in March. French President Emmanuel Macron declared the launch of a strategic nuclear dialogue that would entail extending the French nuclear arsenal to European partners, working as a deterrent against Russia (Reuters, 2025). He stressed, at the same time, that the nuclear deterrent would remain under the command of the French government and would not be placed under EU or NATO supervision (Irish, 2025). However, the matter is not that simple, both theoretically and practically. First, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, i.e international treaty aiming to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, is binding and second, not all EU member states (MS) seem equally enthusiastic about Macron's proposal. Thus, this article will be divided into two big sections focused on normative and practical questions regarding Macron's nuclear plan. The first part will focus on the current perspective on theoretical discussions about the Nuclear Taboo and the degree of uncertainty surrounding nuclear weapons in general. Subsequently, Macron's proposal will be analysed through the principles of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. For the practical part, the analysis of Macron's speech will follow, along with an examination of the reactions of European Countries. Lastly, possible implications of the European Nuclear Umbrella and the realisability of Macron's idea will be discussed.

Normative Questions

Theory - Has the Nuclear Taboo come to an end?

Even though nowadays the term 'Nuclear Taboo' is increasingly contested (Bell, 2023), its two founding arguments, according to Bell (2023), prevail. First, nuclear weapons "have not been used in anger since 1945" (Bell, 2023, p. 169). Second, normative considerations have influenced the non-use of nuclear weapons (p. 169). These reflections are without a doubt present in society, and as he argues, remain an important theoretical benchmark for the study of the nuclear age. Many scholars point out the inevitability of a degree of uncertainty regarding the crucial questions of the nuclear age (Bell, 2023, p. 167). Since people nowadays have thankfully rather limited or close to no experience with nuclear weapons and sometimes inaccessible historical records, this uncertainty increases (Bell, 2023, p. 171). According to scholars, one cannot escape uncertainty about the nuclear age and thus should embrace and communicate it. According to Dill et al. (2022), who studied the attitude towards nuclear weapons in the US, Israel, UK and France, an important factor is the extent of internalisation of the nuclear taboo (p. 2). When it comes to norms and the nuclear taboo, the authors concluded that the consequentialist logic (a logic that identifies certain outcomes as morally bad but asks for balancing out those negative consequences with the positive implications) (Dill et al., 2022, p. 3) prevails, especially when it comes to public opinion. Such a consequentialist approach to nuclear weapons shows that a nuclear deterrent is seen by many as a "necessary evil" to ensure the security of the state. Despite the generally consequentialist approach to nuclear weapons, one can observe considerable differences between different countries when it comes to the acceptance of nuclear weapons. The special perception of nuclear weapons in France is reflected by the open and confident approach of the French government when it comes to nuclear deterrence.

Macron's Proposal vs. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Macron's proposal for an extended French nuclear deterrent also sparked the debate about its compatibility with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which France has been complying since 1968 and which it ratified in 1992. The idea of an extension of the French nuclear arsenal, according to critics, might result in undermining the treaty. In February 2025, the newly elected chancellor of Germany, Friedrich Merz, highlighted the need to consider both the French nuclear arsenal as well as the British nuclear deterrence force. If one were to consider Merz's proposal about the alliance of nuclear forces of both the UK and France, this would mean the establishment of an agreement and joint decision-making structures (Messmer & Cournoyer, 2025). At the same time, the UK's nuclear arsenal is very dependent on US technology; the aeroshells and the warheads, as well as the Trident missiles, are imported from the US (Messmer & Cournoyer, 2025). Additionally, the UK also provides its nuclear weapons to other NATO members within the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). Messmer (2025) notes that France always reserved its nuclear programme for its own protection. In her opinion, if France were to join the NPG, this would allow for a better alignment of policies, whereas placing nuclear missiles in neighbouring countries, as Macron has suggested, "would be highly risky and impractical" (Messmer & Cournoyer, 2025). Additionally, this would weaken control and undermine global non-proliferation efforts (Messmer & Cournoyer, 2025). Thus, given all those suggestions, there is a risk that Macron's proposal, if realised, might undermine the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, since France would share nuclear protection with other European states, leading to a possible undermining of non-proliferation efforts set by the treaty.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty:
A treaty to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and promote disarmament.

Practical Questions

Analysis of Macron's speech on the 'European Nuclear Umbrella'

President Macron is generally rather outspoken about France's nuclear potential and its possible use for Europe. One example of this outspoken approach is his televised address to the French People on the 5th of March 2025, which provoked a heated debate about the extension of the French nuclear deterrent to European allies, which is the main subject of this article. The speech revolves around the new administration in the White House, the war in Ukraine and the EU Defense Strategy. Referring to the US administration, the president of France explicitly mentions "the change of positioning on the war (in Ukraine), lessening its support for Ukraine and raising doubts about what is to come" (Élysée, 2025). In line with the position of other European allies, France highlights that the peace deal between Russia and Ukraine cannot be signed at any price. It must not be equal to Ukraine's capitulation (Élysée, 2025). Macron restated France's commitment to NATO and the partnership with the US, yet he emphasised the importance of increasing Europe's independence in security and defense (Élysée, 2025). Macron highlighted that "Europe's future cannot be decided in Washington or Moscow" (Élysée, 2025).Given France's possession of nuclear deterrence capabilities, Macron not only restated its importance for France since its installation in 1964, but also for Europe (Élysée, 2025). For the scope of this article, the key message of his speech is the previously stated launch of debate on using France's nuclear deterrent tools to protect its allies in Europe. The idea attracted considerable attention, given the heavy reliance on US-nuclear deterrence since World War II, and showcased Macron's determination to build a stronger security front within the EU. In the following part of this article, I will compare the varying positions of different EU member states to analyse the political context in which the French nuclear proposal would have to be realised.

European Reactions to Macron's proposals

Macron's proposal was met with differing reactions across the continent. This section will present a brief account of reactions from European capitals. Since Macron called Russia a danger to both France and Europe (Élysée, 2025), the reaction from the Russian side was rather predictable (Antonov & Papachristou, 2025). Indeed, a strongly negative reaction came from Moscow, where the French proposal was summed up as "very, very confrontational" (Moscow Times, 2025). The spokesperson of the Kremlin told the news that the nuclear extension makes it seem like "France indeed wants the war in Ukraine to continue" (Moscow Times, 2025). Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova deemed Macron's proposals as "detached from reality" (Moscow Times, 2025). This is not surprising given the current geopolitical confrontation. Polish prime minister Donald Tusk, in his early March speech to the lower house of parliament, mentioned the importance of looking into the future of weapons technology and the serious talks with France about the nuclear umbrella" (Lewis, 2025). Poland, as part of the eastern flank of NATO and the EU, is mostly concerned about the proximity of the conflict in Ukraine just across the border and strengthening Polish defense capabilities. Despite Poland's historical full dependence on US defense capabilities, in the last months, Warsaw has focused on advocating for the need for Europe's defense capabilities. Initially, Germany was hesitant about nuclear talks. However, in late February, the German chancellor, Friedrich Merz, also acknowledged the fears about the transformation of "the NATO form that we knew" (Irish, 2025; Werkhäuser, 2025). Werkhäuser (2025) in his article highlights a small change in public opinion regarding nuclear weapons in Germany. Yet as he points out, Germany's possible role in developing nuclear weapons is still limited to external assistance, due to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of which Germany is a member. However, Merz only mentioned the will to discuss nuclear deterrence within the scope of nuclear deterrence with the French and British arsenals (Werkhäuser, 2025). Chevreuil and Horschig (2025) note that Merz made that comment during a live broadcast interview, which naturally does not include carefully designed policy statements. More importantly, however, they also emphasise that, as a new chancellor, he wanted to highlight his approach as being more active than the cautious stance on defense policy advocated by the former chancellor, Olaf Scholz. Thus, with the coming of Merz, German policymaking style might see a significant change.

The idea showcased Macron's determination to build a stronger security front within the EU.

French nuclear arsenal size vs. Russian nuclear arsenal size

"France maintains the fourth largest nuclear weapons arsenal, and as of July 2023, it has 290 nuclear warheads, most of which are designed for delivery by submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) with the remainder affixed to air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs) carried by strategic bombers", reports the Arms Control Association (2024), Kristensen et al. (2023). This stockpile is only half of the nuclear weapons that France possessed during the Cold War, yet as mentioned, all French presidents, along with Macron, restated the importance of French nuclear potential (Arms Control Association, 2024b). From the data of the French Ministry of Defense (MoD), the nuclear deterrence budget in 2023 was 5.6 billion EUR. Between 2019-2023, the government announced it would invest 25 billion euros in the nuclear forces. Kristensen and co-authors (2023) analyse the French nuclear potential in numbers, which is summarised in the table below.

French nuclear weapons, 2023

Weapon System	No.	Year Operation	Range (kilometers)[a]	Warheads x yield (kilotons)	Warhead type	Total warheads
Land-based aircraft[b]						
Rafale BF3/ASMPA	40	2010[c]	2,000	1x <300[d]	TNA	40
Carrier-based aircraft						
Rafale MF3/ASMPA	10	2011	2,000	1x <300[d]	TNA	10
Submarine-launched ballistic missiles						
M51.1	16	2010	6,000+	4-6 x 100 (MIRV)[d]	TN75	80
M51.2	32	2016	9,000+	4-6 x 100 (MIRV)[d]	TNO	160
Total						**290**

Abbreviations used: ASMPA = *air-sol moyenne portée-amélioré* (medium-range air-launched); MIRV = multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle; TN = *ête nucléaire* (nuclear warhead); TNA = *tête nucléaire aéroportée* (air-based air-launched nuclear warhead); TNO = *tête nucléaire océanique* (sea-based air launched nuclear warhead).

[a] Range for aircraft is shown. The range of the ASMPA air-launched cruise missile is close to 600 km.

[b] The Mirage-2000N, which served in the nuclear strike role, was retired in 2018. All nuclear Rafale F3s are currently at Saint-Dizier Air Base. France produced 54 ASMPA air-launched cruise missiles, including those used in test flights.

[c] The ASMPA air-launched cruise missile first entered service with the Mirage-2000N in 2009.

[d] There is considerable uncertainty regarding the yields of the new warheads. It appears that both the TNA and TNO are based on the same new design, which is different from that of their predecessors (Tertrais 2020). This design choice could potentially indicate that the new warheads might have the same yield.Although some French sources continue to attribute a high 300-kiloton yield to the TNA (the same yield as the TN81 warhead that armed the ASMP), the manufacturer of the ASMPA says the TNA has a "medium energy" yield, potentially similar to the TNO's approximately 100 kilotons (Groizeleau 2015). In the absence of more concrete information, however, these numbers should be treated as estimates.

Figure 1: Table about the French nuclear Weapons (Kristensen et al. (2023))

According to Kristensen and co-authors (2025), Russia's nuclear potential looks much more impressive. As opposed to 290 French nuclear warheads, Russia is said to have approximately a stock of 4309 nuclear warheads. Russia's nuclear modernisation programme continuously upgrades the arsenal, and even during the war in Ukraine, it deployed air-launched missiles, ballistic missiles and ground-launched missiles (Kristensen et al., 2025, p. 208). Even though the numbers look overwhelming (see table below), scholars highlight that since Russia's military performance during the war in Ukraine has been overestimated, this could also affect the performance of Russian nuclear forces. Thus, considering the recent statements of Friedrich Merz, the UK's nuclear arsenal should also be taken into account when talking about European nuclear deterrence.

Russian nuclear weapons, 2023

TOTAL	**4,309**
Deployed	1,718[cc]
Reserve	2,591[dd]
Retired warheads awaiting dismantlement	**1,150**
Total inventory	**5,459**

Figure 2: Table about the Russian nuclear arsenal (Kristensen et al. (2024))

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2024) shows the following overview to compare the nuclear arsenals of the US, France, the UK and Russia. The numbers clearly show that Russia and the US possess almost 90% of all nuclear potential. However, despite heightened geopolitical tensions, overall nuclear stockpiles have declined since the start of the war in Ukraine. France and the UK, being placed in 3rd and 4th place, would mean a need to combine their potential. In the eyes of Messmer and Cournoyer (2025), this would mean the establishment of a formal agreement between French and British Nuclear Forces. Yet they note that the matter is more complicated than it seems if the plan were to also include British support in deploying a nuclear arsenal. In her opinion, an independent plan would destroy the established 'nuclear architecture' that would lead to chaos and the erosion of the non-proliferation attempts of the past 57 years of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Also, when comparing the nuclear potentials, the difference is quite considerable, even when one would add the British potential, US support would be indispensable to offer credible deterrence against Russia.

World Nuclear Forces, January 2024

	Deployed Warheads[a]	Stored Warheads[b]	Millitary Stockpile[c]		Retired Warheads[d]		Total Inventory[d]	
Country	2024	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
Unided States	1,770	1,938	3,708	3,708	1,536	1,336	5,244	5,044
Russia	1,710	2,670	4,489[f]	4,380	1,400	1,200	5,889[f]	5,580
United Kingdom	120	150	225	225[g]	-	-	225	225[g]
France	280	10	290	290	-	-	290	290

Figure 3: Table about the World Nuclear Forces (http://sipri.org/media/press-release/2024/role-nuclear-weapons-grows-geopolitical-relations-deteriorate-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now)

Conclusion

As this article has shown, even as the rhetoric surrounding nuclear weapons intensified, the commonly known 'nuclear taboo' still prevails and cannot be fully disregarded. The research by Dill et al. (2022) emphasised France's rather open attitude to nuclear weapons when compared with the fully anti-nuclear stance of other Western democracies. Given the war in Ukraine, Russian adamance in attacks on Ukraine and the volatile policymaking happening in the White House under the Trump administration and its relation to the Ukrainian president, Macron's idea seems to be a move of adaptation to the current security situation. The nuclear weapons installed in the Baltic or Poland would serve as a deterrent to Russia, thus treating Europe as a united security actor, also without the US's guarantees. However, an independent plan would destroy the established 'nuclear architecture', which would lead to chaos and the erosion of the non-proliferation attempts of the past 57 years of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Also, as pointed out, the difference between the French and British arsenals and the Russian nuclear forces is quite considerable, even when one would combine the French and British arsenals, US support would be indispensable to deter Russia.

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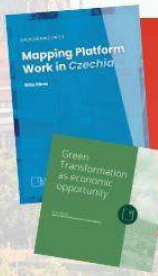

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About the Article

This article compares asymmetries in European and Russian long-range missile arsenals and concludes that Europe has significant capability gaps in three main areas: range, platform diversity and redundancy, and, lastly, insufficient means to deliver nuclear payloads. Although important steps have been taken to tackle some of these challenges at an incredible pace, it remains to be seen, whether the actual capability output will arrive in time to deter Russia credibly.

About the Author

Anton is currently enrolled in the Master's program "Strategy and International Security" at the University of Bonn, specializing in defense studies and military strategy in Europe. He has gained professional experience as a Research Assistant at the Institute for Security Policy Kiel (ISPK) and CASSIS Bonn. Anton aims to leverage his expertise in defense matters to contribute to the success of the report group „Security Policy & Defense".

Introduction

One major aspect of Russia's unlawful and full-scale invasion of Ukraine is Russia's ability to conduct large-scale stand-off strikes against Ukrainian critical infrastructure from the refuge of its strategic depth. At the same time the Ukrainian Armed Forces did not have the necessary capabilities (i.e. range) to halt Russian launch platforms from their deployments effectively. Even more remarkably so, this general picture has not changed with Western-supplied ground- and air-based standoff missiles like the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) short-range ballistic missile or SCALP EG/ Storm Shadow subsonic cruise missiles. This poses an enormous challenge to European policy-makers and military planners, because European states have almost no other longer-range weapons in their arsenals that reach beyond 600 kilometres, in the first place. Although these ranges may be impressive at first glance, they are not appropriate for hitting the airfields in the Russian heartland from which the Russian deep strikes originate, performed mainly by missile platforms with ranges greater than 2.000km (see for example, Kh-101 'Kalibr' cruise missile). It is both the aspect of being severely hit by a strategic air campaign and not being able to punch back; And the cognition that almost no weapon system left in the European Arsenal would be able to meet, balance, and thus deter Russia in the missile roam upwards of 600 km that has resulted in policymakers' insights across the continent to step up the development of long-range strike weapons.This report aims to use these processes to explore the role of Deep Precision Strikes in military strategy, what European Armed Forces' inventories have (not) to offer, and compare them with the Russian arsenal. Combined with a brief excursion on ongoing development and procurement projects of long-range missiles, this paper shall provide an overview of capability gaps and the current progress of closing them.

The Strategic Importance of Deep Strikes and Missile Types

When discussing aspects of deep-precision strike (DPS), this is understood as a concept that envisions the employment of precision-guided munitions at long ranges to yield effects in the enemy's operational and strategic depth[1]—thus behind the immediate combat zone (Fayet & Péria-Peigné 2024 pp. 12-14). Other frequently used terminologies surrounding the use of long-range missiles, like 'Standoff Strikes' just like DPS, broadly describe the operationalisation of weapon platforms from afar and, most importantly, outside the adversarial threat envelope (in contrast to stand-in strikes).) (Gunzinger, 2020 p. 13; Gunzinger 2024). On the other hand, 'Long-Range Precision Fires' is another close concept that includes all means of indirect fire. Therefore, it is not limited to missile platforms but includes tube and rocket artillery for example as well. Missiles may be the only choice for standoff-deep-precision strikes. However, DPS are not necessarily conducted in standoff conditions but could similarly be executed by survivable aircraft, penetrating denied environments to drop precision-guided stand-in munitions (by fifth-generation aircraft or low-altitude interdiction raids). However, as this article seeks to concentrate on capability gaps in the missile segment, for reasons of simplicity, missiles will be assumed as the prime choice for DPS mission sets. Hence missiles , more generally, assume a privileged role in every Armed Force's inventory to kinematically implement what the US Military refers to as 'Active Denial', within the enemy's heartland. Active Denial is "a defense strategy characterized by a phased approach to operations. This approach focuses on deploying resilient and primarily defensive U.S. and allied forces to blunt and disrupt attack, while preparing for focused counterattack later" (Culver, 2022 p. 3). One way to operationalise this aim is through interdiction, that is, denying and constraining the enemy's force generation, troop

[1] The strategic and operational depth covers an area the size of multiple hundred and thousands of kilometres beyond the initial frontline. This, however, according to NATO battlespace classification is to be discriminated from the more immediate enemy's tactical depth (staging and fire coordination area) that extents up to Army Corps level (roughly 500 kilometres) from the frontline (Fayet & Péria-Peigné 2024 p. 13).

deployment, and subsequent capability employment. This serves to weaken the enemy's impact on their own and allied troops and prevents them from achieving the desired strategic objectives (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2021 p. 109). This can be obtained by disrupting the operations of the so-called enemy's 'Center of Gravity'. The Center of Gravity represents the enemy's material and cognitive structures that constitute a state's war-making ability in the first place (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2021 p.30). Interdicting the Center of Gravity with DPS, therefore, may include hitting high-value targets in the strategic depth, like important Lines of Communication, Political Centres, Military Command and Control (C2) hubs, critical industrial sites or military assets based in the rear area. This way of imposing denial has two implications. The first is to weaken the opponent's warfighting ability in general. Secondly, in so doing, denial helps own and allied forces to shape the operational environment on their terms and create vulnerabilities to be exploited in tactical battlefield situations and the political-military strategic realm. Beyond these rather doctrinal considerations in wartime military operations, having the technical ability to reach deep into the core of the adversary's territory creates vulnerabilities in times of power competition, for example, when undermining nuclear second-strike options (Gunzinger, 2020, p. 26)[2]. At the same time, when assuming that DPS effectors (missiles) can be launched under standoff conditions, own and allied launch platforms can submit their payloads from permissive environments and are not immediately under threat (Thibert, 2024). Therefore, regarding peace-time deterrence, DPS capabilities potentially create asymmetric conditions to one's favour. Another advantageous aspect of DPS is the precision element that ensures a higher probability of desired target effects, and compliance with international law demands and moral expectations on combatant to non-combatant discrimination (Ibid). These aspects of standoff-long-range employment, however, come at a price. Not only does a successful operationalisation require extensive intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) efforts to feed the missile's navigation system with accurate data, but it also presupposes close multi-domain command & control (C2) coordination and complex launch platforms. Additionally, missile technology is quite literally 'rocket science' and hence comes with relatively high development and procurement times as well as associated costs. All these characteristics mentioned before, may make missiles the primary instrument for long-range/ DPS engagements, but they are scarce resources at the same time (Thibert 2024). A missile, more generally, may be defined as "a [...] propelled weapon designed to deliver an explosive warhead with great accuracy at high speed" (Britannica 2025). Broadly speaking, there are three types of missiles. First is the cruise missile, a manoeuvrable system that travels at subsonic or supersonic (between Mach 1.2 and Mach 5) speeds at low altitudes ('sea-skimming'/ 'terrain-masking') for long ranges. Then there are ballistic missiles, which are propelled by a rocket motor on the ascent before entering into an elliptic flight trajectory. In the mid-course flight phase, they build kinematic velocity that can extend far into hypersonic speeds (Mach 5+). Ballistic Missiles usually are not manoeuvrable or only in a limited manner in the terminal phase (then 'semi-ballistic missiles'). Lastly, a relatively new technology is called 'hypersonic missiles'. They combine the speed and high altitude of ballistic missiles with the manoeuvrability of cruise missiles. Depending on the specific weapon system, they are either propelled on the ascent, before being released to the target as a hypersonic glide vehicle. Or they sustain hypersonic speeds through specific emerging propulsion systems (Total Military Insight 2024). Each missile may have different ranges, mission roles and can be launched from a variety of platforms as listed in the following chart.

Deep-Precision Strike:
A concept that involves the use of precision-guided munitions at long ranges to achieve effects in the enemy's rear area

[2] For a China case study examining the adverse effects of insufficient weapon ranges to reach the heartland see Gunzinger 2020 p. 26

Missile Type	Mission Roles	Ranges	Launch Platform
Cruise Missile	**Sea-to-Surface/ Surface-to-Sea**	**Short Range Missile (as per INF-Treaty: 500 to 1.000 km)**	**Maritime: Submarine-launched Ship-launched**
Ballistic Missile	**Surface-to-Surface**	**Medium Range Missile (1.000 to 5.500 km)**	**Ground: Silos Road-Mobile Vehicles**
Hypersonic Missile	**Air-to-Surface**	**Long-Range/ Intercontinental (5.500 km+)**	**Air: Tactical Aircraft Strategic Aircraft Unmanned Aerial Vehicles**

Figure 1: Different ways to differentiate Missile types after flight trajectory, roles, ranges and launch platforms (Own Work)

This table serves as an overview and is not exhaustive. For example, it does not reflect the emerging role of long-range drones (like the Russian licence-built Shahed-136 or Ukrainian Liutyi drone), or decoys (like the US-American AGM-160 MALD or Spear EW), which may fulfil critical standalone tasks, but bear much resemblance in their flight profile with the general understanding of cruise missiles. Other guided missiles like Anti-Tank munitions (for example, the AGM-114 Hellfire or Brimstone Mk1) with a range little further than 10km are excluded. As are Air-To-Air and Surface-to-Air Missile roles.

Current European Deep Precision Strike Inventory and Capability Gaps

With this background in mind, it is worthwhile to examine European missile inventories and compare them to the Russian arsenal in order to identify potential capability gaps. A brief word on caveats. Given this article's explicit interest in comparing the European with the Russian stockpile, and Russia's persistent threat to European security, the following considerations will revolve around the operational environment of the Russian Federation. Therefore, given the country's territorial depth, only missiles with a greater range than 200 kilometres will be included (this, for example, excludes US-sourced MGM-140A ATACMS munitions in service with the Greece and Turkish Armed Forces as well as new SPEAR-3 acquisitions made by the British Armed Forces) (IISS 2024). Moreover, intermediate-range and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles will not be considered, as their accuracy does not meet conventional warhead-precision demands (Randorf 2000 pp. 3-5). Lastly, although their guidance systems would hypothetically allow them to engage land targets as well, anti-ship missiles (like the Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM) or RBS-15) and surface-to-air missiles (for example, US-made SM-6 or Russian S-200) are not going to be presented. Instead, the following lineup is a compilation of dedicated Land attack missiles. A weapon system's association with a country is based on the IISS Military Balance 2024 (IISS 2024, Wright 2024); the technical data is derived from the CSIS Missile Threat database (CSIS 2025). When comparing the European and Russian tables, three kinds of disproportionality appear, which subsequently help identify European DPS capability gaps. First, are the ranges. Except for the French MdCN and US-made Tomahawk cruise missile in service with the British Navy, no system in the European inventory currently reaches beyond 1.000 kilometres. This is remarkable as six of the overall eight listed Russian missile platforms have a longer range of between 1.500 and 2.500 kilometres.

Country	Missile	Type	Platform	Range (kilometres)	Manufacturer/ Origin	Warhead type and size
Finland	AGM-158A Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM)	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	F /A-18C /D Hornet	370 (est.)	USA / Lockheed Martin	Conventional, 454 kg
France	SCALP EG	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	Mirage 2000D / Rafale	>500 (est.)	France, UK / MBDA	Conventional, 450 kg
	Missile de Croisière Naval (MdCN)	Sea-launched Cruise Missile	Aquitaine-class frigate / Suffren-class Submarine	>1.000 (est.)	France / MBDA	Conventiona, 300 kg
	Air-Sol Moyenne Portée Renouvelé (ASMP-R)	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	Rafale	>500 (est.)	France / MBDA	Nuclear, unknown
Germany	KEPD-350 Taurus	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	Tornado IDS	>500 (est.)	Germany / MBDA	Conventional, 480 kg
Greece	SCALP EG	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	Mirage 2000-5	>500 (est.)	France, UK / MBDA	Conventional, 450 kg
Italy	Storm Shadow	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	Tornado IDS / Typhoon	>500 (est.)	France, UK / MBDA	Conventional, 450 kg
Norway	Joint Strike Missile	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	F-35	555	Norway, US / Kongsberg, Raytheon	Conventional, 120 kg
Poland	AGM-158A Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	F-16	370 (est.)	USA / Lockheed Martin	Conventional, 454 kg
Romania	MGM-168 ATACMS	Short-range ballistic missile	Transport Errector Launcher (TEL), M142 HIMARS	300	USA / Lockheed Martin	Conventional, 227 kg
Spain	KEPD-350 Taurus	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	F /A-18A Hornet	>500 (est.)	Germany / MBDA	Conventional, 481 kg
UK	Storm Shadow	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	FGR-4	>500 (est.)	France, UK/ MBDA	Conventional, 450 kg
USA	UGM-109 Tomahawk	Sea-launched cruise missile	Trafalgar class-submarine / Astute-class submarine	1.600 (est.)	US / McDonnell Douglas, Hughes Aircraft Company, Raytheon	Conventional, 454 kg

Figure 2: Long-range missiles in European Armed Forces' inventories in comparison (Own Work)

This hampers the European deterrence effect, as it suspends the balance of mutual vulnerability: Europe is within reach, while Russia still has an inner sanctuary that Europe and its allies would not or would only insufficiently be able to hit. In a wartime scenario, this aspect can prove even more difficult when Russian strategic aviation is launching its standoff weaponry from airfields, well outside the European missile envelope. The problems coming along with this dynamic are, as mentioned in the introduction, observable with Ukraine, which to this day struggles to hamper or even halt the Russian Air Force's and Navy's strategic air campaign.Second, the European arsenal is lacking diversity and redundancy. While employing a relatively wide range of cruise-missile types, Europe – in contrast to the Russian Federation – is completely lacking ballistic missile or hypersonic capacities. So far, the only short-range ballistic missile in service with a continental European country is the US-American ATACMS. Another aspect that deserves consideration is the fact that no missile (besides ATACMS) is ground-launched. Instead, European Armed Forces resort to tactical aviation or naval vessels. Even though this may be due to the INF-Treaty that was in place until 2019, prohibiting ground-launched missiles of any type with a range between 500 and 5.500 kilometres, it gives Russia considerable advantages in rapidly and covertly generating stand-off fires (Congressional Research Service 2019). Hence, when the European Armed Forces rely on only one type of ballistic missile, the lack of platform diversity additionally becomes a challenge for capability redundancy.

Missile	Type	Range (kilometres)	Warhead type and size
3M-14 Kalibr (SS-N-30A)	Sea-launched Cruise Missile	1,500 to 2,000 km	Nuclear capable, 450kg
9K72/ 9K723 Iskander-M (SS-26 „Stone"))	Ground-launched short-range Ballistic Missile	500km	Nuclear capable, 700kg
Novator 9M729 Iskander-K (SSC-X-8 „Screwdriver")	Ground-launched Cruise Missile	2,500 km	Nuclear capable, 450 kg
9M728 (R-500) - Iskander-K (SSC-7 Southpaw)	Ground-launched Cruise Missile	490 km	Nuclear capable, unknown
KH-101/102 (AS-23 „Kodiak")	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	2,500 to 2,800km	Nuclear capable, 400kg
Kh-55 (AS-15 "Kent")	Air-Launched Cruise Missile	2,500km	Nuclear capable, unknown
Kh-47M2 („Kinzhal")	Air-Launched Ballistic Missile	1,500 to 2,000km	Nuclear capable, 480kg
3M22 „Zirkon" (SS-N-33)	Sea-launched Hypersonic Cruise Missile	450 to 1,000km	Nuclear capable, unknown

Figure 3: Russian long-range missiles (Own Work)

For example, if, in a wartime scenario, all of the few HIMARS or M270 (/MARS II) launchers in Europe are decimated, there would be no other launch platform for ATACMS in Europe. Lastly, besides the French ASMP-A and R variants as a dedicated nuclear delivery platform, neither European nor US-manufactured standoff weapons listed above can carry nuclear payloads. While this may be beneficial for more controllable risk management, it gives the Russian Federation greater leverage in nuclear ambiguity. Another side effect of this is that Russia simply has a larger amount of capable standoff systems at its disposal for all different kinds of nuclear weapons employment. This degree of nuclear versatility is something European stockpiles lack.

Growing Awareness and New Acquisitions

The reckoning of these gaps and asymmetries has only recently taken place and has been widely discussed among experts like Fabian Hinz and Ben Schreer, 2024, Timothy Wright (2024), Rafael Loss (2023) or Fabian Hoffmann (2023). However, this discourse, or at least elements of it, have reached the broad public somewhat belatedly at the 2024 NATO summit in Washington, with the announcement to deploy a US-Army Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF) to Germany. Conceptualised to be an interim solution, it is supposed to close capability gaps with truck-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles, SM-6 semi ballistic missiles (with a range of 370km), a yet-to-be-introduced Hypersonic Glide Vehicle dubbed 'Dark Eagle' (with an estimated range of around 2.500km), as well as the short-range ballistic successor to the ATACMS - the 'Precision Strike Missile' (PrSM) (500km) (Congressional Research Service 2024). Along with the announced deployment of the MDTF, European nations (France, Germany, Poland, the UK, and Sweden) have adopted the so-called 'European Long Range Strike Approach' (ELSA). ELSA is a framework that aims to pool resources for joint development and procurement. It is speculated to field a long-range cruise missile with a range of between 1.000 and 2.000 kilometres that can be modularly launched from ground, maritime and air-based platforms (Wright 2024).These developments co-me at a time when the European missile market is already rapidly adapting its portfolio. MBDA (2024a), for example, is currently developing the so-called 'Remote Carrier Multidomain Multirole Effector' (RCM^2). It projects a versatile cruise missile platform, with varying mission payloads (kinetic and electromagnetic) and cross-domain launch platforms. It may also be enabled for loitering tactics, real-time data forwarding and control of larger swarms. The supposed range remains unknown as of now. Furthermore, as the successor to the Storm Shadow/ Scalp EG and MdCN platform (among others), France, UK and Italy are developing a new generation of cruise missiles (both sub- and supersonic) within the programme of 'Future Cruise/Anti-Ship Weapon' (FC/ASW). It is expected to bring anti-ship, anti-surface (land), and limited surface-to-air capabilities (MBDA 2024b). Their ranges remain speculative, but given the current missiles' ranges and that FC/ASW will attempt an adequate replacement, the ranges will likely be between 500 and 1.000km. In parallel with these processes, Germany plans to acquire 600 Taurus Neo (modification of Taurus KEPD 350), whose technical parameters remain unknown (Hoffmann, 2024). On the other hand, the UK and Italy are integrating the British SPEAR-3 cruise missile (est. range of 140km). Additionally, Italy has announced that it will procure Kongsberg's Joint Strike Missile (Navy Lookout 2021, Jennings 2024). Whereas Sweden is set to receive the Taurus KEPD 350 by 2028, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland as well as Poland have placed orders for different types of US-made JASSMs (among them JASSM-ERs with a range of 1.000 km) (Siminski 2024, Defense Industry Europe 2024a). Most notably, the Netherlands is introducing Tomahawk missiles into the Navy's De Zeven Provinciën-class frigates (Naval News 2025). Even in the Rocket Artillery segment, some significant dynamics can be observed: the Israeli Euro PULS Multiple Rocket Launch System

European Armed Forces fail to match the Russian long-range Arsenal

(MLRS) produced by ELBIT Systems, for example, gains greater traction in the European market after Germany announced the purchase of five of these systems. Its compatibility with launch-tube sizes ranging from 122mm to 370mm makes it a scalable platform, allowing the integration of a variety of different rockets, among them the co-developed Predator Hawk Precision Missile by Elbit and KNDS with a range of 300km (Defense Mirror 2025, Geiger 2024). Lockheed Martin and Rheinmetall offer a competitive counter draft with the 'GMARS' launcher that is said to field Guided MLRS rockets (GMLRS), ATACMS, and the relatively new US-made short-range ballistic 'Precision Strike Missile' (PrSM) (over 500km range) (Rheinmetall 2025).-The attempt to acquire PrSMs and extended range versions of GMLRS by Norway for its HIMARs launchers has been turned down by the US in 2024 for publicly unknown reasons. But as presented, European Forces and armament manufacturers have recognised the one-sided capability gaps and have stepped up their game accordingly. New systems are acquired at an impressive pace, and new cooperation and development programmes are underway.

Conclusion

As this article has presented, the European Armed Forces fail to match the Russian long-range Arsenal in terms of ranges, diversity, and conventional nuclear warhead capability. This is even more dangerous, given the prominent and strategically significant role of DPS missiles, both at peace-time deterrence and wartime dominance. The European States have come to recognise this challenge and are in the process of rapidly procuring and developing new systems. Nevertheless, the capability gaps are significant and will prospectively remain regarding ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles, and dual-capable payloads. Additionally, although it appears worthwhile to create ranges that only make the West of Russia vulnerable (as the military and the socio-economic centre of the country), it may be meaningful to consider ranges that go beyond the Ural. This implies, however, a reach that extends to 4.000 kilometres rather than 2.000. Consequently, this would also allow for conventional counterforce deterrence, relieving the deterrence effect of an otherwise small European nuclear arsenal But even with the current level of ambition, it will take precious time to develop, test, procure and subsequently integrate new DPS systems into the European arsenals. Therefore, the shifts observed herein are rather tectonic. Except for longer-standing deliveries of JASSMS, for example, new platforms like FC/ASW or ELSA will not be viable for operational use before the 2030s. This is even more dangerous, given the pace of Russia's military current and future reconstitution. In summary, European policymakers and industrials have recognised the deficits and have taken meaningful decisions. One can only hope these measures were taken early enough to dissuade Russia from its next potential war.

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About the Article

How can European states improve regional security cooperation against emerging threats? A trilateral model combining NATO, the EU, and NORDEFCO offers more agile and localized defense capabilities. Institutionalizing this model would enhance Europe's resilience through interoperable and complementary security strengths.

About the Author

Duncan Postema is pursuing a B.Sc. in Public Administration at Leiden University, specializing in Policy, Governance, and Organizations, with a double minor in Intelligence Studies and European Union Studies. He is primarily interested in security and defense, particularly in Europe. Previous research includes examining the impact of NATO on security and defense integration within the EU, and European states' readiness to protect critical infrastructure on the North Sea seabed.

Introduction

In a time of growing geopolitical uncertainty, new military threats, and hybrid warfare tactics, being able to respond quickly and effectively to regional security challenges has become more important than ever for European states. While alliances and international organizations offer a broad framework for defense, many threats first appear, and hit hardest, at the regional level. European states must seek more agile and coordinated frameworks to ensure collective defense and resilience. Over the past decades, both North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) have played central roles in shaping Europe's security architecture. Amid these well-established frameworks, the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) stands out as a flexible, regionally focused initiative that facilitates defense collaboration among Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. While NORDEFCO is often less prominent in broader European security discussions, its unique approach offers valuable insights into pragmatic defense cooperation, particularly among small and medium-sized states with shared regional interests. This article examines how NORDEFCO's role in regional security complements the efforts of NATO and the EU, focusing on the ways its cooperative framework enhances collective defense in Northern Europe. Using an institutional perspective, the analysis compares the organizational structures, objectives, and strategic priorities of these three frameworks, as well as the nature of their interaction. By exploring these institutional dynamics, the study underscores the strategic importance of regional cooperation initiatives like NORDEFCO in strengthening European security and considers the potential for applying similar models in other regions facing comparable challenges.

NORDEFCO: background information

NORDEFCO is a collaborative security and defense framework involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. It was established in 2009 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Helsinki (NORDEFCO, 2009), consolidating three earlier Nordic security cooperation frameworks into a more unified and cohesive structure (NORDEFCO, n.d.-a). The first of these, the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support (NORDCAPS), was created to coordinate joint Nordic efforts in military peace support. The second, the Nordic Armament Cooperation (NORDAC), has supported collaboration in defense materiel acquisition since the 1990s, including joint development, procurement, and maintenance. The third, the Nordic Support Structure (NORDSUP), was launched in 2008 to investigate 140 specific areas across the full military spectrum for potential collaboration (NORDEFCO, n.d.-a). NORDEFCO's official purpose, according to the MoU is to "strengthen the participating nations' national defense, explore common synergies and facilitate efficient common solutions." The consolidation of the three earlier frameworks helped create a more robust and efficient cooperation structure, "based on a political ambition of a comprehensive, enhanced and long-term approach to defense related issues" (NORDEFCO, 2009). The MoU outlines nine objectives. These are intentionally broad and vague, and the MoU explicitly states that they are not limited to these objectives (NORDEFCO, 2009). NORDEFCO considers this flexibility a strength, as it allows the organization to act efficiently while adapting to evolving needs. This is also why NORDEFCO is structured as a cooperation framework without headquarters or command structure rather than as an international organization with an independent legal personality. It is a cooperation structure working on an ad hoc basis, notable for its flexible and informal modus operandi (Wilson & Kárason, 2020).

At the highest policy level, the cooperation is led by the Defense Ministers of the participating countries, who meet twice a year. Beneath them is the Policy Steering Committee (PSC), where each nation is represented by national departmental officers (NORDEFCO, n.d.-a).

On the military level, the Military Coordination Committee operates under the PSC. This committee is responsible for coordinating military activities within NORDEFCO bet-

ween the Chiefs of Defense meetings (NORDEFCO, n.d.). It also oversees concrete projects and initiatives, which are developed and staffed by the Cooperation Areas (COPAs). These areas focus on capabilities, armaments, human resources and education, training and exercises, and operations. Each COPA is staffed by senior military representatives from the member countries. They have the authority to establish working groups for specific activities, which then provide recommendations (NORDEFCO, n.d.-b). This ensures effective cooperation without being tied up by bureaucracy and international contracts.

Comparing the Security Role

It is important to understand that while NATO, the EU, and NORDEFCO are all involved in security and defense cooperation in Northern Europe, they differ significantly from one another. The most notable difference is that, as previously discussed, NORDEFCO is not an international organization with its own independent legal personality or command structure (Wilson & Kárason, 2020). Additionally, NORDEFCO has a specific focus on strengthening the participating nations' national defense, exploring common synergies and facilitating efficient common solutions (NORDEFCO, 2009). Its efforts are logically centered on improving security in Northern Europe. Structure, objectives and regional scope are what sets NORDEFCO apart from both NATO and the EU. NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance consisting of 32 member states. It is governed by the North Atlantic Council (NAC), where decisions are made by consensus. The alliance operates under a rigid command structure in which the Supreme Allied Commander Europe leads the Allied Command Operations, responsible for planning and executing all NATO military missions, though always under the direction of the NAC (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2018). NATO's primary objective is to secure lasting peace in Europe and North America, a goal enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO, n.d.-b). The alliance focuses on hard security, including deterrence, defense, and military interoperability. This is most clearly reflected in Article 5, which states that an attack against one ally is considered an attack against all (NATO, n.d.-a). Historically, NATO was a point of contention among the Nordic countries. While it has long been a cornerstone of security and defense policy for Norway and Denmark, Finland and Sweden traditionally preferred neutrality and only joined recently. Today, however, NATO represents another way in which Northern European security is further strengthened (Friis & Tamnes, 2024). The EU is an economic and political union of 27 European countries. While it has traditionally focused on economic and political cooperation, the EU has increasingly developed a security and defense dimension through the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). This policy is overseen by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and politically managed by the Foreign Affairs Council (Rehrl, 2021). Member states contribute security capabilities on a voluntary basis, which has led to mixed results in terms of effectiveness. The EU's true strength lies not in hard security, but in its economic and political tools. It can impose sanctions and fund or coordinate defense-related projects using mechanisms such as the European Defense Fund (EDF) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) (European Defense Agency, n.d.). The EU aims to strengthen the security and defense capabilities of its member states, enhance strategic autonomy, and contribute to peace and stability both in its neighbourhood and globally (EEAS, 2022). Historically, Denmark and Norway had limited involvement in the CSDP. Norway because it is not an EU member, and Denmark due to an opt-out following a referendum in 1992 (Danish Parlia-

Resilience:
the ability of forces, systems, or societies to withstand, adapt to, and recover quickly from disruptions, attacks, or crises while continuing to operate effectively

	NORDEFCO	NATO	EU
Legal Structure	Informal Cooperation Framework	Intergovernmental Military Alliance	Political and Economic Union
Command Structure	No Permanent HQ or Command Structure	Rigid Military Command Structure	No Standing Military Command & Voluntary Contributions
Region	Regional (Northern Europe)	Transatlantic	European
Primary Focus	National Defence, Synergies, Efficiency	Collective Defence, Deterrence	Economy, Politics

Figure 1: Table (Own Work)

ment, n.d.). However, this has changed: Norway deepened its engagement through the EU-Norway Security & Defense Partnership signed in May 2024 (EEAS, 2024), and Denmark abolished its opt-out in July 2022 (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2023). As a result, the Northern European countries have become even more closely aligned in the domain of defense and security.

Trilateral Interaction

There is already a wealth of research on the interaction between the EU and NATO. The two international organizations maintain a close relationship, built on „shared values, the determination to tackle common challenges, and the unequivocal commitment to promote and safeguard peace, freedom, and prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area" (Council of the European Union, 2024). Twenty-three states are members of both organizations, meaning they both face similar challenges and pursue similar objectives, making interorganizational cooperation the most efficient way to address issues and achieve goals (Council of the European Union, 2024). The two organizations are also complementary: NATO is primarily focused on military defense, while the EU addresses a broader spectrum of political, economic, and security issues. They coordinate particularly in areas such as countering hybrid threats, defense capabilities, capacity building, operational cooperation, defense industry and research, political dialogue, cybersecurity, and joint exercises (Council of the European Union, 2024). Many of these areas align with the priorities of NORDEFCO. This is why NORDEFCO, as a framework for Nordic defense cooperation, plays a crucial role in complementing broader NATO and EU efforts. NORDEFCO emphasizes enhanced operational cooperation, capability development, and improved interoperability among its member states, all of which are either NATO or EU members, or closely aligned with both. NORDEFCO helps bridge national initiatives with larger transatlantic and European strategies, reinforcing resilience against shared threats while promoting a more integrated and effective defense across the region. This situation could easily have resulted in a „too many cooks in the kitchen" scenario, with multiple international cooperation frameworks responsible for the same objectives. However, this is avoided because of the way NORDEFCO is structured. Cooperation with NATO and the EU is central to its existence. NATO, in particular, plays a vital role in NORDEFCO's Vision 2030: "Aligning Nordic defense cooperation with NATO supports and contributes to the collective defense of the Alliance. As NATO members, the Nordic countries are committed to assist each other and other allies. Furthermore, the Nordic countries will align defense capabilities in accordance with national interests and defense responsibilities in NATO. Nordic defense cooperation will enhance NATO's posture in Northern Europe and contribute to the security of the Alliance as

a whole. Nordic defense cooperation is aligned with NATO planning and concepts. Furthermore, Nordic defense cooperation complements and adds value to the EU, bilateral defense arrangements, and regional cooperation formats such as the Joint" (NORDEFCO, 2024) NORDEFCO is a cooperation structure built around the existing framework of the EU and NATO. It is specifically created to align with the processes of NATO and the tools of the EU. This ensures that NORDEFCO does not have to unnecessarily redo security and defense initiatives, but also that they will not be competing with each other or become a hindrance to security cooperation. NORDEFCO operates within the strategic frameworks of larger organizations, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts. It also ensures that a regional perspective remains a priority and is not overshadowed by global threats and challenges. NORDEFCO's flexible, non-binding structure allows the Northern European countries to adapt quickly to new challenges, particularly regional ones, while remaining aligned with evolving NATO and EU priorities. This flexibility is especially important given the structures of NATO and the EU. Both organizations have rigid decision-making processes, requiring consensus among all members on security and defense issues. Combined with the large number of participants, this often makes them slower and less responsive than necessary. Regional challenges, which are not a priority for all member states, can therefore be addressed too slowly or inefficiently. NORDEFCO ensures that Northern European states can respond to these regional challenges both quickly and effectively. The rigid structures of NATO and the EU also present obstacles to further integration. Decisions on deeper security cooperation are made by consensus, meaning that individual member states can block collective efforts. While this is a simplified view of a complex issue, NORDEFCO does provide the Northern European states with a way to strengthen their cooperation without being constrained by broader membership. In conclusion, NORDEFCO is an effective structure for security cooperation. It synergizes with NATO's processes and the EU's tools. By operating within the strategic frameworks of larger organizations, NORDEFCO is able to complement rather than compete, bringing flexibility, a regional perspective, and the ability to strengthen cooperation efforts without the constraints of broader memberships.

Applicability of the NORDEFCO Model to Other Regions

Due to its strengths, NORDEFCO is interesting as a model to be replicated for other regions in Europe. NATO and the EU have cooperated more and more closely and international cooperation has become a larger part of the security and defense domain. But these organizations are constrained by their large and consensus-driven structures. A regional framework on an ad hoc basis with flexible and informal modus operandi may be needed for efficient and responsive international cooperation on regional security and defense. Other European regions, facing their own unique security challenges, might benefit from a comparable approach. By creating flexible, non-binding structures that complement broader NATO and EU initiatives, regional groups could address localized threats more effectively, enhance interoperability, and contribute to overall European security without duplicating existing efforts. However, the effectiveness of using a NORDEFCO model depends heavily on political will within the region. The challenges that it aims to address are based on the fact that there is greater political will for cooperation inside the region than inside the international organizations. If a region is sceptical about deepening security cooperation, then even a flexible and voluntary structure like NORDEFCO would prove futile. It is also inefficient if the objective is simply to address a specific regional challenge. NORDEFCO's goal is to improve security cooperation over the long term, and if the sole purpose is to tackle an immediate issue, it is often more effective to cooperate directly with

The effectiveness of using a NORDEFCO model depends heavily on political will within the region.

the countries facing the same challenge and issue a joint declaration. An example of this is the six North Sea countries that have joined forces to secure critical infrastructure on the seabed (Van Tigchelt et al., 2024). These countries are cooperating to address a specific regional challenge but are not required to deepen their cooperation beyond that. In short, while NORDEFCO offers a valuable model for regional cooperation, its success depends on strong political will and a long-term commitment. Where these conditions exist, such frameworks can enhance security alongside NATO and the EU. Where they do not, targeted, issue-specific cooperation may be a more effective alternative.

Conclusion

In an increasingly complex and dynamic security environment, regional cooperation frameworks like NORDEFCO provide essential flexibility and resilience. By aligning closely with NATO's processes and the EU's tools, NORDEFCO strengthens Northern European defense without duplicating efforts or competing with existing structures. Its informal, non-binding character allows for rapid, pragmatic responses to regional challenges that larger international organizations may be too slow or inefficient to address. The NORDEFCO model demonstrates that, where strong political will and shared regional interests exist, flexible cooperation structures can significantly enhance both national and collective security. While not universally applicable, this approach offers valuable lessons for other European regions seeking to bolster their security architecture: regional resilience is best achieved not by replacing larger alliances, but by complementing and reinforcing them through agile and responsive cooperation.

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About the Article

How can we maximize the societal benefit of increasing defense expenditure? There is a positive correlation between higher defense expenditure and overall public R&D expenditure. The EU needs to strengthen the interconnectedness of the defense and civilian sector to maximize innovative spillover effects that result from an increase in defense R&D.

About the Author

Felix Heuner is pursuing a B.A. in European Studies at Maastricht University (NL). His research focuses on international security, cybersecurity and the east-asian security field. Currently, he is involved in the Erasmus Student Network.

The Innovative Potential of Increased Defense Spending in the EU

The emerging geopolitical fragmentation of the world confronts Europe with mounting challenges in both the economic and security spheres. For years, Europe has depended on China as a growing market to export its products and to benefit from a globalising economy. At the same time, Europe has outsourced its defense to the United States and relied on unwavering U.S. support in case of any aggression from a foreign state. This reliance on China as an export market and the U.S. as a provider of defense has allowed Europe to significantly increase its global exports and enjoy a peace dividend through a reduction of defense spending. However, both of these pillars of the European economic and security model are falling apart. China is rapidly catching up and surpassing Europe in critical technologies, such as AI, clean energy manufacturing and batteries. At the same time, the U.S. is increasingly unwilling to support Europe militarily and has openly questioned its commitment to the mutual defense obligation of NATO. These global shifts force Europe to rethink its economic and security model at the same time. This article argues that economic competitiveness and security policy are deeply intertwined and must be considered together to allow Europe to regain economic strength and security independence. To this end, this article will first explore the existing issues of European Competitiveness and the societal challenges that come with a significant increase in dense spending. Following this overview, this article will analyse how an increase in defense spending can benefit the wider economy and the innovative capacity of Europe as a whole. To this end, this article argues that innovative spillover effects, mission-oriented innovation, and ecosystem formation must be essential aspects of a new European approach to innovation to regain international competitiveness and security independence.

The Current State of European Competitiveness and Security Policy

Europe has a productivity problem. Between the end of 2019 and the first half of 2024, productivity per working hour in the EU has only grown by 0.9%. In the same timeframe, productivity per working hour has grown 6.7% in the United States (Draghi, 2024). This persistent gap has led to a significant gap in GDP between the EU economy and the United States. In 2002, the United States had a 17% higher GDP at constant prices than the EU. By 2023, this gap had widened to 30% (Draghi, 2024). The productivity gap between the US and the EU has a variety of reasons, spanning from cultural differences to the availability of capital. However, one critical factor that has contributed to the widening of the productivity gap in recent years is the EU's lack of high-tech innovations that have caused significant GDP growth in the United States (Highfill & Surfield, 2022). Most notably, the EU lacks competitive global companies in critical sectors such as AI, microchips and cloud computing. Instead of focusing on a limited number of disruptive technologies, EU economies, such as Germany, have focused on a broad spread of incremental innovations in already developed industrial sectors. However, in a context of rising geopolitical confrontation, especially with Russia, and increasing competition from state-supported global industries in China, this economic model is facing severe difficulties. At the end of 2024, industrial production in Germany was almost 10% lower than in 2021 (DEstatis, 2024). To address these structural deficiencies in productivity and innovation, and to confront the geopolitical realities of the 21st century, the EU needs a new and ambitious approach to innovation and defense. As a response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, many European states have pledged to significantly increase their defense spending to generate a credible conventional deterrence against future Russian aggression. For the past decades, the official guideline of NATO to spend 2% of GDP on defense was out of reach for most European countries. Now, in 2025, the perspective of raising defense spending to 3.5% of GDP is a realistic scenario that is seriously considered by European NATO states. In Germany, increasing defense spending to 3.5% of GDP would mean total spending of

around 150 billion € per year, if one were to take the German GDP of 2024 as a reference (Destatis, 2025). This level of spending will place great fiscal strain on the German state, which expects declining tax revenues for the foreseeable future (Bundesministerium der Finanzen, 2025). It is often argued that public expenses in the defense sector do not offer sufficient societal benefit compared to other public investments, such as infrastructure or welfare programs. With regards to the direct economic impact of defense spending, this argument must be considered valid to some extent (Europe Economics, 2013). After production, military weapons and equipment offer little long-term benefit to the economy, except for some maintenance activities, which are conducted by the defense industry. Nonetheless, the current geopolitical environment forces Europe to significantly increase its defense spending to adapt to the fast-evolving nature of warfare. While this concentration of state capital poses societal challenges, it also offers an opportunity to simultaneously address economic competitiveness in strategic sectors and European Security. In future conflicts, having the technological edge will be decisive to ensure credible deterrence (Cheung, 2021). The resulting increase in research and development expenditures must not only benefit the defense industry, but can serve as a driver for innovation throughout the economy.

Innovative Spillover:
The diffusion of innovation through cooperation between different industries.

Levying the potential of increased defense spending through innovative spill-overs

Innovative spillover describes a process in which research and innovation in a particular industry are transferred to use cases in another industry. Such innovative spillover effects generate secondary, often unintended, benefits from a research and development (R&D) investment (Myers & Lanahan, 2021). These innovative spillover effects are particularly relevant when considering public R&D support. Myers & Lanahan (2021) analysed the innovative spillover effects of the Small Business Innovation Program of the US Department of Energy. Their findings show that for each patent that was funded by the program, an average of three related patents were filed by independent actors, who benefited from the innovative spillover effects generated by the initial public R&D investment. These findings demonstrate the strong potential that could be leveraged in the wake of increasing R&D investment in the defense sector. In addition to the passive diffusion of innovation through spillover effects, public R&D investment also incentivises additional private sector investment into R&D. Moretti et al. (2025) have shown a strong crowding-in effect of public R&D investments through defense spending on additional private investment. This effect is observable not only in the defense sector itself but also in related civilian industries. They also found that an increase in defense R&D significantly increases the overall R&D expenditures of a state. This overall increase in public R&D supports both military and civilian innovation. Furthermore, the analysis of Moretti et al. has shown that the industries that benefit the most from an increase in defense R&D are aerospace, electronics, technical instruments, chemistry and machinery, all of which are essential to an innovative and competitive economy and play a central role in emerging strategic industries such as AI and clean energy production.Europe needs a more mission-oriented approach to innovation to address the current issues in Europe's innovation system, which is falling further and further behind the U.S. and China. In a mission-oriented approach to innovation, academia, private industry, and the state would identify certain key technologies in which accelerated innovation is essential for the competitiveness of the market and the technological sovereignty of the state (Landesmann & Stöllinger, 2020). Through an integrated, mission-oriented approach, larger financial resources and technological know-how can be coordinated to reach sufficient economies of scale to compete with heavily state-subsidised innovation in China and deep capital markets in the US. Public defense R&D can play an im-

portant role in such a mission-oriented approach to innovation. Many of the strategic industries, such as AI or Cloud Computing, that are essential for economic competitiveness are also key to military development. The increase in public R&D, which will be a product of increased defense spending, must be used efficiently in this mission-oriented approach to benefit both the geopolitical security and economic competitiveness of the EU. To facilitate the efficient use of public and private R&D investment, the EU should focus on the creation of innovative ecosystems. Innovative ecosystems are a geographic cluster of public research institutions, universities, and private industries that create an ecosystem that is much more efficient than a dispersed approach to innovation. This efficiency is gained by facilitating the above-mentioned innovative spillover effects, as well as a concentration of talent and capital (Liu & Ma, 2023). These innovative ecosystems are also the ideal construct to follow a mission-oriented approach to innovation, because they combine the innovative strengths of public and private research institutions and companies with a defined goal that allows the concentrated use of available capital. An example of a successful innovation ecosystem, which has profited from a mission-oriented approach to innovation and strong defense-driven R&D investment, is the Silicon Valley in the United States (Juhász et al., 2024). Many of the key breakthrough innovations of the Silicon Valley, such as the internet or GPS, were enabled by the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which is a military research institution that operates based on a mission-oriented approach to innovation. A European example that could serve as an important innovative ecosystem is the Munich area in Germany. Today, this area already combines the strengths of world-class research institutions, such as the Max Planck Institute, strong academic institutions with the Technical University of Munich and global industry players, such as Airbus Defense and BMW. In addition, several innovative defense start-ups, such as Helsing, have established themselves in the Munich area. Airbus Defense and Helsing are both very likely to significantly profit from an increase in public defense R&D. This infusion of capital into the innovative ecosystem must be leveraged to maximise the benefit from the innovative spillover effects that can be generated between these different institutions. Innovation through Defense Spending Compared to Traditional R&D Support. It could be argued that funnelling R&D investments through defense spending is an unnecessary detour, when it would be possible to directly increase the budget of public research institutions or financially incentivise

Figure 1: Map of Europe that indicates the headquarters locations of the 10 biggest defense industry companies.(Own Work)

R&D investment of the civilian industry. However, defense spending gives the state access to funds at a scale that would otherwise be difficult to justify. In times of geopolitical confrontation, the argument of national security unlocks public R&D spending that is unachievable without high defense spending. Moretti et al. (2025) found a strong correlation between the overall R&D investment of a state and its defense expenditures. A recent example of this effect is the exclusion of defense spending from the national debt brake in Germany, which theoretically allows "unlimited" spending for defense. Using this lever of national security for R&D thus allows far greater investment than traditional public R&D in the civilian sphere. A popular instrument to incentivise private R&D is government tax breaks that allow private companies to write off part of their R&D investment. This instrument is currently being used in the Inflation Reduction Act in the US, which has the objective to support private investment in strategic industries, such as semiconductors or clean energy (U.S. Congress, 2022). However, Moretti et al. (2025) have shown that public defense R&D is three times as effective in crowding in additional private investment as government tax breaks. The argument of greater available capital, as well as a stronger impact on mission-oriented innovation, supports an approach that ties defense R&D to civilian applications. To enable innovative spillover in strong ecosystems, the increase in funds available for defense must go hand in hand with a shifting mindset towards a more innovative approach in military spending. Currently, Germany only spends around 5% of its defense budget on R&D, which amounts to roughly 3.6 billion euros of defense R&D investment (ReportLinker, n.d.). The United States, in comparison, spends almost three times the amount (15%) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024). If Germany increased its overall defense budget to 3.5%, meaning around 150 billion euros per year, and simultaneously raised its share of defense-related R&D to the same level as the United States, roughly 22,5 billion euros would be available for defense-related research activities. Moretti et al. (2025) estimate that if Germany were to increase its defense R&D to the level of the United States as a fraction of GDP, private R&D investment would increase by 72% in defense-related industries. While such an increase is unrealistic at the moment, it shows the strong effect that defense-related R&D can have on associated private R&D investments. The EU is already taking steps to facilitate cooperation among member states in defense R&D. Important initiatives include the EU Defense Innovation Scheme or the European Defense Innovation Hub (EUDIS, 2025; HEDI, 2025). These initiatives mainly focus on pooling innovative resources from different member states to increase the overall efficiency of the EU innovation ecosystem. In addition, programs such as Horizon Europe already follow a mission-oriented approach to innovation. While Horizon Europe is currently focused exclusively on civilian research, the EU Commission has recently highlighted the need to consider the inclusion of dual-use applications into the Horizon framework (European Commission, 2023). The EU has also recognised the need for a mission-oriented approach to innovation. In 2021, the Commission called for a "capability driven" approach to innovation to improve the synergies between the civilian and the defense sector (European Economic and Social Committee, 2021). These various initiatives show that Brussels has understood the need to improve EU performance in defense R&D and to facilitate stronger links between the civilian and defense sectors. However, in the past, these initiatives lacked high-level political backing and the necessary funding to develop a meaningful impact. In the context of current geopolitical developments and significant increases in funding, these existing initiatives need to be implemented and expanded to develop their full potential.

Europe needs a more mission-oriented approach to innovation.

EU defence and R&D expenditure

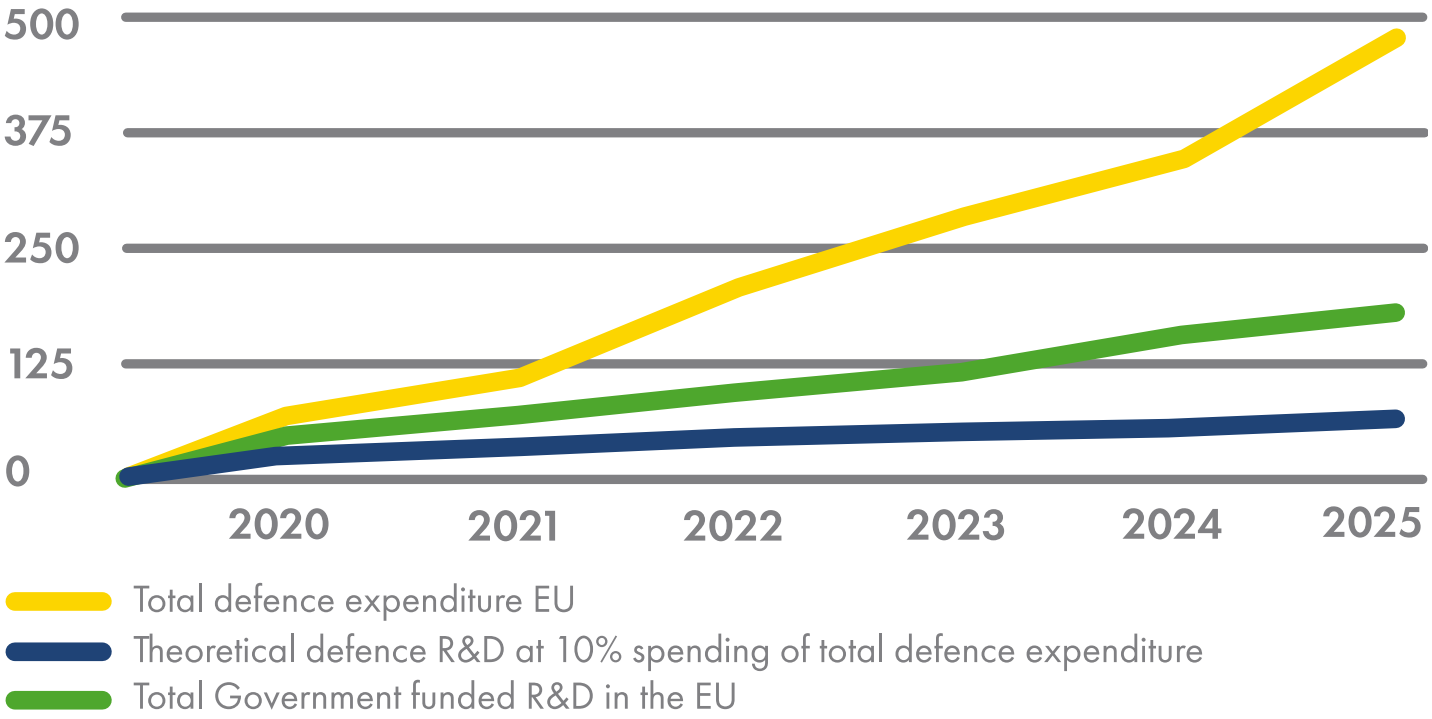

Figure 2: Total government budget for R&D in teh EU (2024 and 2025 projections based on past developments)
(Sources: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/GBA_NABSFIN07__custom_16931918/default/table?lang=en
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defense-numbers/)

4. Conclusion

An increased use of defense spending for R&D will only be one step of a broader effort that is needed to support Europe's innovative potential. Deeper capital markets, stronger universities of excellence and larger companies are all necessary to catch up with the likes of China and the US. Defense is, and always has been, an all-of-society endeavour. The best army can not offer credible deterrence if it is not supported by a strong industrial base and an innovative economy. Now, at a time when Europe faces intense geopolitical pressure, it is necessary to make sure that the increase in defense spending not only supports the military but also the broader innovative capacity of the EU to strengthen the societal effort of building a strong and resilient European Union.

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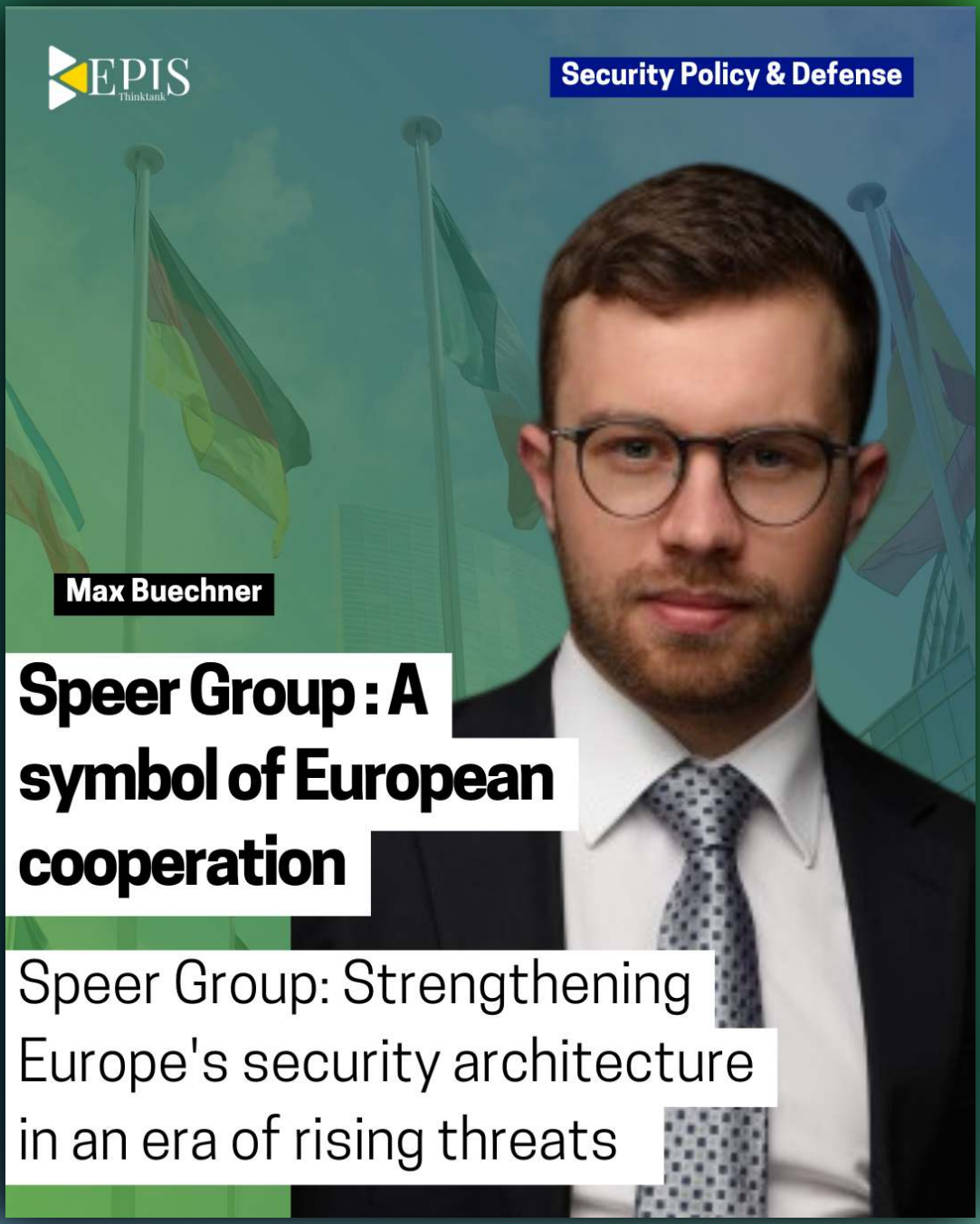

About the Article

How can private equity, through firms like Speer Group, strengthen European defense cooperation? By filing a critical gaps in early-stage defense ventures, Speer Group fosters innovation, interoperability and strategic autonomic across Europe. Speer Group positions itself as a key neutral actor enhancing Europe's resilience and security in a multipolar and increasingly unstable geopolitical environment.

About the Author

After graduating in Project Management and Finance from Harvard University, Max Buechner continued his studies at the Military Academy of the German Armed Forces and completed a Pre-Master's in International Diplomacy at the University of Oxford. As CEO of the Speer Group, Max Buechner plays a key role in strengthening European defense policy.

„We invest in companies and the people behind them, preserve values and traditions and promote the regional economy". This philosophy lies at the heart of the Speer Group's mission. In this interview, Max Buechner, CEO of the German firm, specializing in the acquisition, development and transfer of businesses, shares the core principles guiding their work across Europe, and explains how Speer Group contributes to shaping the future of European defense.

Your role as an investor : Envision and strategy

What led you to found Speer Group ?

Speer Group originated out of the demand for a solution for the funding gap of early-stage ventures in the field of security and defense in Europe. While legacy funds are bound to ESG criteria that label investments in security and defense as unsustainable, we see security as the basis for considerations of sustainability. With Speer Fund II, we set the tone for a generation of funds to come that are open for ethical investments in security and defense in Europe.

Strategic autonomy:
The EU's ability to ensure its own security without relying on external powers.

How do you think private equity can help to strengthen European cooperation in security and defense?

What we are missing in the European Union is a clear set of objectives that are tangible and viable for each of the 27 member states to buy in. The threat imposed by the Russian aggression serves as a catalysator to align interest between European states towards a common objective, as seen in the endeavor to strengthen European security and defense. This is a large wheel to turn, that takes time to show effect on the national and subnational level. This is where Private Equity comes in with its ability to drive change in the mid-market towards a common objective currently seen in the increased demand for security and defense capabilitites in Germany. What is lacking are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) goals on a European and national level that enable us to communicate and collaborate more effectively towards the realization of these goals.

How do you assess the potential of the start-ups you invest in?

Our fund is focused on startups in the space of security and defense in Europe. We openly exclude ventures, with products and services that constitute a breach of the Geneva convention, as we aim for means of security and protection. The field of security and defense is multidimensional; therefore, we are not only looking for innovation, which is an important aspect, but also for real impact. We want to enable motivated founders that drive real impact in terms of enhanced technological development, in the armed forces and society at large. History shows, that times of uncertainty and change bear great innovative potential, as the Jet Engine, GPS, or the Internet demonstrate.

About Speer Group

Speer Group's strategy and investments field

How does the Speer Group fund differ from other traditional venture capital funds, particularly in terms of strategy and objectives?

At Speer Group, we believe that it takes more than doing the right thing at the right time. It requires the right people and a clear purpose: We do not invest to capitalize on war, we invest to drive innovation that strengthens Europe's security, resilience, and prosperity. Our Fund provides seed and growth capital to early-stage ventures, empowering investors to actively shape and contribute to a more secure and prosperous future for Europe.

Which of the five areas (land, air, sea, cyber and space) are the most critical (why is Speer Group focusing its investments in these areas?)

Modern warfighting is asymmetric and fought across multiple domains defined as sea, air, land, cyber, and space to stay within the realm of NATO. Coming from the perspective of joined and combined warfare and the aspiration of interoperability on a European scale, there is no single Domain that stands out, why we focus on technologies, that enable effective communication and collaboration across domains, in response to external threats.

What types of security technologies does Speer Group consider to be the most promising for the future of European defense?

While we are open for all security and defense related ventures and ideas, we see great potential in the advancements of intelligence technology in cyber and space to obtain and retain information superiority as an enabler for strategic decision making. Further, we are particularly interested in (counter) Anti-Access/Area Denial (S2AD) capabilities such as technologies that help to identify deep-strike missiles, drones, and stealth fighters, or capabilities and advancements in UAVs, logistics, transportation and co.

Private equity boosts EU defense by funding early-stage ventures focused on innovation and impact.

Double stages collaboration and decision-making

Your advisory board is composed of experts from different worlds such as finance, industry, diplomacy and Military. How do all these perspectives collaborate together in terms of investment decision-making?

Modern warfighting is asymmetric and fought across multiple domains such as sea, air, land, cyber, and space. While this is true for the military, strategic considerations go beyond pure warfighting capabilities and considerations. This includes discussions about interoperability across European states and their respective armies, which brings a diplomatic perspective to the table, especially in regard to the subsequent procurement of spare parts and ammunition, dependent on the system under consideration. The example highlights the importance to see products and services wholistically, including economic consideration, whereby it is not necessarily the most innovative product that is going to make it but the product that fits the need and that enhances current security and defense capabilities at scale.

Different political visions sometimes pose obstacles to European collaboration on defense and security. To what extent does the Speer Group manage to overcome these obstacles, and thus act as a player that strengthens cooperation between states?

Speer Group actively mitigates the challenges posed by differing political visions in Europe by positioning itself as a neutral, mission-driven investor committed to shared strategic goals rather than national agendas. What we are particularly good at is to foster communication and collaboration across domains and industries. This enables us to see and utilize synergies on a European scale.

Investments in security

Strategic autonomy and resilience

European strategic autonomy and resilience are two key concepts at the heart of discussions and negotiations between political players. How do you integrate these concepts into your investment strategy?

Speer Fund II integrates European strategic autonomy and resilience at the core of its investment strategy by backing early-stage ventures in security and defense across five key domains: land, sea, air, cyber, and space. With a strong European stance and access to national and supranational institutions, the fund aims to reduce reliance on non-European defense systems while strengthening the continent's technological sovereignty, filling critical funding gaps and aligning with EU legal and ethical standards. Speer Group positions itself as a key player in shaping a more secure, prosperous and self-reliant Europe.

Russia represents a growing threat to European security. Beyond the former Soviet glacis, the Scandinavian countries are worried about an extension of the conflict in the Baltic Sea. Against this backdrop of heightened tensions, how do you see Speer Group's role in the years ahead?

In light of escalating tensions with Russia and growing concerns among Scandinavian and Baltic states, Speer Group is well-positioned to play a strategic and stabilizing role in Europe's security architecture over the coming years. As a venture capital fund focused on European security, defense, and technological sovereignty, Speer Group can act as a force multiplier by accelerating the development and deployment of critical capabilities across Europe.

About the Interview

While strategic autonomy remains a key ambition, Europe's defense still largely depends on transatlantic cooperation, making full independence unlikely in the near future. Europe position itself between U.S pressure and strategic autonomy? Europe is increasingly seeking to develop its own defense capabilities and reduce dependency. 3.While strategic autonomy remains a key ambition, Europe's defense still depends on transatlantic cooperation.

About the Interviewee

Christoph von Marschall, a distinguished German journalist currently with Der Tagesspiegel, brings a wealth of experience to the discussion on transatlantic relations and European defense. Having been accredited to the White House during the Obama Administration, Mr von Marschall offers an interesting perspective on the evolving landscape of European security. In this context, he shares his expert views on the future of European defense and the strategic dynamics shaping the Atlantic alliance.

About the Interviewers: Theodor and Elyse

Theodor Himmel is pursuing an advanced legal education as a Rechtsreferendar at the Regional Court of Baden-Baden. His expertise includes international arbitration and mediation, as evidenced by his Advanced LL.M. from Leiden University, where he focused on the EU and Singapore Mediation Conventions. As Chair of the EPIS Thinktank e.V., he leads international collaborations on foreign affairs and security policy, while also contributing to legal scholarship and policy advisory roles with government affairs.

Elyse Béasse completed a literary preparatory class with a specialization in history before earning a degree in the same field. To enhance her language skills, she spent a year in Germany working as a French language assistant. Currently, Elyse is pursuing a Master's in European Affairs at Sorbonne University, with a specialization in defense, focusing particularly on cyberdefense. She contributes to reports on cyberdefense and information warfare in European cyberspace for the think tank EurasiaPeace.

Theodor: Mr von Marschall, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us. We always start by asking about the young Christoph von Marschall. Why did he decide to go into journalism and pursue international politics ?

We were always internationally interested in the family. My father studied and taught abroad, we spent time abroad, and I was already in the USA as a child. I started journalism during my studies — originally to earn some money, at the Badische Zeitung. But I soon realised that the incentive systems were completely different: A term paper takes weeks and might be read by the professor, while an article is read across town the next day, and you even get paid. I then worked for the Badische Zeitung during my studies, and later for DIE ZEIT and the FAZ. That's how journalism finally became my career aspiration. The international aspect came through my studies of Eastern European history, even before the fall of the Iron Curtain, and my studies in Poland.

Theodor: If we ask ourselves what role journalists play in international politics, for example by producing opinions or disseminating news, what political responsibility do they bear, including in security policy debates?

Journalists have responsibility and should try to analyse and present the facts. In my opinion, sensationalist headlines are not a good approach for responsible reporting on foreign and security policy, even if they do occur. In open societies such as in Europe or North America, readers have a choice as to whom they trust. In my experience, you can build up a reputation for serious work overtime — or never get that reputation or lose it again if you work dubiously. Many media users have a sense of what to take seriously. If they develop trust or interest in certain journalists, they often remain loyal with the expectation of continuing to receive reliable and serious information.

Theodor: The point about seriousness is interesting. Has the commitment to seriousness changed not only among the senders but also among the recipients of media?

My personal experience is: I organise 50 to 60 discussion events a year. Of course, this is not a representative cross-section, it is mainly politically interested people who attend. But my impression is that many of them are well aware that security, prosperity and stability in Germany can no longer be taken for granted. They may not know the details, such as the situation of the Bundeswehr or NATO defense in an emergency, but they have a sense

that the world has changed and that we are no longer in the situation we were in 10 or 20 years ago. This is precisely why it is important to engage in dialogue with these people. Many people complain that politicians don't talk to them openly, but often just deliver platitudes. I would like to see politicians take the situation more seriously and speak more clearly to citizens, especially in view of the new federal government. If we don't act quickly, there is not only the threat of economic decline, there is also the risk of a direct confrontation with Russia. Both are avoidable, but this requires clear words, honest analyses and swift reforms. We need to reorganise our priorities, draw up sustainable budgets and stop financing the country permanently on credit. Illusions that everything can continue as before will not help. Now is the time to take responsibility openly, honestly and resolutely.

Strategic Autonomy:
The ability of the EU to act independently in defense and foreign policy.

Theodor: Now we have taken the perspective on German politicians out of the perspective on US politicians? With Trump, we now have another politician in the White House about whom many things can be said, but who has announced many things that are now being implemented. Is this someone who doesn't play favourites but talks straight, and is that something that stands in contrast to European politicians?

I have spent about ten of the last 20 years in the USA and the rest in Germany and Europe. Political disputes are much more brutal in the USA, which is not always a good thing, as it also leads to exaggeration. The main problem I see with Trump is that, although he has a very good feel for pressing issues, his political style is unserious and undisciplined. He ignores facts, makes false claims: yet his radicalism brings movement to encrusted structures. In Europe, we would sometimes also like to see more pressure for change. Trump is therefore a mixed experience: his style is to be rejected, but his sense of unresolved issues is real. Many of these issues - such as Europe's foreign and security policy autonomy - have been known for decades, but have been ignored or covered up with money. Trump's pressure on Europe is risky, for example when he questions the NATO guarantee - this sends dangerous signals to opponents such as Putin. But if this pressure leads to Europe finally taking responsibility and becoming capable of independent deterrence, then it has been constructive to a certain extent. Another example is irregular migration - a problem in both the USA and Europe. Political credibility depends on whether governments credibly demonstrate that they have understood the issue and are looking for realistic solutions. If they fail to do so, right-wing populist parties such as the AfD will continue to gain strength. We therefore urgently need a realistic asylum and migration policy. Trump is tackling the issue in a way that we in Germany would consider to be incitement to hatred - and quite rightly so. At the same time, he is sending clear signals that irregular migration does not promise success. Such signals can act as a deterrent - which is necessary if you want to prevent people smugglers from selling false hopes.

Theodor: You have always mentioned Germany in the context of the budget and independence. Would you also relate this to Europe?

I welcome the fact that we have finally recognised the importance of increased spending on defense, infrastructure, and research. But I think it is wrong to finance this by softening the debt brake. In a functioning state, it should be possible to reallocate existing funds so that priorities such as security and innovation are paid for from the regular budget. However, German politicians do not appear to be in a position to do this - there is a lack of will to make cuts elsewhere or to tighten the budget. Most EU countries are already over the Maastricht limits anyway. And it must be clearly stated: EU debts are not 'other' debts. They, too, must ultimately be repaid proportionately by the nation states. It is not honest to incur debt via the EU just because the national room for manoeuvre has been exhausted - you end up increasing national debt anyway.

In my view, this behaviour is irresponsible. It is being pretended that European debt is something completely different - when it is not.

Elyse: From this perspective, how do you assess Europe's foreign policy role in the current world situation, and to what extent does it correspond to public perception within the EU?

The European Union is in the midst of a development that was initially received very positively. In the 1990s and early 2000s, things happened that generations had dreamed of: the common market, several enlargements, political union, the single currency, the Schengen system - it all progressed very quickly. What was neglected, however, was the reform of the decision-making mechanisms. Today, the EU consists of 27, soon over 30 states - it is not structurally equipped for this. Yet the EU has enormous potential: economically, it is one of the three strongest blocs in the world, together with the USA and China. Nothing comes after that for a long time. So why are we afraid of Russia, even though we have seven times more economic power? If we organised our resources better, Russia would have reason to fear us - not the other way round. Europe certainly has leverage - in data protection, for example. Large US companies such as Google and Microsoft have to abide by our rules. Europe also carries weight when it comes to free trade agreements. However, nobody is afraid of the EU because it is seen as weak in decision-making. Instead of consequences, Brussels often only threatens to make concessions - more carrot than stick. This applies not only to third countries, but also within the EU. Member states regularly break rules - such as the Maastricht criteria on national debt or the Dublin Agreement on migration - without any real sanctions. Brussels also typically fails to act in defense of democracy and the rule of law, even though these are enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Countries such as Hungary and Poland are criticised, but other states - such as Bulgaria, Romania, Malta, and even the Netherlands - also have serious abuses, such as attacks on journalists with suspected links to politics. The basic problem is that all reforms in the EU are unanimous. Many states use this to gain advantages - they block necessary changes as long as they do not receive anything in return. The dealmaking that we criticise in Trump's case has long since become part of everyday politics in Brussels. Treaties are no longer honoured out of conviction, but only when it pays off. This is a dangerous development.

Elyse: How do you assess Barack Obama's influence on Europe's strategic foreign and security policy?

I learned two important things from Barack Obama: firstly, the distinction between the world as we would like it to be and the world as it actually is. He emphasized this in his Nobel Prize speech: you have to accept reality, even if it is different from what you would like it to be. This is especially true for Germany: we have to get away from "the world according to Germany" and recognize the actual situation. Secondly, if you want to get people to change, it's not enough just to put pressure on them with negative scenarios. You have to encourage people and show that change is possible. For example, the claim that you cannot spend 3.5 percent of the budget on defense without jeopardizing education, research or social issues is not true. In the 1960s and 1970s, this was possible without any problems. It is normal for a country to want to be the master of its own destiny, especially when the EU is as economically strong as the USA and China, and Germany is one of the largest economic powers in the world.

Theodor: You mentioned the word leverage, in general that there are mechanisms for implementing decisions and for making the EU a political heavyweight again. If we look at defense policy. There are always initiatives such as we need a European army, a European defense umbrella, uniform EU procurement regulations. How realistic do you think this or the EU initiatives on these issues are?

In view of the geopolitical situation, it is clear that we require quick and reliable decisions on security issues — and this is precisely where the EU often fails. If there is a threat on NATO's eastern flank, for example in the Baltic States or Poland, and it is unclear whether the USA will still provide support under Trump, I would not rely on the EU, but on a coalition of the willing. There is no veto there: you are in or out. This coalition could consist of around a dozen countries with Germany as a central, of the political and economic player. We cannot rely on to carry the security burden. Political support is good, military substance tends to come from the north and east of Europe. This 'coalition of the willing' would have a quadruple economic superiority over Russia, enough to act as an effective deterrent if we deploy our resources decisively. At the moment, however, the military situation seems like an invitation to Putin to test whether the Baltic States can be annexed. He will only refrain from attacking us if we are credible and well-defended. At the moment, we are not. Anyone who thinks that Russia will not attack NATO is misjudging reality. Russia is on the advance again in the east. Ukraine will not be able to recapture its territories without massive Western help. If we give in now, as some are demanding, and push Ukraine towards a lazy peace, Putin believes he only has to hold out, and the West will fall over. Peace on Putin's terms would only be a pause before the next war.

The EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy reveals internal divisions that challenge its unity.

Elyse: On the coalition of the willing: do you think Turkey could participate in this coalition?

Turkey could certainly support a coalition of the willing — but it is a special case with two faces. On the one hand, Ankara is aware of its dependence on the West; on the other, President Erdoğan pursues clear national and personal interests. In cases of conflict, he tends to decide in favour of his own advantage rather than a common Western interest. Putin has respect for Erdoğan, not because they are partners, but because Erdoğan is pursuing power politics. Russia has indirectly lost to him in two conflicts (Karabakh and Syria). That impresses Putin more than EU diplomacy. Both are pursuing a realpolitik that has little to do with Western European values and the rules-based system. Our idea that every war ends with negotiations under neutral mediation is often illusory. Many wars freeze without being resolved — see the Middle East, Georgia, or Ukraine. And when negotiations do take place, mediators are usually anything but neutral: Erdoğan, for example, played an important role in both the grain agreement and the prisoner exchange but not as a neutral actor. We should therefore critically scrutinize our Western-influenced beliefs — for example, that conflicts can be resolved through neutral diplomacy. They typically correspond more to wishful thinking than reality. In this respect, France is even ahead of Germany: more realpolitik thinking is recognizable there than here.

Theodor: Would you understand Doha or Saudi Arabia as neutral mediators ?

I don't see Saudi Arabia as a mediator, but rather as a place where Americans and Russians talk to each other, which could just as well happen in Turkey. So far, however, there have been no serious negotiations. Trump made proposals that were unacceptable to Ukraine, and Putin did not respond with concessions but repeated his maximum demands.Only military counter-pressure can stop Putin. If the USA fails to do this, we Europeans must act quickly, otherwise there is a risk of a new war. Our generation should realize that 80 years of peace in Europe — even if the Ukraine crisis is taken into account — are at risk. We have long been indirectly at war, even if many do not want to admit it. Putin's actions such as attacks on communications infrastructure and the testing of NATO responses clearly show this. We are no longer at peace, even if there is no shooting yet.

Theodor: Finally, two more questions that relate to the NATO alliance. I recently heard a report on Deutschlandfunk radio that tried to categorize Trump's demands for Canada to become the 51st federal state. If the USA is an unreliable partner in NATO under Trump, the consequence is that the USA will fall away or even turn against NATO territory.

The many headlines that Trump is making should be viewed with a little distance: What of it will remain important in a year's time, what is just yesterday's talk? You can certainly be wrong, but my thesis is: In a year's time, we will no longer be talking about Canada or Greenland, but will still be talking about the war in Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East and, above all, alliance reliability. The important issues will be what happens in Eastern Europe, how the economy develops, and how the trade conflict in the West is defused. The problem is not necessarily whether the US wants to help under Trump, but that his uncertain statements encourage Putin to risk it. If the US does intervene, Trump can always row back and settle for minor concessions. This will test how determined the West really is to repel military aggression, or whether it is satisfied with ceding territory. Another scenario being discussed by American security experts is a double war: China could attack Taiwan while Putin sets his sights on the Baltic States. The USA would then concentrate on Asia and Europe would have to deal with Putin alone. This is precisely why we Europeans must be able to do it, we must not rely on Trump being reasonable or on another president coming in after three years. We have to take responsibility for our own security. This mental "turning point" needs support, through organizations, in discussions, in politics. Europe must finally become the master of its own destiny and use its resources to reliably guarantee security and prosperity for the next generation. This is in our hands, and we must not leave it to others.

Theodor: It is precisely this defensive capability that you mentioned that ties in well with my last question. 24 years ago, you wrote a commentary on September 11, 2001. In the last sentence, it says: Germany must be capable of alliance and take responsibility. Conversely, America must listen to its allies and show moderation. An alliance binds both. How would you classify this quote today?

It is sad that it was only due to pressure from the USA that we realized that we had to be able to defend ourselves. Moving from our current military dependence on the USA to genuine self-reliance requires their help, and not just financially. Germany has relaxed the debt brake and theoretically has unlimited money for armaments, but money alone is not enough. Systems must first be produced. American Patriot missiles are sold out until the mid-2030s. We must therefore be able to build them ourselves, here we need US support, for example through licences. Europe requires air defense systems quickly, months' worth of ammunition and must produce tens of thousands of drones. This can only be achieved with cooperation between the "coalition of the willing" and the EU. The European arms market should be designed in such a way that we have to work together. Airbus shows that the civilian example works, why not the military too? We require fewer different types of weapons, but effective systems and more economy of scale. The good times after 1990, when we thought liberalism and democracy had won, are over. Powers like Russia and China are threatening us with missiles and cyberattacks. We have to respond, and we can. The message remains positive: Germany and Europe can overcome the crisis if we want to.

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