

## Standing on our own feet? Opportunities and risks of European self-defence

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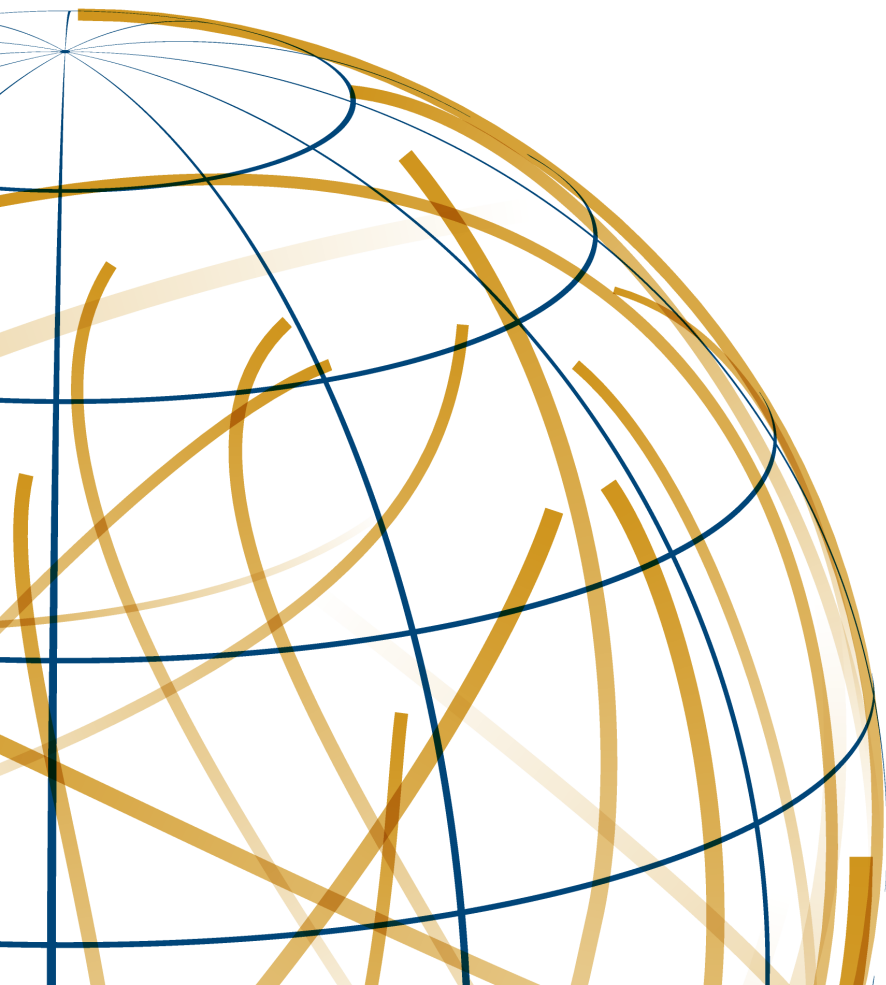
SWP Research Paper

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*Eckhard Liibkemeier*

# Standing on Our Own Feet?

Opportunities and Risks of European Self-Defence



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- Only a Europe that provides for its own defence can be a fully sovereign Europe. As is the case for the US, Europe would have to be capable of protecting its core security interests without depending on its transatlantic partner.
- Structural incentives as well as recent developments militate in favour of establishing such intra-NATO status parity. Structurally, unilateral dependence, even among friends, comes at a price. This timeless incentive is reinforced by recent developments: the demise of the old West, with or without Trump; China's twofold challenge; an emerging Sino-American rivalry; a resurgent Russia; the new world disorder; Macron's offer to his European partners.
- European self-defence has to meet four key requirements: broader and greater European integration, sufficient military capabilities, effective strategy, and political leadership.
- Defence autonomy requires an independent nuclear deterrent capability. In the case of the EU, neither primary deterrence, reserved for a single state, nor extended deterrence, such as that provided by the United States, would be adequate.
- Instead, Europe would have to create a novel type of "integrated deterrence". Underpinned by a solid community of solidarity and trust, this would be based on French nuclear forces, with the French president maintaining exclusive decision-making authority.
- Germany and France would have to seize the initiative by "taking their bilateral relations to a new level", as stated in the Aachen Treaty of January 22, 2019. They would have to lead by example, bring about the progressive integration of their armed forces and an alignment of their strategic cultures.
- This would demand a great deal of Germany in terms of defence spending and redefining its "culture of military restraint". To initiate such a process of rethinking and repositioning will require an open-minded debate on the role of the military for a Europe that "takes its fate into its own hands" (Chancellor Angela Merkel).

**SWP Research Paper**

*Eckhard Lübkemeier*

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**Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik**  
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*This paper was originally published in German in September 2020, i.e., prior to recent events, in particular, the U.S. presidential election in November 2020. As noted in the text, however, the replacement of Donald Trump with Joe Biden does not alter the thrust of the argument and the paper's main conclusions derived from an analysis of the desirability and feasibility of European self-defence.*

## **Standing on Our Own Feet? Opportunities and Risks of European Self-Defence**

One of the lessons from the corona pandemic is that latent dependencies can quickly and painfully become acute. This was brought home to EU Member States when they suffered sudden supply shortages of medical protective clothing, face masks, and drugs imported from Asia, demonstrating their lack of sovereignty in an area vital to the well-being of their citizens.

Sovereignty, however, is never absolute. No one is fully independent, completely invulnerable or omnipotent. Rather, in situations of mutual interdependence, an actor's sovereignty increases or decreases with its ability to ensure a balanced distribution of dependencies. Hence, a sovereign actor is one who can either ensure that interdependencies are symmetrical or sever its dependency on others at an acceptable loss of security and prosperity.

In this sense, the sovereignty of EU nation-states rests on a united Europe serving as a power multiplier. By global standards, even major European powers such as France and Germany are no more than middleweights. Only Europe's collective power can ensure status parity, i.e., power symmetry with other global players, be they states or non-state entities, such as companies.

The corona crisis has heightened public and political awareness of the need to harness Europe's collective power for its economic, technological, and digital sovereignty. Even if this were achieved, however, there would still be an Achilles' heel as long as Europe's defence continues to depend on American protection. Yet only a Europe capable of providing for its own defence can be a fully sovereign Europe.

This study explores whether and how such a capacity for self-defence could be achieved. In addition to discussing the feasibility of European defence autonomy, the issue of desirability will be addressed, as well. *Prima facie*, the latter appears self-evident since sovereignty enables an actor to assert their interests and promote their values, either in cooperation with or in opposition to others. However, when it comes to defence, ultimately national or collective survival is at stake. Since the founding of the North Atlantic alliance (NATO) in 1949, Europe has relied on the US



for its security. Shedding this dependence can and should only be embarked upon if the associated risks can be contained and the benefits outweigh the costs.

Consequently, the main part of this study is devoted to an in-depth analysis of both the feasibility and desirability of European defence autonomy.

To this end, I will first define the key terms. European defence sovereignty implies neither autarky nor a dissolution of NATO and the transatlantic security partnership. The objective is status parity *within* NATO through symmetric interdependence between Europe and the U.S.

Chapter 2 sets out why it is important to put the issue back on the political agenda. Structurally, unilateral dependencies, even among friends, entail vulnerability and come at a price. Five developments have heightened Europe's dependency and increased its associated costs: transatlantic rifts, Chinese assertiveness, Sino-American rivalry, Putin's Russia, and global disorder.

In the third and main chapter, three issues are addressed: What is required for European autonomy ("What must be done?"), what is achievable ("What could be done?"), and what is desirable ("What should be done?").

There are four essential requirements for a European self-defence posture: a solid foundation of political, economic, cultural, and military integration; sufficient military capabilities; a resilient political-military strategy, and determined political leadership.

These four criteria are used to discuss the attainability of European defence autonomy ("What could be done?"). For the foreseeable future, such autonomy will require a nuclear deterrent component. In political and military terms, fulfilling this requirement is the toughest challenge. Meeting it will only be possible if Europe succeeds in devising a novel type of nuclear deterrence. To date, there have been two kinds: *primary deterrence*, whose protective perimeter is confined to the homeland of a nuclear-armed state, and *extended deterrence*, where a nuclear-armed state aims at protecting not just itself but also an ally with threats of nuclear use directed at a third party.

Since NATO's inception, Europe has relied on extended deterrence provided by its U.S. ally. For Europe to stand on its own feet when it comes to deterrence, it would have to develop a substitute located somewhere between primary and extended deterrence. This could be referred to as *integrated deterrence* and would correspond with the hybrid nature of the European Union, comprising both inter- and supranational pil-

lars. Integrated deterrence would necessitate deepening and broadening European integration to a point where the French nuclear deterrent was Europeanised without affecting the decision-making sovereignty of the French president.

As envisaged by President Kennedy in 1962, European defence autonomy would be achieved in coordination with the United States and it would aim at reinforcing NATO through a fully-fledged European pillar. However, as not all EU Member States will want to go down this path from the outset, the initiative would have to come from Germany and France as Europe's critical mass. In the Aachen Treaty of 22 January 2019, the two countries affirmed their willingness to "take their bilateral relations to a new level", which would have to involve a gradual merging of their military resources and cultures. Through their exemplary bilateral integration and their enduring commitment to European integration at large, France and Germany would attempt to win over other EU Member States.

To succeed, they would have to defuse concerns and refute the arguments advanced by critics of European self-reliance. Five such objections are discussed in the section "What should be done": fragmentary European identity; insufficient resources; lack of credibility of French nuclear protection; a perilous transition from American protection to European autonomy; and splitting Europe into proponents and opponents of defence autonomy.

The three analytical steps of "What must be done", "What could be done" and "What should be done" allow for a rigorous analysis of the requirements and challenges, the benefits and costs of European self-defence. However, they cannot provide a definitive answer regarding the balance of opportunities and risks. Any such assessment is inherently subjective, just as policy conclusions are determined by political preferences as well as electoral politics.

In light of this, the author presents his own view in the final chapter. A vision degenerates into delusion if it consists of mere voluntarism. "In foreign policy, a realist without imagination is a dullard. But if one is not also a realist, one is just a dreamer." (Willy Brandt). Following this precept, the study concludes by expounding the rationale for and mapping out a path to a Europe that would stand on its own defence feet and thus achieve full sovereignty.

# European Self-Defence: What It Means and What It Doesn't

Whether nightmare or pipe dream – if European self-defence is coupled with an unattainable objective it amounts to a flight of fancy.

This would be the case if self-defence, or its conceptual counterpart autonomy, were equated with autarchy, which, in an interdependent world, is neither possible nor desirable.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, no one is autarchic, i.e., completely invulnerable and entirely self-sufficient. This is not only true with regard to military or terrorist threats. Protecting from global climate change and pandemics or decoupling from international trade, data flows, and supply chains are either simply impossible or too costly.

Furthermore, defence autonomy does not require independence. Consequently, European self-defence should not and need not lead to NATO's dissolution. Instead, the alliance could be based on an American and a European pillar, as envisaged by President Kennedy in his speech on 4 July 1962.

Although there was no explicit mention of NATO, the president's offer and invitation to the "nations of Western Europe" were clear. The United States did not see a strong and united Europe as a rival, but as a partner "with whom we can deal on a basis of full equality". It would take time to create such an Atlantic partnership, but, to pave the way for it, Kennedy announced "on this Day of Independence, that the United States will be ready for a Declaration of Interdependence" with a united Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Recalling Kennedy's invitation highlights the extent of transatlantic estrangement under a Presi-

dent Trump who sees Europe as a rival rather than a partner. However, in the present context, Kennedy's address makes another, more important point. The speech provides two crucial notions for defining European self-defence: partnership among equals and interdependence. European sovereignty in defence is not synonymous with a declaration of independence from the USA. It is about status parity with the U.S. through symmetrical interdependence.

## **NATO: Not to be dismantled, but rebuilt.**

Such parity does not exist today and indeed never has. NATO has always been characterised by asymmetrical interdependence: Europe needs the U.S. far more than Washington needs its European allies. Certainly, NATO is still of great value to the U.S., including the forward deployment of U.S. forces in Europe that can also be used for non-NATO missions. Nevertheless, there remains a fundamental disparity: the U.S. is able to protect itself independently, while Europe does not have the same autonomy as it relies on U.S. assistance for safeguarding its existential security.

American-style autonomy goes beyond deterrence or defence against an armed attack on its own territory or that of an ally. In addition to territorial defence, it includes the ability and willingness to use military means in a host of other contingencies: to contain and resolve conflicts that might foster terrorism and result in refugee flows; to contribute to multinational peace missions; to protect trade and communication routes; to enforce embargoes and sanctions; or to evacuate and rescue one's own citizens. These and other forms of extended self-defence may come into play not only when a country's own well-being is in acute danger. They might also apply to situations in which protecting against the ramifications of potential long-term threats such as global

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Lippert, Nicolai von Ondarza, and Volker Perthes, eds., *European Strategic Autonomy. Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests*, SWP Research Paper 4/2019 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2019), 5.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Address at Independence Hall Philadelphia", Pennsylvania, 4 July 1962, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/philadelphia-pa-19620704> (accessed 20 February 2020).

warming is not a practicable option, or turning a blind eye to suffering and need is not a morally acceptable option. Moreover, Germany and Europe benefit enormously from global trade, cross-border investment, and unrestricted communication. They therefore have a fundamental interest in effective and rules-based institutions and regimes with regional or global capacity to manage positive and negative interdependencies. However, if we do not want might to trump right, rules have to be set and enforced, and the latter may also require military means.

# Why Revisit the Topic of European Self-Defence?

For decades, Europe has fared well under the protection provided by its American guardian.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true for Germany. During the Cold War, the country was extremely vulnerable due to division and its frontline position; any military escalation of the East-West confrontation could have had devastating consequences for both of its states. The American protector as the backbone of NATO not only offered protection from the Soviet Union, but also from a recovering (West) Germany. This facilitated the European integration process, which, in turn, favoured the sovereignty of the West German state and its “economic miracle”. This process, NATO integration, and strong support from Washington were decisive for German reunification. The German Ministry of Defence’s *White Paper* of 2016 still states unequivocally: “The transatlantic alliance is vital to the security of Europe. Only together with the United States can Europe effectively defend itself against the threats of the 21st century and guarantee a credible form of deterrence.”<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, due to recent developments as well as a specific structural reason, the issue of a Europe standing on its own feet is back on the political agenda.

The aforementioned structural reason relates to the asymmetrical nature of transatlantic interdependence. Unilateral dependency causes vulnerabilities

and comes at a price, even among friends. This is demonstrated by recurrent NATO controversies about risk- and burden-sharing and persistent European and especially German concerns regarding the possibility of Washington not honouring its defence commitments or doing so at the expense of its allies.

The implications of asymmetry can be particularly worrying when the nuclear dimension comes into play. Ever since the U.S. became vulnerable to a devastating Soviet or Russian nuclear strike, American presidents have all had to give the survival of their own country precedence over the security of European allies. Fortunately, whether or not the escalatory dynamics of a war that would leave Europe devastated but spare U.S. territory could be reined in has never been put to the test and thus far remains a hypothetical question. However, no pre-war arrangements (such as the establishment of forward bases for American troops and matériel in Europe) and no American pledge of allegiance can eliminate the fundamental difference between primary and extended deterrence. Primary or homeland deterrence is reserved for a nuclear power’s own survival. Only then is such deterrence unconditional: If a country has nothing to lose because its own survival is directly threatened, an attacker must reckon with the possibility of a tit-for-tat response threatening his existence as well. However, if the initial attack is directed only against an ally, a nuclear protector’s response is conditional, i.e., guided by a country’s supreme interest in preventing escalation to a destructive all-out war. Herein lies the difference between a nuclear guarantee (= original deterrence), which Washington’s European allies have never had, and a nuclear commitment (= extended deterrence), which is what underpins the mutual assistance clause of the NATO Treaty (Article 5).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt would not have triggered the debate about an alleged gap in NATO’s nuclear response options in the late 1970s. In his view, the Soviet

<sup>3</sup> While he regarded this state of affairs as untenable in the long run, Egon Bahr nonetheless did not hesitate to point out its secure and beneficial nature: “There are worse things than the luxurious protectorate, which offers Europe such generous co-determination and under which American bases really do not hurt at all.” (Egon Bahr, *Deutsche Interessen. Streitschrift zu Macht, Sicherheit und Außenpolitik* [Munich: Blessing, 1998], 36–37 – my translation.)

<sup>4</sup> Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, ed., *White Paper 2016 on German Security Policy and The Future of the Bundeswehr* (Berlin, June 2016), 49, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/111704/2027268/2016%20White%20Paper.pdf> (accessed 31 October 2020).

That said, America's nuclear commitment is by no means a loose arrangement. It has fulfilled its twofold purpose of deterring a potential attacker and reassuring European allies. It derives its credibility from America's strategic interest in the physical integrity, economic wellbeing, and cooperation of its allies, underpinned by a military presence on the territory of its partners. In essence, this has been NATO's formula for success for 70 years.

The longevity of this alliance structure is all the more remarkable given that from the point of view of the protégé, extended deterrence is a second-best solution to their security predicament: they have no control over whether and how the commitment is honoured and have to assume that if it ever came to the crunch, the protector's own survival would be paramount.

### **Recent developments exacerbate the structural ambivalence of extended deterrence.**

Linked to this are the pre-war costs and risks associated with asymmetrical interdependence. In conjunction with deep-rooted concerns about potential victimisation in war they are the structural source of aspirations to establish status parity with the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Such aspirations have been reinforced and revitalised by six specific developments.

SS-20 intermediate-range missiles were "euro-strategic weapons" because they posed an existential threat to Western Europe but not the United States. If Europe had an American nuclear guarantee, i.e., if it were protected by primary deterrence, the SS-20s would have been categorised as "strategic" in light of the Soviet intercontinental missiles that could reach the U.S. homeland. As a corollary, Washington would have insisted that they be incorporated into strategic arms control accords with the Soviet Union or Russia.

**6** It should be noted that this applies to both sides. While extended deterrence is a second-best solution in the eyes of those benefitting from it, it is equally true that for the U.S., too, its commitment is by no means risk and cost free. Hence, the optimal solution for both sides would be a Europe capable of providing for its defence without American assistance. However, Washington would then have to accept no longer being "primus inter pares" within NATO.

## **Trump or no Trump – the old West is dead**

All in all, the transatlantic community remained intact during the Cold War, despite recurring disputes. It also survived the fall of the Berlin wall, which removed the unifying force of the East-West confrontation. The United States and Europe have always had more in common than just economic and security interests; they are also bound by a unique web of shared values and history, of cultural and human closeness.

Behaving like a "demolition man", President Trump has strained transatlantic relations like no other leader before him.<sup>7</sup> Trump is neither a realist nor an idealist, he is an opportunist: preserving values and observing rules are contingent on their functional utility for promoting "America First", which he equates with "Trump First". America's allies are no longer treated as such. Trump does not seek partnership, but expects allegiance. He appears to be the first U.S. president to call the EU "a foe".<sup>8</sup> In 2018, he reportedly raised the issue of the U.S. leaving NATO on several occasions.<sup>9</sup> He has dealt several blows to multilateralism, including terminating American adherence to the Paris climate accord and the nuclear deal with Iran, employing the global predominance of the dollar to undermine the latter and isolate Iran.

Trump is a disaster, but not an accident. Even if he is to be ousted and succeeded by Biden – the old West will not return. This is not solely due to the harm inflicted and the loss of confidence caused by Trump. Even more important are four long-term factors that made a Trump presidency possible in the first place: a deeply divided American society and polarised politics, demographic changes, the fall-out

**7** For the term "demolition man", see "Donald Trump's Demolition Theory of Foreign Policy Won't Work", *The Economist*, 9 June 2018, 13.

**8** Trump said in a CBS interview on July 2018: "Now, you wouldn't think of the European Union, but they're a foe." <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-interview-cbs-news-european-union-is-a-foe-ahead-of-putin-meeting-in-helsinki-jeff-glor/> (accessed 1 November 2020).

**9** See Julian E. Barnes and Helene Cooper "Trump Discussed Pulling U.S. from NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns over Russia", *The New York Times*, 14 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/us/politics/nato-president-trump.html> (accessed 21 February 2020).

of the corona pandemic and the shift in Washington's geostrategic focus.<sup>10</sup>

America's innate talents and dynamism, fuelled by optimism and pragmatism, should not be discounted. But whether the wounds aggravated by Trump will heal remains uncertain and if they do, it will take time.

Even then, the socio-political complexion of the United States is changing, not least because of demographic shifts. The proportion of the population with a European migration background has shrunk drastically, for instance.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there has been a reorientation of domestic and foreign policy. The country is beset by social and political cleavages that sap its global power and standing. These have been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic and addressing them will tie up enormous resources. As a result, the inward orientation of American policy is likely to intensify regardless of the outcome of the November elections.<sup>12</sup> Until the collapse of Soviet communism, the East-West conflict had provided the glue of transatlantic cohesion. In the wake of its disappearance,

Europe's strategic importance to the United States has dwindled.<sup>13</sup>

These four factors need not lead to a complete American withdrawal from Europe. But taken together, they will ensure that American resources and interests will increasingly be directed toward Asia in general and China in particular, fuelled by an expectation that by now, Europe should be rich enough and mature enough to stand on its own feet. Trump has not minced his words in this respect. Just because Trump says it, however, does not mean it should be ignored.<sup>14</sup>

Trump's deranged behaviour will not become the presidential norm. Nonetheless, the transatlantic community of yesteryear cannot be resurrected, and building a new and lasting partnership will only be possible with a stronger Europe ready to take on more responsibility within it.<sup>15</sup>

## China's twofold challenge

Within a single generation, China has catapulted itself into the position of a world power. It is the only country that has the potential not only to reach power

**10** Kirsten Westphal points to another factor: the impact of the fracking boom in the USA. "The West as an 'energy community' has ceased to exist [...] The new situation of American energy abundance has deprived the alliance of interests of its essential basis" (Kirsten Westphal, *Strategische Souveränität in Energiefragen. Überlegungen zur Handlungs- und Gestaltungsfähigkeit Deutschlands in der EU*, SWP-Aktuell 46/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2020, 4, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2020A46\\_energiesouveraenitaet.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2020A46_energiesouveraenitaet.pdf) [accessed 15 July 2020]).

**11** "Europe inevitably counts for less in American eyes than it once did. The generation that formed bonds fighting side-by-side in the second world war is passing away and even the cold war is becoming a distant memory. Meanwhile, America is becoming less European. A century ago more than 80% of its foreign born population came from Europe; now the figure is only 10%" ("Europe and America Must Work to Stop Their Relationship Unravelling", *The Economist*, 26 March 2019, 12).

**12** "Rather, the United States' withdrawal from many stages of world politics is likely to continue. For Covid-19 relentlessly exposes America's weaknesses, not least in the health care system. And the recession weighs heavily on the country. To remedy the weaknesses and to overcome the recession, America will focus even more resources and energy on its inner workings." (Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger, "Trump's Kriegsmodus", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung [FAS]*, 29 March 2020, 8 – my translation).

**13** "The United States' focus on Europe is declining – that will be the case under any president." (Chancellor Merkel, interview with *Financial Times [FT]*, 16 January 2020, 7).

**14** Indeed, he was not the first to complain about European "free-riders". See, for example, "Remarks by Secretary Gates at the Security and Defence Agenda, Brussels, Belgium, 10 June 2011", <https://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4839> and President Obama, *The Atlantic*, April 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/> (accessed 21 February 2020).

**15** "But Biden's commitment to transatlantic relations will not magically reverse the trends that contributed to Trump's election in the first place – populism, anti-globalization, and resentment of the costs of U.S. leadership – and that have driven the two sides of the Atlantic apart in recent years. A President Biden will need to walk a fine line between providing more support for European allies and insisting that they take on greater responsibilities – for defense, for security in their region, and for internal European cohesion." (Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, "The Atlantic Alliance Had Pre-existing Conditions. The Pandemic Will Worsen Them", *War on the Rocks*, 13 April 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/the-atlantic-alliance-had-preexisting-conditions-the-pandemic-will-worsen-them/> [accessed 8 June 2020].)

parity with the United States, but even to outstrip it in terms of economic and technological might.<sup>16</sup>

Yet China presents more than just a geopolitical challenge. China's communist autocracy sees itself as a systemic alternative to a Western-style combination of capitalism and democracy. The Chinese leadership's explicit aim is to prove that a highly productive and innovative economy controlled by the state can go hand in hand with political authoritarianism.

The dual challenge posed by China has left its mark in Washington. China is one of the few issues on which the usually deeply divided Republicans and Democrats are agreed. The country is viewed as a global rival that must be kept in check by countervailing power.

The U.S. administration is not alone in this. At a meeting in London in December 2019, for the first time ever NATO members not only discussed the opportunities, but also the challenges resulting from China's rise.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in 2019, the EU Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy classified China as a partner as well as an economic competitor and systemic rival.<sup>18</sup> This ambivalence was also reflected in a paper issued by the Association of German Industry: the country remains an important sales and procurement market, but it is closing off markets and disadvantag-

ing non-Chinese companies, while the party's claim to control society and the economy is growing.<sup>19</sup>

This claim is linked to the repression of opponents, oppression of minorities such as the Uighurs, and reining in of Hong Kong in breach of the agreement concluded with the United Kingdom in 1997. China pursues a hegemonic policy in its region by, for example, laying claim to islets and waters in the South China Sea in defiance of international arbitration panels. It is expanding its global reach through the Belt and Road initiative as well as financial investment and loan arrangements.

## A new bipolarity is emerging

East-West bipolarity was the defining characteristic of the second half of the 20th century in the Euro-Atlantic region. The 21st century could be a Pacific century, with China and the U.S. the two opposing poles.

However, Sino-American bipolarity is not a forgone conclusion. If it were able to muster the political will, a united Europe has the resources to be a third pole. After decades of uninterrupted growth, China could stumble: its population will age dramatically, its labour force will shrink as a result of the one-child policy, its growth will have to rely less on exports and investment and more on domestic demand with falling savings rates, many companies are heavily indebted, and the jury is still out on whether an autocracy that deprives citizens of fundamental political rights is compatible with an innovative and knowledge-based economy.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, if Chinese leaders succumb to the temptation to flex their country's muscles in Asia and beyond, they could stir up mistrust and resistance to Chinese influence.

Thus, China is not invulnerable, and its continued rise is not inevitable. Similarly, as 2008 showed, the United States and debt-fuelled capitalism are not immune to major economic and financial crises.<sup>21</sup>

**16** Based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP), China's gross domestic product (GDP) became the world's largest in 2013, its GDP per capita has risen tenfold since 1990. As a result, the global centre of economic gravity, which in 1980 was still located in the Atlantic Ocean off Norway had moved to Siberia in 2018. ("The Chinese century is well under way", *The Economist*, 27 January 2018, 81).

**17** NATO London Declaration, 3–4 December 2019, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm) (accessed 22 February 2020).

**18** "China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance." (European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *EU-China – A Strategic Outlook*, Strasbourg, 12 March 2019, 1 <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf> [accessed 22 February 2020]).

**19** See Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, *Partner und systemischer Wettbewerber – Wie gehen wir mit Chinas staatlich gelenkter Volkswirtschaft um?* (Berlin, January 2019), 2–4.

**20** See "Can Pandas Fly?", *The Economist*, 23 February 2019, 11/43–48, as well as "Red Moon Rising" and "Chinese Science: The Great Experiment", *The Economist*, 12 January 2019, 9 and 64–68, respectively.

**21** See Institute of International Finance, *Global Debt Monitor: High Debt May Exacerbate Climate Risk* (Washington, D.C., 14 November 2019), and Markus Frühauf and Winand von Petersdorff-Campen, "So viele Staatsschulden wir nie. Auch

Nevertheless, power relations do not change overnight or as a result of a global pandemic. Moreover, China and the U.S. are such heavyweights that no country would be spared if even one of them were to fall prey to turmoil or even collapse.

Therefore, their development and their bilateral relationship will crucially determine the global (dis-)order of the 21st century. If the EU fails to form a third power pole, a new bipolarity will emerge where Europe will find it difficult to hold its own. The U.S. as well as China would then be tempted to press Europe to take their side in the mutual rivalry.<sup>22</sup> Europe will lean towards Washington for historical reasons and based on their congruent values and interests. But it will only be able to stand its ground in a transatlantic partnership of equals. Unless it can provide for its own defence, such confidence will elude Europe.

Paradoxically, Europe's defence-related vulnerability could increase as it achieves status parity in other areas. President Trump was able to undermine the nuclear agreement with Iran because the dollar is the global currency and access to the vast American market is vitally important to companies and exporters worldwide.<sup>23</sup> A Europe with a euro currency strong enough to challenge American "financial hegemony"<sup>24</sup>

Unternehmen doppelt so hoch verschuldet wie in der Finanzkrise", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, 22 February 2020, 17.

22 "Washington will probably perceive the world, and thus Europe as well, primarily through a 'China prism' [...] However, Washington's pressure on its allies to take a position in the intensifying U.S.-Chinese conflict and to clearly side with the United States will grow rather than diminish" (Peter Rudolf, "Der amerikanisch-chinesische Weltkonflikt", in Barbara Lippert and Volker Perthes, eds., *Strategische Rivalität zwischen USA und China*, SWP-Studie 1/2020 [Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 2020], 12, [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2020S01\\_lpt\\_prt\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2020S01_lpt_prt_WEB.pdf) [accessed 26 February 2020]).

23 "America started using the dollar system as a geopolitical weapon in earnest after the attacks of September 11th 2001 [...] President Trump has taken this policy to a new level of intensity, using sanctions as his main foreign-policy tool and even targeting allies with 'secondary' sanctions that punish anyone who trades with states in America's bad books." ("Dethroning the Dollar. The Search to Find an Alternative to the Dollar", *The Economist*, 18 January 2020, 12).

24 *Ibid.*, 13; similarly, a former director of the European central bank stated: "In such an environment, being the issuer of a global reserve currency confers international monetary power, in particular the capacity to 'weaponise'

would have to expect Washington to be all the more inclined to use its remaining leverage in the defence area.

Moreover, parity with the dollar might be unattainable without defence autonomy. According to a former director of the European Central Bank (ECB), for example, empirical evidence supports the view that the U.S. dollar benefits from a substantial security premium. Nations that depend on the U.S. security umbrella hold a disproportionate share of their foreign reserves in dollars.<sup>25</sup>

## Russia – a worrying neighbour

The well-being and security of Russia and that of the European Union are linked in many ways. In addition to their geographical proximity, they have established mutually beneficial economic ties, particularly in the oil and gas sector.

Russia is a medium-sized power in economic and technological terms, but it remains a major military power with a formidable nuclear arsenal. This does not pose a threat in and of itself, because military capabilities only become a source of concern when political actors distrust each other.

Following the demise of the Cold War, a stable relationship of trust between Russia, on the one hand and its European neighbours and North America, on the other has not materialised. At their London summit in December 2019, NATO member states declared that "Russia's aggressive actions constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security".<sup>26</sup> Russia under President Putin has provided plenty of reasons to be wary: annexation of the Crimea peninsula and intervention in Ukraine; cyberattacks and attempts to influence election out-

access to the financial and payments systems." (European Central Bank, "The Euro's Global Role in a Changing World: A Monetary Policy Perspective. Speech by Benoît Cœuré" [New York, 15 February 2019], <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/key/date/2019/html/ecb.sp190215~15c89d887b.en.html> [accessed 26 February 2020]).

25 Benoît Cœuré, *ibid.*; Claeys and Wolff also count "significant geopolitical and/or military power" among the criteria that historically, countries with "dominant currencies" have to fulfil (Grégory Claeys and Guntram B. Wolff, *Is the COVID-19 Crisis an Opportunity to Boost the Euro as a Global Currency*, Policy Contribution 11/2020 [Brussels: Bruegel, June 2020], 4, <https://www.bruegel.org/2020/06/is-the-covid-19-crisis-an-opportunity-to-boost-the-euro-as-a-global-currency/>).

26 *London Declaration* (see note 17).



comes; breach of the INF treaty on medium-range land-based missiles; military provocations against NATO and non-NATO states; massive military support for Syria's Assad regime. Russian external aggressiveness goes hand in hand with internal repression, media control, and human rights violations.

We are not seeing a return to the Cold War, and Moscow may not be solely responsible for failing to replace this conflict with a cooperative relationship with the European Union and the United States. Yet Russia has become an aggressive neighbour who arouses suspicion and demands countervailing hedging.

## World disorder

The widespread view that the world is in turmoil should not give rise to a misplaced nostalgia for the Cold War: East-West enmity could have escalated into a nuclear war,<sup>27</sup> and wars such as those in Korea and Vietnam form part of the Cold War legacy.

Yet expectations that the East-West antagonism might be replaced by a cooperative world order have not materialised. Democracy and the rule of law have become fragile even in their Western strongholds; the transatlantic partnership is crumbling; China as an emerging world power is challenging the U.S. and Europe; Russia represents more of a threat; wars and crises outside Europe feed terrorism and increase the migratory pressure on Europe, which, in turn, nurture right-wing populism and authoritarian movements; arms control regimes are eroding; perennial conflicts in Europe's neighbourhood, such as the Israeli-Palestinian or Iranian-Arab struggle remain unresolved; runaway climate change could trigger and intensify power and distributional struggles. Global trade and investment, cross-border supply chains, pandemics and migratory flows, the Internet and other easily accessible means of communication — all these and other phenomena of globalisation have brought the Earth's inhabitants closer together than ever before, but there is a dearth of robust and widely accepted institutions and regimes to defuse the conflict-prone effects of global interdependence.

<sup>27</sup> It is one the paradoxes of nuclear deterrence that the possibility of an irreversible escalation into mutual annihilation can exert a restraining and thus de-escalatory effect on the intensity of pre- and intra-war conflicts.

## Macron's offer

European self-defence is impossible without France. The country is an economic and political heavyweight in Europe as well as Germany's closest partner; more importantly, in the present context France is the only EU Member State that possesses nuclear weapons. Over the years, various French presidents have noted that the mission of the Force de frappe, France's nuclear arsenal, is not only to protect the French homeland but to bolster the security of its allies, too.<sup>28</sup> However, this has never been put to the test because U.S. nuclear protection was considered irreplaceable.

In February 2020, President Macron declared in a keynote speech on security policy that France's vital interests "now have a European dimension" (my emphasis) and that "in this spirit" he was seeking a strategic dialogue on the role of France's nuclear deterrent for common security with those European partners willing to take him up on this offer. Such partners could be associated with the exercises of French deterrence forces.<sup>29</sup>

In so doing, Macron goes further than any president before him. While Macron insists that Europe's long-term security requires a strong alliance with the U.S., he also stresses that Washington is rightly sending a strong and direct message to its European allies: "Spend more on your own security, I may not be your protector forever."<sup>30</sup> Macron's offer is in line with his decidedly pro-European approach and his commit-

<sup>28</sup> For a "quick history of the nuclear policy speeches of French presidents", see Shahin Vallée, *France and Germany Need a Dialogue on Nuclear Policy*, DGAP Commentary (Berlin: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik [DGAP], March 2020), 3, <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/france-and-germany-need-dialogue-nuclear-policy> (accessed 8 June 2020).

<sup>29</sup> "Let's be clear: France's vital interests now have a European dimension. In this spirit, I would like strategic dialogue to develop with our European partners, which are ready for it, on the role played by France's nuclear deterrence in our collective security. European partners which are willing to walk that road can be associated with the exercises of French deterrence forces" ("Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defence and Deterrence Strategy", Paris, 7 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy.en> [accessed 7 June 2020]).

<sup>30</sup> "Let's face it, and listen to the United States of America, telling us: 'Spend more on your own security, I may no longer be, over time, your guarantor of last resort, your protector'" (ibid. — my emphasis).

ment to European sovereignty, particularly in the economic, digital, and health sectors.<sup>31</sup>

How far would the French president be prepared to go in Europeanising the deterrent perimeter of the Force de frappe? To find out, his invitation to dialogue would have to be taken up.<sup>32</sup> But this would not be the first step. Crucially, the credibility of a French nuclear commitment to its EU neighbours would hinge on its political dependability, i.e., there must be no doubts about the offer being retracted following a change in government in France. This, in turn, needs a solid mutual trust between France and its partners that is rooted in close European and above all Franco-German integration.

In their totality, these six trends and developments suggest four policy conclusions. First, Germany and Europe face clear and increased threats to their well-being and security. Second, defusing these threats or keeping them in check will require military capabilities, too. Third, regardless of who holds the post of U.S. president, militarily, Europe will have to fend for itself more. Finally, President Macron seems ready to discuss the possibility of a French nuclear umbrella for Europe.

## The pandemic as a damper?

European self-defence is not on the European agenda. Instead, the focus is on less ambitious projects such as a European Defence Fund and PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), “a framework and process to deepen defence cooperation between those EU Member States who are capable and willing to do so.”<sup>33</sup>

31 See *French-German Initiative for European Recovery from the Coronavirus Crisis*, Berlin, 18 May 2020, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/resource/blob/656734/1753772/414a4b5a1ca91d4f7146eeb2b39ee72b/2020-05-18-deutsch-franzoesischer-erklarung-eng-data.pdf> (accessed 4 November 2020).

32 Demesmay and Kunz claim that “French nuclear policy is unsuitable for cooperation, to say the least.” (Claire Demesmay and Barbara Kunz, “Macron’s Foreign Policy”, *Internationale Politik* 75, no. 2 [2020]: 90). However, the question is not whether this is the case today, but whether its European partners should therefore refrain from putting France to the test. Even the critics quoted would probably not want that.

33 See “About PESCO”, <https://pesco.europa.eu/> (accessed 7 November 2020). “25 EU Member States have joined PESCO and subscribed to more binding commitments to invest, plan, develop and operate defence capabilities more together, within the Union framework.” (ibid.).

It is likely that the fallout of the corona pandemic will adversely affect PESCO projects as well as national defence budgets. EU Member States may be hit by the severest economic slump in EU history as they face soaring debt levels in the wake of unprecedented aid and recovery programmes. Furthermore, containing the pandemic and its devastating consequences will absorb a great deal of political energy and attention at both EU and national levels.

At first glance, these seem like unpropitious conditions for strengthening European defence capabilities, let alone for launching a highly ambitious project such as European defence autonomy. However, the structural incentive as well as critical recent developments are valid reasons for putting the subject of European self-defence back on the political table, and the pandemic could increase the pressure on Europe to focus more on looking after itself. As the United States has been hit hard by coronavirus, whoever is the next president will expect more self-reliance from America’s European partners.<sup>34</sup> China’s high-handedness and claim to world power status have been unaffected by the outbreak of the pandemic in the country. The crisis has fuelled rather than attenuated Sino-American rivalry, and the devastation wrought by the pandemic could exacerbate conflicts and put further strain on fragile states and economies in the vicinity of Europe.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to such external threats and challenges, there are two factors relating to internal European politics that point in the same direction. First, Euro-

34 “In the longer term, however — over the span of two or three presidencies — the corona pandemic could further weaken the social foundations of America’s global security policy; at least if socio-economic inequalities in the U.S. cannot be reduced. Germany and other U.S. partners must brace themselves for more frequent and intense disputes over security policy and military burden-sharing in NATO.” (Marco Overhaus, *Das Virus und die Weltmacht. Mögliche Folgen der Corona-Pandemie für die US-amerikanische Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik*, SWP-Aktuell 44/2020 [Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2020], 8, [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2020A44\\_corona\\_usa.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2020A44_corona_usa.pdf) [accessed 15 July 2020 — my translation]).

35 “Nor should we forget that none of the other problems that prevailed before the Corona crisis have disappeared. They could even get worse” (Josep Borrell, “The Coronavirus pandemic and the new world it has created”, European External Action Service [online], 23 March 2020, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquartershomepage/76437/node/76437\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquartershomepage/76437/node/76437_en) [accessed 31 March 2020]; see also Nina von Hardenberg, “Jenseits der Pandemie: Was vor Corona wichtig war — und es heute noch ist”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 April 2020, 6–7.)

pean military capabilities suffer from duplication and inefficiency due to uncoordinated national procurement and planning processes.<sup>36</sup> Pandemic-induced pressures on defence budgets could thus lead to the more affordable development of common capabilities, coordinated procurement, and a Europe-wide armaments market.

The second propitious factor is also linked to the pandemic and the policy lessons drawn from it. EU Heads of State and Government have called on Member States “to take all necessary measures to protect strategic assets and technology from foreign investments that could threaten legitimate public policy objectives. This will contribute to the EU’s strategic autonomy, during the crisis and afterwards.”<sup>37</sup> Increased self-sufficiency on defence production and technology would contribute to this goal, as well.

Moreover, the corona crisis is a powerful reminder of how invaluable a united Europe is. Although national reflexes prevailed at the start, Member States quickly realised that a collective European response was required to cope with the crisis.

The pandemic has laid bare the fragility of supply chains and the potentially harmful effects of excessive dependency. The lesson for Europe is that it must become autonomous through controlled deglobalisation, not only with regard to medicine and protective clothing, but also to protect its digital and energy infrastructure and to improve its technological competitiveness. Boosting Europe’s autonomy in these areas is a longer-term project that Member States still have to underwrite with the requisite decisions and financial resources. In contrast, the pandemic recovery funds adopted by Member States significantly advance European integration: because of its size alone: €750 billion with a high proportion of non-repayable grants (€390 billion) but, even more importantly, because the funds are to be financed by common European borrowing that will be serviced by the EU budget. Up till now, such debt mutualisation had been anathema to Member States such as Germany.<sup>38</sup>

**36** See European Commission, *Towards a European Defence Union. Towards a More United, Stronger and More Democratic Union* (May 2019), [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/euco-sibiu-towards\\_a\\_european\\_defence\\_union\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/euco-sibiu-towards_a_european_defence_union_0.pdf) (accessed 8 June 2020).

**37** *Joint Statement of the Members of the European Council* (Brussels, 26 March 2020), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43076/26-vc-euco-statement-en.pdf> (accessed 7 November 2020).

**38** See Eckhard Lübke and Nicolai von Ondarza, *A Corona Presidency in the Coronavirus Crisis? The Dual Task of the*

Despite this progress, European self-defence would still represent a quantum leap in European integration. Yet as Europe becomes more empowered in areas other than defence, driven by strategic autonomy as its leitmotif, the Achilles heel of this autonomy, namely Europe’s asymmetrical dependence on the U.S. in the field of defence, will stand out in striking contrast.

Thus, in addition to the structural motive reinforced by recent political developments, the corona pandemic provides an additional impetus to revisit the feasibility and desirability of European self-defence. Effective conflict prevention and crisis management will continue to also require military means, while the U.S. will be less willing to provide Europe with military support at acceptable costs and risks.<sup>39</sup>

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has stated: “And it is no longer the case that the United States will simply protect us; Europe must take its fate into its own hands.”<sup>40</sup> Can and should Europe go as far as taking its fate into its own hands when it comes to defence autonomy, too?

*German Presidency: Containing the Crisis and Giving a Lasting Impetus to European Solidarity and Autonomy*, SWP Comment 33/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2020C33/> (accessed 8 November 2020).

**39** The latter corresponds with the view of a large part of the German population: In September 2019, just under half of those interviewed (52 percent) were in favour of greater independence from the U.S., 63 percent rated relations between Germany and the U.S. as rather poor, and only 22 percent wanted to continue to rely on the U.S. nuclear umbrella (see Körber Stiftung, *Einmischen oder zurückhalten? Eine repräsentative Umfrage im Auftrag der Körber-Stiftung zur Sicht der Deutschen auf die Außenpolitik* (Hamburg, 2019), <https://bit.ly/34AWzZu> (accessed 28 February 2020 – my translation).

**40** “Speech by Federal Chancellor Merkel in Aachen on 10 May 2018”, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-angela-merkel-anlaesslich-der-verleihung-des-karlspreises-am-10-mai-in-aachen-1008452> (accessed 26 February 2020 – my translation); see also Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, Markus Söder, and Manfred Weber, “Wir stehen gegen die Feinde Europas auf”, *FAZ*, 15 February 2019, 8: “Our Europe is successful and powerful. We want to take our fate into our own hands.” (my translation). Similarly, German Foreign Minister Maas has noted: “Yes, Europe must be able to defend itself in future. Nonetheless, our cooperation within NATO remains important.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 February 2020, 14 (my translation).

# The Anatomy of European Self-Defence

Deciding whether or not to pursue the objective of European defence autonomy poses three main questions: What are the requirements (“what must be done”)? Would Europe be able to meet those requirements (“what could be done”)? And, even if it could, would defence autonomy be a desirable goal given the inevitable costs and risks (“what should be done”)?

If the decision is made to pursue defence autonomy, the next step would be to devise a political strategy to achieve the objective. Such a strategy would centre on three issues: What conditions are needed to ensure the success of the project? Which Member States might be willing to support the project? What are the potential risks and how could these be minimised? Seeking to answer these questions would presuppose that defence autonomy is deemed desirable in the first place. They are, therefore, not addressed in the present chapter, but in the final one which makes the case for European self-defence.

## What must be done?

Just as in politics itself, reflecting on politics has to start with a long, hard look at reality. Viewed through this prism, the status quo is sobering: “Currently, Europe cannot provide for its own defence. We have to rely on the transatlantic alliance.”<sup>41</sup> And, according to Chancellor Merkel, this will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Speech by Chancellor Merkel, 27 November 2020, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-im-deutschen-bundestag-1699682> (accessed on 28 February 2020 – my translation).

<sup>42</sup> Interview with *Financial Times*, “Europe Is no Longer at the Centre of World Events”, 9 January 2020, <http://www.ft.com/content/00f9135c-3840-11ea-a6d3-9a26f8c3c3ba4> (accessed on 24 August 2020); see also Claudia Major, *Die Rolle der NATO für Europas Verteidigung. Stand und Optionen zur Weiterentwicklung aus deutscher Perspektive*, SWP-Studie 25/2019 (Berlin: Stiftung

## The four prerequisites for self-defence: Foundation, capabilities, strategy, and leadership.

Against this backdrop, what would it take to enable Europe to stand on its own feet in this regard? There are four essential requirements: a solid foundation, sufficient capabilities, a suitable strategy, and political leadership.

### Foundation

A thought experiment may help illustrate the critical importance of this requirement. The U.S. forms the backbone of NATO. Could Europe defend itself if there were a similarly powerful European state? The answer is: not necessarily, because on their own even the most formidable military capabilities would not suffice. A potential adversary as well as the members of a defence alliance must be confident that, if need be, the political will to use military means will be forthcoming. Crucially, this must be done in such a way that an attacker would run an unacceptable risk, whereas for the supplier and recipient of a defence commitment, the risk must be bearable if and when the pledge is honoured.

This would be the case if Europe were a federal state with sub-state political entities sharing a common identity and an unwavering sense of solidarity. But the “United States of Europe” is nowhere in sight; for quite some time to come, Europe will remain a union of nation-states.

Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2019), 6: “Without the conventional and nuclear contributions of the U.S., a credible deterrence for and military defence of Europe cannot be guaranteed for the time being”, [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2019S25\\_mjr\\_Web.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2019S25_mjr_Web.pdf) (accessed 6 July 2020 – my translation).

Conceptualizing a Europe able to defend itself must start with this reality. This does not render it elusive, however. The EU is a political entity with no historical analogy: a hybrid of inter- and supranational elements in which nation-states have transferred a substantial part of their sovereignty to the European level.<sup>43</sup> This “de-nationalisation” in favour of collective sovereignty was made possible because EU members share a common European identity. Since there is no European people, but only peoples of Europe, this sense of belonging (“Europeanness”) is weaker than national identities. Hence, European cohesion necessitates a second component: the national interests of EU Member States. From a nation-state point of view, Europe’s added value lies in its collective power: together, EU members can more effectively and efficiently pursue their core national interests of peace and security, prosperity, and self-assertion in the international arena.

Nevertheless, the combined strength of European identity and national interests has so far been insufficient to generate the will and the capabilities needed for European self-defence. On the one hand, the costs and risks of American protection have been deemed lower than those of defence autonomy. On the other hand, one essential resource has been lacking: Member States’ confidence in their mutual reliability. The demands placed on this resource are much higher in the field of defence than in the case of a common currency. Chancellor Merkel’s warning, “If the euro fails, Europe fails”, emphasises what is at stake in this area. Yet there would be much more at stake if European self-defence were to fail: If Member States were to renege on their mutual assistance pledge when challenged by an attacker, the survival of those being attacked would be in jeopardy.

The reference to monetary union is also revealing in another way. Given what is at stake, greater convergence than in the case of the single currency would be needed. Despite insufficient alignment of national economies and “economic cultures”, the euro was launched in the hope that the functional necessities of a currency union would force a catch-up convergence. But this did not happen. The same

<sup>43</sup> This is illustrated by, among others, the single market, a common currency, the Schengen area, supranational institutions such as the Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice, as well as qualified majority voting.

mistake must not be repeated when embarking on a European self-defence union.

Therefore, a prior alignment of strategic cultures is essential. It would be part and parcel of a process of confidence-building among Member States, which would lead to and subsequently preserve European defence autonomy. After all, in a union of nation-states the readiness of a country to entrust its survival in the solidarity of others is never a given but must be constantly renewed. In this way, defence autonomy is linked to overall European integration: whenever a united Europe provides its Member States and citizens with tangible added value, European identity and solidarity, and thus the underpinnings of European self-defence, is strengthened.

## Capabilities

European self-defence requires robust conventional and nuclear capabilities as well as a domestic arms industry.<sup>44</sup>

Yet adequate conventional capabilities would not necessitate a single European army. Doubtless, this is something that would be highly desirable: politically, it would signal and foster unwavering solidarity, militarily, it would mean optimum effectiveness and efficiency. Unfortunately, under the prevailing circumstances of an EU composed of nation-states, a uniform military organisation is a long-term prospect at best. In the meantime, multilateral units and common capabilities could increasingly complement national units, thus becoming the growing nucleus of a single European army. However, the military interoperability of national and European capabilities would be indispensable, and politically there must be no doubt that these would be available for the unconditional protection of all.

In addition, Europe would need a substantial and sophisticated armaments industry. As is the case with civilian technologies and products, an asymmetrical dependence on third-party suppliers would severely constrain Europe’s strategic autonomy.

Last but not least, Europe would have to tackle the most delicate and demanding of military requirements: “Nuclear deterrence remains the litmus test that determines whether Europe can play an independent

<sup>44</sup> In order to underscore the fundamentally different nature of nuclear weapons, the term conventional also includes more novel instruments such as cyber capabilities and non-nuclear hypersonic weapons.

role in security policy.”<sup>45</sup> When potential adversaries are or could become nuclear armed, defence without nuclear deterrence is impossible: “To demand their abolition is noble yet hopeless. The knowledge of how to build nuclear weapons cannot be buried in oblivion, and no nuclear power will expose itself to the danger of being blackmailed by a country that was previously a nuclear “nobody” or an irresponsible actor.”<sup>46</sup> Nuclear weapons cannot be uninvented, they can only be defused politically in peace communities such as the EU where war has become inconceivable. A world-wide peace community, however, is a utopian ideal but not a realistic prospect. Therefore, European self-defence would require both conventional and nuclear forces.

The size and composition of these forces is not a given. A major determinant is an analysis of present and future threats. Yet this alone does not provide an answer to the key question “How much is enough for what?”. This leads us to the third requirement for European self-defence.

## Strategy

The purpose of a strategy is to ensure that the resources needed to achieve a goal are used effectively and efficiently. What type and level of military capabilities Europe would have to possess in order to defend itself cannot be derived solely from an “objective” threat analysis. Military capabilities only pose a threat when they are in the hands of an actor deemed untrustworthy – a thoroughly political judgement.

For this reason alone, the military capabilities needed for European self-defence are not preordained. Moreover, a threat assessment is an on-going exercise that must take into account an evolving international environment. Influencing this environment in order to contain and reduce its potential for violence is the task of a foreign and security policy employing a

broad range of approaches and instruments, including arms control and disarmament arrangements. And a military posture should, as much as possible, reflect professed defensive intentions because by their very existence, armed forces signal explicit or lingering distrust.

Therefore, the threat or use of military means carries an inherent risk of intensifying a conflict. To control and attenuate this risk, an overarching political strategy must give priority to civilian conflict prevention and crisis management as well as establishing cooperative and rules-based regimes and institutions. However, to be a fail-safe solution in an environment of obvious or latent hostilities, it needs a military backstop.

## Leadership

As with the euro, it will take bold leadership to achieve European self-defence. Germany and France may not be sufficient in this regard but they are nevertheless indispensable due to their political, economic, and military weight and because France is the only nuclear-armed EU Member State since the United Kingdom’s withdrawal.

The euro analogy is relevant in other respects, too. While plans for a monetary union had been devised even before the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the end of the division of Germany and Europe acted as a catalyst for the introduction of the common currency.

So far, the epochal shifts and cataclysmic events of the first two decades of the 21st century have failed to provide a similar impetus to European self-defence. As noted earlier, this is because more is at stake in the defence field and because monetary union is an unappealing model given the lack of convergence, the euro crisis that erupted in 2010, and the still incomplete stabilisation through a fully-fledged banking and capital market union.

Yet another major reason is the lack of political leadership. In a European Union of democratic nation-states, it is the Member States that must take the initiative, especially when it comes to European self-defence. They will certainly not leave it to a supranational EU body to decide on the use of force and thus the fate of their citizens and voters instead.

In democratic systems, political leadership needs a mandate from the electorate. Yet political leadership

<sup>45</sup> Eric Gujer, “Macron ist Machtpolitiker, und die Deutschen sind Romantiker”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)*, 16 February 2020, <https://www.nzz.ch/international/macron-ist-machtpolitiker-und-die-deutschen-sind-romantiker-ld.1540830> (accessed 30 June 2020). The French White Paper of 1994 states concisely: “Nuclear capabilities render European defence autonomy possible. Without them it is impossible” (*Livre Blanc sur la Défense* [Paris, June 1994], 56, <http://www.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/pdf/le-livre-blanc-sur-la-defense-1994.pdf> [accessed 30 June 2020 – my translation]).

<sup>46</sup> Bahr, *Deutsche Interessen* (see note 3), 53.

is not only about executing the will of the people.<sup>47</sup> Leadership must also be asserted when this will is unclear, inconsistent, or contradictory, and above all in situations in which the support among the electorate for what political leaders consider to be in the national interest is brittle.

This is especially true for Germany. Trust in the U.S. has declined sharply among Germans, and at the end of 2019 three quarters of them agreed with Chancellor Merkel's statement that Europeans must take their fate into their own hands. Yet only 20 percent agreed that Germany would have to make a greater military effort to this end, whereas 60 percent disagreed with this statement.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, the German armed forces are beset by major deficiencies. The 2019 annual report of the Federal Commissioner for the Armed Forces shows that the Bundeswehr's operational readiness is severely limited: "Staff shortages, material shortages, and excessive bureaucracy remain a feature of everyday life in many places."<sup>49</sup> According to current budgetary projections, Germany intends to reach NATO's defence spending target of at least two percent of GDP by 2031, i.e., seven years later than the agreed 2024. President Macron's offer to conduct a dialogue on the role of French nuclear weapons for European defence has not yet been taken up by the German government.

In line with Clausewitz' most famous dictum, a political strategy (he termed it "the guiding intelligence") determines the use or non-use of military means. Yet under the present and foreseeable circumstances, such means are necessary to safeguard peace and security, and European self-defence requires a greater German willingness to take on more military responsibility. It is up to Germany's political

leaders to make this case to the German public and to act accordingly.<sup>50</sup>

## What could be done?

As this section will demonstrate, Europe could provide for its own defence if it wanted to. In this respect, the two essential enablers are shared identity and interests ("foundation") as well as leadership by a "critical mass" of participating states, in particular Germany and France. The pivotal role of these two countries is to generate and sustain the requisite political will.

Meeting the other two requirements ("capabilities" and "strategy") would still be an ambitious and demanding, but not impossible task.

## Strategy

In the founding act, participating states would have to agree, *inter alia*, on the rationale and basic goals of a European self-defence union, the commitments and contributions Member States would have to make for it to work, the institutional setup of the union, as well as the kind and size of capabilities needed for self-defence and their coordinated development. In addition, they would lay out the core principles guiding the project: NATO and the transatlantic partnership remain central to Europe's security; the union's door is open to those who initially chose not to join; the capabilities and operational options developed are to bolster the wider EU's ability to act; armed forces are indispensable but they are just one instrument for conflict prevention and crisis management; whenever

<sup>47</sup> Speaking from rich experience, former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt candidly admitted: "That is one of the disadvantages of democracy: political success depends on getting the people to support you, which creates a huge temptation to tell them what they want to hear." (Helmut Schmidt and Fritz Stern, *Unser Jahrhundert. Ein Gespräch* [Munich, 2010], 190 – my translation).

<sup>48</sup> See Thomas Petersen, "Halbherzige Verteidigungsbereitschaft", *FAZ*, 19 December 2019, 8.

<sup>49</sup> See German Bundestag, 19. Wahlperiode, *Unterrichtung durch den Wehrbeauftragten. Jahresbericht 2019* (Berlin, 28 January 2020), quoted on p. 5, <https://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/165/1916500.pdf> (accessed 3 March 2020 – my translation).

<sup>50</sup> "I can understand why our partners legitimately get the impression that Germany is not stepping up to the plate [...] Following the disaster of 1945 we have internalised a culture of restraint [...] Showing off does not suit us. But our history cannot be a fig leaf. It must not be used as an excuse for shirking responsibility [...] While long-standing issues of European stability must be kept in mind, the time has come to define strategic interests, to explain again and again the context of foreign policy and to convince the Germans of the necessity of taking additional steps in the field of defence policy. Even in the face of resistance. In other words: political leadership is needed." (Adenauer Lecture 2019 of Bundestagspräsident Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble "Deutschlands Rolle in der globalisierten Welt", 29 October 2019, <http://www.bundestag.de/parlament/praesidium/reden/2019/043-665622> [accessed on 4 March 2020 – my translation]).

and wherever possible civilian means are the preferred instruments of a political strategy aimed at promoting a cooperative and rules-based international order.

Such a strategy document would have to be reviewed and adapted in line with an evolving regional and global environment and it would need to be inspired by strong leadership. Such leadership will only be forthcoming if Europe is able to underpin a self-defence union with sufficient military capabilities. This requirement will be analysed next, first for conventional and then nuclear defence.

## Conventional self-defence

When discussing the issue of whether Europe can afford robust conventional forces, two potential pitfalls present themselves: underestimating the costs or regarding them as prohibitive. A study conducted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) serves as an illustration.<sup>51</sup>

The starting point of the IISS analysis is an “Amerexit”: the U.S. withdrawing from NATO and refusing to come to the aid of its former allies. The analysis then employs two scenarios (the protection of sea lines of communication and the response to limited Russian aggression against Lithuania and parts of Poland) to calculate what it would cost to close the capability gaps left by the U.S.. In the first scenario, the price tag would be between US\$94 and US\$110 billion, for the second scenario this would rise to between US\$288 and US\$357 billion. The Institute maintains that it would take Europe up to 20 years to procure the military equipment needed to compensate for an “Amerexit”.<sup>52</sup>

The IISS analysis provides an initial estimate of the prospective costs of conventional self-defence, in particular since the IISS scenarios are not based on worst-case assumptions, such as an even larger Russian attack and/or several simultaneous operations. Yet despite the hefty price tag, the Institute warns against concluding that European efforts are hopeless and

that Europe is structurally incapable of defending itself.<sup>53</sup>

And this is with good reason: affluent Europe has the financial and technological resources needed to support collective self-defence. Hence, any attempt to convince the American Congress of the opposite when the U.S. spends a much greater percentage of its GDP on defence than Europe would be a fruitless endeavour. Moreover, it would be tantamount to admitting that Europe was permanently trapped in a state of existential dependency on an external power. Such vulnerability entails three interrelated risks: first, Europe would struggle to hold its own in the event of a major conflict of interests with its American ally; this would also restrict Europe’s freedom of action vis-à-vis third parties; and if these actors believed that the U.S. defence commitment was wavering they might be tempted to adopt a more confrontational stance in dealing with Europe.

### Conventional self-defence is affordable.

Moreover, there is no clear-cut criterion to determine what Europe would need to defend itself. It could be argued that the military capabilities of potential adversaries should be the benchmark. Yet there is no “objective” way to accurately determine the threat they pose because how weapon systems and their interplay would perform in wartime and whether an aggressor would be able to tactically and strategically maximise their effectiveness all come down to a judgment call. The same is true for assessing the intentions and objectives of an opponent, their willingness to incur risks and escalate the level of violence.

Moreover, it would take a political decision to mark the perimeter of European self-defence. Europe needs robust non-nuclear capabilities for two main purposes: defence and intervention. In the context of defence, their mission is to deter and repel attacks. Effective conventional defence raises the attacker’s risk and thus lowers the defender’s risk of having to choose between a rock and a hard place, i.e., between surrender or nuclear escalation.

Intervention scenarios do not involve, at least not initially, attacks on a country’s own territory. Never-

<sup>51</sup> See Ben Barry et al., *Defending Europe: Scenario-based Capability Requirements for NATO’s European Members* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], April 2019), <http://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2019/05/defending-europe> (accessed 4 March 2020).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 42: “The point of this work is not to say that European efforts are hopeless and European governments structurally unable to defend themselves.”



theless, a military intervention is rarely a purely altruistic undertaking. This is obvious given that its objective is to protect its own citizens in third-party conflicts or in counterterrorism operations, such as the one launched to quash the so-called “Islamic State”. The aim of this operation was twofold: to protect the victims of IS rule on IS-controlled territory and to thwart IS-organised or IS-inspired terrorism in the member states of the anti-IS coalition. Military operations that help to create a secure environment for economic and social development reduce the incentives to migrate to Europe. And the protection of maritime transport routes serves the economic interests of participating countries.

This incomplete list of conventional defence and intervention scenarios suggests two conclusions: fail-safe protection against every conceivable risk is impossible and using finite resources comes with opportunity costs. Yet military overinsurance would not only entail a waste of resources, it could also lead to an over-reliance on military instruments at the expense of civilian means.

In point of fact, however, Europe’s predicament is the opposite: it suffers from military underinsurance due to segregated armed forces, defence spending, and armaments markets. Thus, to a large extent, the capability gaps identified in the IISS study are related to insufficient integration and coordination among EU Member States. If they could muster the political will to progressively “de-nationalise” their military establishments in favour of common capabilities, each euro spent on defence would generate a considerably higher return on investment in Europe’s ability to defend itself.<sup>54</sup>

The crux of the matter is the subjective nature of answering the “How-much-is-enough-for-what?” question. The primacy of policy implies that a vigorous effort must be made to curtail the size and type of military capabilities through bilateral and multi-lateral disarmament and arms control. But one cannot replace the other. Stable peace without military reinsurance requires rock-solid confidence in the recip-

rocal willingness to settle conflicts without resorting to violence. The EU is the very incarnation of a peace community in which war has become inconceivable. Yet a global peace community is not on the cards. In light of this, disarmament and arms control are all the more necessary but they are no substitute for a military backstop.

## Nuclear self-defence

Thus, deciding on the quantity and quality of the conventional forces needed for European self-defence is an inherently political task. This applies *a fortiori* to its nuclear dimension. There can be no European defence autonomy without a nuclear deterrent, but deploying one is far more difficult than ensuring conventional self-reliance.

This is due to the peculiar nature of both the EU and nuclear weapons. The EU is not a federal state, and we can realistically assume that, for the foreseeable future, it will remain a partially supranational union of nation-states. For their part, rather than representing an evolution of war-fighting technology, nuclear weapons mark a revolutionary turning point in the history of war and violence. Its essence was described at the dawn of the nuclear age as follows: “Thus far, the chief purpose of our military establishments has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose.”<sup>55</sup> More than seven decades later, this observation is still valid for situations in which adversaries face mutually assured destruction because each possesses an assured second-strike capability. In such circumstances, the imperative is to prevent conflicts from spiralling into potentially uncontrollable hostilities.

Given this existential risk, nuclear retaliatory threats are only unconditional when an actor employs them to protect their own existence: when an actor has nothing left to lose but their survival, an attacker faces a devastating response. This *primary* or *homeland* deterrence is unavailable to an EU of nation-states. It would only be available if Europe’s citizens saw themselves as a body politic with a common identity comparable to that of a nation-state. Then, and only then, would a European authority, endowed with the requisite mandate and legitimacy by Europe’s citizens,

54 “Our research shows that joint European procurement can provide 30 percent savings on equipment investment. In addition, joint procurement would facilitate interoperability, joint maintenance, and joint training.” (Munich Security Conference, *More European, More Connected and More Capable. Building the European Armed Forces of the Future* (Munich, 2017), 7, [https://securityconference.org/assets/02\\_Dokumente/01\\_Publikationen/MSCEuropeanDefenceReport2017.pdf](https://securityconference.org/assets/02_Dokumente/01_Publikationen/MSCEuropeanDefenceReport2017.pdf) [accessed 4 March 2020]).

55 Bernard Brodie, “The Implications for Military Policy”, in *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*, ed. Bernard Brodie (New York, 1946), 76.

be in a position to decide on the threat and use of nuclear weapons.

### **Nuclear self-defence must do without Britain.**

Given this limitation, is there an alternative to the nuclear protection provided by the U.S.? Since a nuclear deterrent *by* Europe is unattainable for the time being, there is just one option left: a deterrent *for* Europe by one or more European states.

Today, there are only two European nuclear powers: France and the United Kingdom. Brexit has made it even less likely that a joint Franco-British nuclear umbrella could protect Europe. A country that has opted to cast off the alleged shackles of European integration will neither want to nor actually be trustworthy enough to risk its own survival for the security of its erstwhile EU partners.

But even if Britain were willing to incur such risk – for as long as it not part of EU integration, it could only offer what the U.S. has been providing for decades, namely extended deterrence. Yet the constraints, risks, and costs associated with this type of deterrence stand in the way of European self-defence. So, while a British contribution would still be desirable, it cannot be a *sine qua non* given Britain’s political status of a non-EU nuclear power.

Unless, of course, the country were to experience a Pearl Harbor moment, an abrupt shock triggering a political about-turn. The Japanese attack in 1941 forced the U.S. government, and, perhaps even more importantly, a reluctant population, to acknowledge that going to war against Japan and Germany could no longer be avoided. A comparable volte-face of British security policy could only be expected if the U.S. withdrew from NATO and its bilateral security commitments to Britain – a “Black Swan”-type scenario that, until the Trump presidency, had been relegated to the realm of the unthinkable.<sup>56</sup>

Trump’s erratic and reckless behaviour serves as a reminder never to lose sight of the possible downsides of unilateral dependencies. However, taking the “Black

Swan”-scenario as a premise for empowering Europe to defend itself would be counterproductive. First, while it cannot be ruled out entirely, it is still seen as a highly unlikely scenario. Moreover, it could be argued that such a worst-case assumption could become a self-fulfilling prophecy by triggering a fateful spiral of mistrust in transatlantic relations that would result in a U.S.-European split that no one wanted.

As a catalyst for a process leading to European defence self-sufficiency, the “Black Swan” is neither useful nor necessary. But the scenario does demonstrate that proponents of the project should not count on British involvement.

The same applies to the proposition that Britain might be replaced by one or more new European nuclear powers. By all accounts, Germany would have to be one of them. Yet a “German bomb” would call into question the viability of NATO, the EU, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>57</sup>

So Europe is left with the French nuclear arsenal, which appears unsuitable for the task. France acquired nuclear weapons for reasons of national prestige and as an attribute of great power status in line with its permanent seat on the UN Security Council. But there are two additional motives: a lack of trust in the reliability of the U.S. nuclear commitment and a desire to enhance its national capacity to act. These motives are incompatible with what Europe needs: a power willing and able to provide nuclear cover for European self-defence.

The question is whether France can become what it has so far not been and indeed was never meant to be: a replacement for the U.S. when it comes to nuclear protection for Europe. The counterargument that this is impossible simply because the French president will not share his nuclear decision-making monopoly with others does not hold. After all, this is something the American president would never do either – a fact that has not and does not turn U.S. nuclear protection into an empty promise.

A more plausible objection is that, compared with the U.S. arsenal, the French stockpile of around 300 warheads on a limited number of carrier systems is too small and vulnerable for the task. Evaluating this argument must start with the observation that conventional and nuclear weapon systems are fundamentally different.

<sup>56</sup> See above, p. 8 (“Trump or no Trump – the old West is dead”. For an argument in favour of pulling out of NATO, see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing. A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy”, *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 4 (2016), 82: “In Europe, the United States should end its military presence and turn NATO over to the Europeans.”

<sup>57</sup> See Wolfgang Ischinger, “Bloß kein atomares Deutschland”, *Die Welt*, 30 July 2018, 2.

## Unlike conventional weapons, nuclear weapons are unsuitable for military duels.

While conventional weapons could also be used against civilian targets, their primary purpose is to destroy military capabilities. This “duel-type situation” means that an adversary’s conventional forces must be the main benchmark of a conventional deterrent and defence posture. Nuclear weapons could also be used to destroy military targets (“counterforce”). Yet due to their infinite destructiveness, and because crossing the nuclear threshold would be an escalatory step fundamentally changing the nature of a war, keeping a counterforce “duel” within tolerable damage limits could be well-nigh impossible. Indeed, the spectre of an uncontrollable escalation into mutual annihilation is one, if not the main reason why nuclear weapons have so far never been used between nuclear-armed adversaries.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, a nuclear deterrent need not mimic an adversary’s arsenal.

Provided it meets two conditions. Deterrence is a product of capabilities and perception. Therefore, the first prerequisite of an effective nuclear deterrent is retaliatory capability: a nuclear arsenal must be sustainable, i.e., it must be technically immune to a disarming strike. The second requirement relates to an adversary’s perception: the adversary must assume that the nuclear-armed victim of their attack is in a position to make use of its retaliatory capability.<sup>59</sup>

The key factor for determining the second-strike or retaliatory capacity of a nuclear force is an adversary’s military arsenal.<sup>60</sup> Yet just how threatening an opponent’s forces are is difficult to gauge because their effectiveness (or ineffectiveness, respectively) would only become apparent in the event of war. Nevertheless, it is easier for an actor to assess the capa-

bilities of an opponent than to read their intentions and perception of one’s own readiness to retaliate.

This subjective component would be of particular relevance in a conflict between nuclear-armed states. Threatening nuclear escalation or retaliation comes with a self-deterrent effect because carrying out the threat could result in mutual annihilation.

This self-deterrent component forms the crux of the nuclear commitment the U.S. extends to its European allies.<sup>61</sup> For an American president, the survival of his own country is paramount. Yet to protect American allies against a nuclear-armed aggressor, the latter must be unable to rule out that an American president might be willing to risk the survival of his own country for the protection of allies.

This credibility dilemma notwithstanding, American extended deterrence has worked, both for Europe and Asia, where Japan and South Korea are U.S. nuclear protégés. Even though Taiwan has a less formal commitment it also benefits from American protection because if China dared attack Taiwan, it would be confronted with a nuclear-armed America.

The United States has been able to provide extended deterrence protection because it is a global power with immense economic, technological, and military prowess and unrivalled cultural and civilizational appeal. However, this status alone has not been considered sufficient. To render its nuclear commitment credible in the eyes of allies and adversaries alike, while keeping the risk to the U.S. itself tolerable, American troops have been deployed on allied territory. In this way, even an attack that spared U.S. territory would still be tantamount to an aggression against the U.S.

In order to minimize the existential risk inherent in its nuclear commitments, the U.S. needs nuclear options below the threshold of mutually devastating blows. This is reflected in the U.S. differentiating between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons and in planning for limited nuclear war. On the one hand, selective options might lower the nuclear threshold by suggesting that nuclear war is controllable. On the other hand, it would be utterly irresponsible not to try to limit a nuclear war, even if such an attempt

<sup>58</sup> “More positively, the record suggests – even if it cannot prove – that the risk of nuclear disaster has been a source of welcome caution in international politics over the past seven decades.” (Lawrence Freedman and Jeffrey Michaels, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 4th edition [London, 2019], x.)

<sup>59</sup> In a different context, Karl W. Deutsch described the interaction of the two components as follows: “Will is therefore ineffective without power; but power without will is only an effect without a goal.” (Karl W. Deutsch, *Politische Kybernetik. Modelle und Perspektiven*, 3rd edition [Freiburg, 1973], 170 – my translation.)

<sup>60</sup> It thus includes both nuclear and non-nuclear options suitable for disarming strikes (e.g., cyber weapons, drones, hypersonic, and laser weapons).

<sup>61</sup> On the requirements and dilemmas of nuclear deterrence in general and extended deterrence in particular, see Eckhard Lübke, *Extended Deterrence: The American Nuclear Commitment to the Federal Republic of Germany*, Ph.D. dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 1990, Part I (Extended Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis) and Part III (Managing Nuclear Peace).

might seem well-nigh impossible.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, it would be fanciful to expect the U.S. to forgo limited options and not accord supreme priority to its own survival at the expense of allies.<sup>63</sup> That is part of the price to pay for extended deterrence protection.<sup>64</sup>

It could be argued that this also applies to French nuclear protection. After all, a major rationale of the Force de frappe is lack of trust in the reliability of the U.S. nuclear commitment, fuelled by the desire to preserve the core of national sovereignty, namely the ability to provide for its own defence. Thus, in the present circumstances, France would be unable to replace the U.S. as Europe's nuclear guardian. What is lacking are the requisite military capabilities and, at least equally importantly, the credibility of a French nuclear commitment, both in the eyes of its European protégés and of potential adversaries.

Enabling Europe to defend itself requires tackling both of these components. In terms of capabilities, Europe needs robust non-nuclear forces for the two main tasks of defence and intervention. However, as explained above, their size and composition are not

only a function of the capabilities of potential opponents. They are also determined by a political assessment of present and future threats, as well as the appropriate strategies to deal with those threats. In any case, the bottom line is this: If Europe wanted to, it would have sufficient resources to mount an effective non-nuclear self-defence.

### **An EU of nation-states is incompatible with European nuclear forces.**

In contrast, nuclear self-defence poses a far greater challenge. This is due to the revolutionary implications of nuclear weapons for war prevention and warfare as well as the political nature of the EU. As long as it remains a union of nation-states, no supranational European body will be entrusted with the decision regarding whether and how to employ nuclear weapons. In these circumstances, a genuinely European nuclear force is impossible.

However, there could and should be conventional European forces, which could even take the form of a single European army involving all or most of Europe's national armies. A single force like this would not be deployed in one fell swoop; instead, it would be the outcome of a progressive integration of military capabilities, driven forward by successful joint operations and a convergence of strategic cultures. Such Europeanisation of national armies and doctrines would be characterised by ever-closer coordination of national planning processes and a growing division of labour, by joint procurement of capabilities and the establishment of multinational units. Eventually, this could culminate in common forces under European military command, while the decision on their deployment would remain with EU Member States.<sup>65</sup>

In contrast, a nuclear deterrent for Europe cannot be created by pooling national nuclear capabilities. Such capabilities do not exist and must not be built, if

<sup>62</sup> “We usually think of deterrence as having failed if a major war ever occurs. And so it has; but it could fail worse if no effort were made to extend deterrence into war itself.” (Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* [New Haven and London, 1966], 191).

<sup>63</sup> Thus, the following speculative statement seems quite plausible: “Interestingly, the United States appears to have developed its own parallel plans for graduated escalation and tactical nuclear employment in the theater, separate from NATO's options, though the details of the U.S. options (called POODLE BLANKET) remain classified. Those plans may have provided a way for the United States to conduct theater nuclear attacks even if NATO did not authorize NATO nuclear operations, but such conclusions must await eventual declassification.” (Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, *The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution* [Ithaca and London 2020], 148). It would be unsurprising if this were still the case.

<sup>64</sup> Up till now, this also includes so-called nuclear sharing arrangements. Apart from Germany, American nuclear bombs are stored in Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. Once authorised by the U.S. president, these bombs are to be delivered to their targets by aircraft of these host countries. As part of the American sub-strategic arsenal, the military utility of these weapons is marginal. Their principal purpose is political: they are an integral part of the intra-NATO burden- and risk-sharing equation and they may give allied countries some, albeit limited influence on U.S. nuclear strategy. As long as this is the case, or at least is perceived as such, it would be counterproductive to demand their unilateral withdrawal.

<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the fact that any participation of German armed forces in combat operations requires the approval of the German parliament (so-called “parliamentary reservation”) does not stand in the way of European conventional forces. Otherwise, Germany would be unable to take part in NATO operations either. However, what would have to change is Germany's self-proclaimed “culture of military restraint”. If it were interpreted as restrictively as hitherto, German reliability would be questionable and thus impede an effective European self-defence even if Germany relaxed the parliamentary reservation or abolished it outright.

only because the nuclear proliferation involved would violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). With the exception of France, all EU states are non-nuclear members of the NPT. The NPT as a global brake on proliferation must not be undermined by efforts to achieve European self-defence.

Thus, only French nuclear forces would be capable of providing the nuclear backbone of European self-defence. Unlike conventional weapons, nuclear capabilities are unsuitable for fighting extended (counterforce) duels. This is due to their destructiveness and associated escalatory impact: crossing the nuclear threshold would radically alter the risk perception of the parties involved in the conflict. It is this signalling effect rather than their war-fighting quality that distinguishes nuclear from conventional weapons. Consequently, the size and composition of an opponent's nuclear arsenal is much less relevant as a determinant of a countervailing nuclear deterrent than their conventional forces are for an effective non-nuclear defence. With one crucial proviso: the combined conventional and nuclear capabilities of an adversary must not give him a first-strike or disarmament option. Thus, a nuclear arsenal must be sufficiently invulnerable to confront an opponent with the burden of having to incur an unacceptable risk when launching or continuing an aggression.

### **A nuclear deterrent needs retaliatory as well as escalatory options.**

The threat or use of nuclear weapons should not be confined to a massive counterattack. If this were the sole option available, the self-deterrent effect of nuclear threats would entail a debilitating vulnerability vis-à-vis an adversary capable of threatening or carrying out a limited aggression without losing their retaliatory capacity. Such a situation need not be deliberately provoked by an opponent. Wars can be triggered by conflicts spiralling out of control. In a war-prone confrontation, the side with no other option than a massive nuclear strike would be exposed to political coercion and thus at a significant disadvantage.

Such reckoning does not imply planning for nuclear warfighting. The belief that once nuclear weapons are employed a war is unlikely to be kept within mutually acceptable bounds reinforces pre-war deterrence and its political acceptability. Still, it would be politically irresponsible to incur the risk of strategic vulnerability and, should war erupt anyway, to desist from at-

tempting to prevent it escalating into mutual annihilation. Both considerations suggest that, while nuclear deterrence requires limited deployment options, such flexibility need not be extensive and should not foster a reckless belief that war could be waged with apocalyptic weapons.<sup>66</sup>

Once a nuclear posture assures escalation and retaliation, it need not mirror an opponent's arsenal. Yet capabilities alone do not make for an effective deterrent. The other ingredient is a readiness to carry out the threat of nuclear use.

So far, France has been unwilling to replace the U.S. as Europe's nuclear protector, and no such demand has been made of it either. European self-defence will only be possible if both sides change their minds: Paris must be ready to offer nuclear protection and its partners must request it.

This will only happen if a French nuclear deterrent for Europe could be sufficiently credible for friend and foe alike. As noted earlier, what would constitute "sufficiently credible" is not predetermined by the military capabilities of potential adversaries. Even if these capabilities could be accurately identified, whether and how they would perform in the event of war would be as hard to discern beforehand as an adversary's ability to use them efficiently and effectively. Taking military precautions against all even remotely conceivable threats and on the basis of worst-case

<sup>66</sup> Since nuclear weapons, unlike conventional systems, do not lend themselves to tit-for-tat duelling, there is no objective measure for the deterrent optimum between the two poles of a single retaliatory blow and a whole raft of escalatory options. Moscow allegedly plans for selective nuclear use as part of an "escalate to de-escalate" strategy (see Freedman and Michaels, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* [see note 58], 635–39). How to thwart such a scheme is a policy issue rather than a purely military calculation. The starting point is to address the question of whether such plans are based on offensive or defensive intentions and how to influence Moscow's corresponding perceptions. This political assessment informs the decision on how many and what kind of selective military options are sufficient to neutralise Russian military capabilities and political objectives. While the choice between surrender or massive nuclear retaliation is unacceptable, an actor's own range of flexible employment options does not have to mimic an opponent's capacity. The credibility of nuclear threats prior to and in the course of war depends on mutual perceptions of what is at stake and the risk each side is prepared to take. Thus, the flexibility of a nuclear arsenal is a, but by no means, the only determinant of its deterrent potency.

assumptions will never be possible and any such attempt would carry prohibitive opportunity costs as well as the risk of fuelling rather than containing a conflict.<sup>67</sup>

Whether for deterrence or defence, an overarching political strategy must govern the configuration and use of military means. It is one of four essential prerequisites for European self-defence. Answering the question: “How much is enough for what?” depends on such a strategy for guidance.

This also applies to the question of how robust the conventional component of an independent European defence capability would have to be. The issue is intimately linked to the credibility of a French nuclear umbrella. Similar to America’s nuclear commitment, a French nuclear deterrent for Europe would need conventional capabilities strong and versatile enough to meet two basic requirements: maximise the risk an attacker would have to incur and minimise one’s own risk of having to choose between nuclear escalation or political surrender.

### **The benchmark for European nuclear self-defence cannot and need not be America’s nuclear posture.**

In contrast, the analogy to the protection provided by the United States is considerably weaker in the nuclear sector. It would be misleading to take American nuclear capabilities as the gold standard for European nuclear self-defence. Otherwise, achieving such autonomy would be doomed from the outset. The French arsenal cannot come close to the magnitude and diversity of American nuclear capabilities.

Even if technological and operational challenges could be overcome, political considerations would stand in the way of a massive upgrading. As France would be unable to finance this, its partners would have to fill the gap, including and especially Germany as the partner with the most financial power. Legally, such co-financing of French nuclear forces may even be allowed: “Germany’s current obligations enshrined in the NPT [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons] and the ‘Two-Plus-Four Treaty’ are limited to prohibiting the country from acquiring its own nuclear weapons (‘German bomb’).” According to this

<sup>67</sup> “If the worst is assumed by everyone, it is difficult to make preparations at all, and impossible to pay for them.” (Hedley Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race. Disarmament and Arms Control in the Missile Age* [London: IISS, 1961], 90).

view, the co-financing of foreign nuclear weapons would not be ruled out by the nuclear treaties.<sup>68</sup>

Yet the notion of Germany subsidising French nuclear forces is unrealistic. Even if subsidies were provided without a quid pro quo and the decision to use nuclear weapons remained the exclusive prerogative of the French president, the credibility of such an assurance would be questionable. This would dent the integrity of the NPT which prohibits nuclear-weapon states from transferring the control of nuclear weapons and prohibits non-nuclear-weapon states from receiving such control.<sup>69</sup>

But assuming this risk were eliminated or accepted – a massive nuclear re-armament on the part of France would still be politically counterproductive. In particular if, as argued in this study, European empowerment would not lead to the dissolution of NATO but to its restructuring on the basis of symmetrical interdependence. Potential adversaries such as Russia could see a substantive upgrading of the French nuclear arsenal as a hostile move and take political and military countermeasures. With tensions and distrust rising, the prospect of arms control and disarmament could dwindle, straining European-American relations and exacerbating intra-European conflicts.

So, could France become Europe’s nuclear protector without massively upgrading its Force de frappe? This question goes to the very heart of what would have to constitute the foundation of European self-defence: shared European identity and mutual solidarity. These two values are the prerequisites as well as driving forces of a demand for French nuclear protection and a French willingness to provide such protection.

Currently, there is neither demand nor supply. Demand and supply will only be forthcoming if Europe continues to grow together and European identity and solidarity rapidly progress. Thus, as long as EU partners continue to argue over the distribution of refugees, they will be even less willing to rely on one another when their national existence is at stake. And, in the absence of a stable monetary union, bol-

<sup>68</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Research Services, *Völkerrechtliche Verpflichtungen Deutschlands beim Umgang mit Kernwaffen. Deutsche und europäische Ko-Finanzierung ausländischer Nuklearwaffenpotentiale*, WD 2-3000-013/17 (Berlin, 23 May 2017), <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/513080/c9a903735d5ea334181c2f946d2cf8a2/wd-2-013-17-pdf-data.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2020).

<sup>69</sup> *Vertrag über die Nichtverbreitung von Kernwaffen (NVV)*, Art. I and II, quoted in *ibid.*

stered by Member States assuming their collective responsibility for their common currency, such trust will not flourish either.

### **In a community of fate, France could be Europe's nuclear protector.**

Unshakable faith in the reliability of others is not something that develops overnight when national survival is at stake. It needs an intertwining of interests and a shared European identity, nurtured by the tangible benefits of European solidarity and cooperation. In the course of such a process, politico-military integration is both an end and a means. The development and procurement of common capabilities, armaments cooperation, and joint military operations not only promote military integration but integration as a whole. Conversely, successful cooperation and fair burden-sharing along the entire spectrum of European policy areas facilitate confidence-building and integration in the area of defence, too. Given this interlinkage, a (self-)defence union is an integral part of a wider political union. However, the assertion that a fully-fledged political union is a precondition for independent European defence<sup>70</sup> underestimates the reciprocal relationship between the creation of a defence union and a political one.

Nevertheless, a nuclear deterrent for Europe based on French nuclear forces would be the capstone rather than driver of a political union. For it to be credible in the eyes of potential adversaries, tolerable to France as the protector, and reassuring to its European protégés, France and its European partners would have to share a rock-solid perception that they belong to an enduring community of fate.

This requirement does not contradict the premise of this study that Europe will remain a union of nation-states. For all its attendant shortcomings, risks, and costs, extended deterrence provided by the U.S. has worked even though the country is separated from Europe by the Atlantic Ocean. In principle, what has been possible in such circumstances should not

be impossible when protector and protégés share the same continent.

More importantly, NATO and the EU are fundamentally different. Unlike NATO, the EU is not an international organisation, but a hybrid of supranational and international strands, neither a federalised state nor a loose association of states; rather, Europe is a political entity *sui generis*.<sup>71</sup> If Europe is to be able to defend itself, replacing its American nuclear protector with a French one, it will have to evolve into a community of fate bound by a sense of togetherness and a web of interdependencies unattainable for an intergovernmental organisation like NATO.<sup>72</sup> Taking this crucial difference into account sheds a different light on the possibility of a French nuclear umbrella for Europe. The benchmark can then no longer be the extended deterrent provided by the USA. In contrast to the U.S., the security, prosperity, and sovereignty of France are bound up with its European partners. Geography alone ensures that France cannot escape this interlinkage: unlike the U.S., France has European neighbours.

### **Like the EU itself, Europe's model of nuclear deterrence would be unique.**

Even more important than geography, however, is the integrative fabric consisting of European identity and solidarity, as well as converging national interests. The authority to decide on nuclear use could not be shared among Europeans but would remain with the French president, and since his primary loyalty has to be with the French citizens electing him, France's European partners would still not be guaranteed the same measure of nuclear protection as France proper. But the ensuing uncertainty would be incomparably smaller in a European community of fate than in the context of NATO. This is due not to ill will on the part of the U.S. but to geography and the distinctive nature of the EU setting it apart from an intergovernmental organisation like NATO. The U.S. is a protective power *for* Europe, but not *of* Europe.

<sup>70</sup> “[...] a common West European defence can come only after a political union has been established that approaches in cohesion, political authority and identity the traditional nation-state” (Christoph Bertram, “Western Europe’s Strategic Role: Towards a European Pillar?” in *The Changing Strategic Landscape*, ed. François Heisbourg [London: IISS, 1989], 104–13).

<sup>71</sup> Note that there is still no commonly accepted term for the “constitutional” setup of the European Union.

<sup>72</sup> The fact that few Europeans (or Americans, for that matter) have a transatlantic identity, whereas many consider themselves as having a European identity in addition to their national identities illustrates this fundamental difference between the EU and NATO.

## Integrated deterrence

What would it take for a French nuclear umbrella to be credible, tolerable, and reassuring? Crucially, compared to the U.S., the political requirements for meeting these criteria are more demanding than the military ones. The USA can “only” offer extended deterrence, France must and would offer more: “must” because otherwise it could not replace the U.S. as Europe’s nuclear protector, and “would” because its peace and security, prosperity and political sovereignty are inextricably linked to its European neighbours. Just as there is no standard term for the political (i.e., constitutional) nature of the EU, there is, as yet, no term for the specific nature of French nuclear protection under these conditions: neither extended deterrence as provided by the U.S., nor primary or homeland deterrence, which is reserved for the nation-state proper. This third kind of deterrence could be referred to as *integrated deterrence*: deterrence for and by a community of states bolstered by far-reaching inter- and supranational integration.<sup>73</sup>

What extend and kind of nuclear capabilities France would need for integrated deterrence would ultimately have to be determined by France and its European partners. However, given the unique character of Europe’s political union a massive build-up of nuclear weapons to the American level would be neither necessary nor desirable.

In addition to retaliatory and escalatory capabilities, integrated deterrence would have a third requirement: political-military participation. In NATO, this is achieved through the nuclear sharing arrangement. Similarly, French nuclear weapons would also be based in partner countries. As in NATO, where the U.S. president would have to release American nuclear weapons for delivery by European allies, their

<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Bruno Tertrais raises the possibility of such a novel type of deterrence in proposing the prospect of a French declaration to the effect that the mutual assistance clause of the EU treaty would be honoured by all means, including French nuclear weapons: “This would not be an ‘extended’ deterrence in the traditional sense of the term.” (Bruno Tertrais, *The European Dimension of Nuclear Deterrence: French and British Policies and Future Scenarios* [Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), 2018], [https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/wp106\\_tertrais\\_european\\_nuclear\\_deterrence.pdf](https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/wp106_tertrais_european_nuclear_deterrence.pdf) [accessed 10 June 2020]). However, he does not elaborate on the political underpinning needed to render such a declaration credible to partners and opponents alike.

use with France as the protector would require a decision by the French president. Unlike in NATO, however, the delivery systems could be provided not only by individual allies but also by designated units of joint European forces.

However, an integrated deterrent could be effective without such military arrangements, while some measure of political participation would be indispensable. In NATO, the Nuclear Planning Group was created to make America’s nuclear strategy more transparent to allies and to enable them to bring their interests to bear. The extent to which this happens is unknown to the general public. In the case of European self-defence propped up by a French nuclear deterrent, however, such political participation could and would have to be much more extensive than would be expected in extended deterrence contingencies. As it would constitute a breach of the NPT, there could be no infringement of the French president’s decision-making monopoly (e.g., by means of a “second key” granted to partners). Below this threshold, however, consultative mechanisms could be established, military personnel from non-nuclear partners could act as liaison officers with French nuclear forces, and a “doctrine of integrated deterrence” could be developed in joint White Papers.

## What should be done?

After World War II, barely anyone would have dared predict that Germany and the victims of Nazi aggression would be able to create a peace community grounded in an unprecedented level of integration and reciprocal confidence in non-violent conflict resolution. And yet, in 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Unique circumstances made European unity possible, but it was not down to circumstances alone. It took bold political leadership to harness them for the common European good and thus draw peace-building lessons from Europe’s war-torn history of the first half of the twentieth century.

Similarly, it will take political will to empower Europe to defend itself. As described, the costs and risks of Europe’s dependence on the U.S. and several recent developments favour European self-reliance, and its requirements (“What must be done?”) could be met (“What could be done?”). But to underestimate the magnitude of the challenges would be courting failure. Of these challenges, financial constraints do not pose an insurmountable obstacle. European self-



defence implies a mutual readiness to engage in a relationship of existential dependency. To be crisis-proof, such readiness must be consistently and reliably backed by Europe's citizens. The task of political leadership is not only to build on popular support, but to also nurture that support by showing courage, steadfastness, and a willingness to spend political capital.

### **Costs and risks must be identified and discussed.**

Only those in power can lead. In a democracy, power requires an electoral mandate. Exercising leadership when public opinion is unfavourable can only be expected if national interests outweigh the costs and risks. In this section we will therefore discuss frequent objections against striving for European defence autonomy.

### **Too little Europeanism**

The crisis-ridden monetary union is a reminder that European self-defence requires a far-reaching convergence of national interests and mentalities. Heeding this lesson does not imply that a self-defence union presupposes a European federal state: The EU would not have come into existence or would have disintegrated during one of its crises if other types of political entity than the nation-state or a federal state were not possible.

However, the question remains whether a common European identity that is weaker than separate national identities can be strong enough to sustain a European self-defence union. Referring to monetary union, Peter Graf Kielmansegg asserts: "The European Union, and this will not change, must live with legitimacy and solidarity remaining scarce resources."<sup>74</sup> But there is no way of determining just how scarce these resources really are at any given moment. More importantly, the "reservoir" of common interests and European identity is not static, it can grow or shrink over time. As there is no fixed upper limit to its size, it is in the hands of the EU Member States and institutions themselves to expand this "reservoir" through

policies and projects that deliver tangible benefits to Europe's citizens.<sup>75</sup>

### **Insufficient resources**

Europe would have to spend more on defence if it wanted to stand on its own feet. The extra expenditure required is influenced by a host of different factors, with the military capabilities of potential adversaries being a decisive, but not the sole factor. In any case, military instruments have to be part and parcel of a political strategy that accords priority to preventing and resolving conflicts through non-military incentives and sanctions, while backed up by the threat and use of military means when necessary. If Europe had to provide for its own defence because the U.S. withdrew from NATO, it *could* raise the requisite funds and manpower. Hence, whether it *should* do so in the absence of such a Pearl Harbor-like shock is not a financial, but a political question, the bottom line of which is the value Europeans attach to being fully sovereign.

### **Lack of credibility**

Self-defence requires a mixture of conventional and nuclear capabilities. As explained above, prevailing circumstances are such that only French forces could be the nuclear arm of a European self-defence posture. A massive build-up of French nuclear capabilities is politically impossible, as is depriving the French president of his decision-making monopoly. If, like America's today, a French nuclear commitment remained within the realm of extended deterrence, its credibility would be doubtful. Thus, European self-defence with French nuclear forces is only feasible if it is preceded and sustained by a substantially deeper and broader level of European integration, which would have to include an alignment of strategic cultures. Then, a new kind of deterrent could emerge, which would be neither extended nor primary deterrence. This *integrated deterrent* could be credible as the

74 Peter Graf Kielmansegg, "Europa. Neu denken", FAZ, 20 April 2020, 6 (my translation).

75 Against the backdrop of the corona pandemic, Schäuble postulates: "The European community of fate is especially forged in times of crisis. Identities are not set in stone, they can change as a result of challenges met successfully together." (Wolfgang Schäuble, "Aus eigener Stärke", FAZ, 6 July 2020, 6 – my translation).

nuclear backbone of a European self-defence capacity.<sup>76</sup>

## Hazardous transition

Were the U.S. to abruptly withdraw its pledge of protection, European self-defence would have to be created overnight. Yet in such a worst-case scenario, the opposite might in fact happen: a national “every man for himself” scramble that would spell the end of European unity. Betting on a Pearl Harbor-type shock would therefore be irresponsible.

In contrast, bolstering European defence capabilities up to the point of self-reliance would be an undertaking set in train and fostered by a series of deliberate political decisions. Such a process, so the objection goes, could risk creating a fatal security gap by prematurely corroding American protection when it is still needed. In this scenario, driving the process forward would be distrust of America’s reliability or fear that Washington could exploit the vulnerability of its European “protégés”. According to this argument, this could trigger a detrimental self-fulfilling prophecy that would further exacerbate transatlantic tensions and be grist to the mills of American isolationists or unilateralists calling for American security commitments to Europe to be rescinded.

This risk cannot be denied. Therefore, every effort should be made to develop European defence autonomy in lockstep with Washington. After all, such European emancipation is also in the interests of the U.S. A Europe that could stand on its own feet would free up American resources for domestic or global use, above all to deal with China from a position of economic and technological strength. On the one hand, a Europe shedding its defence dependency might be a more recalcitrant partner, on the other, it would also be a stronger partner in helping a reinvigorated “West” to promote a sustainable, cooperative and rules-based international order.

<sup>76</sup> Admittedly, “credibility” is an inherently elusive concept. The standard dictionary of the German language (*Duden*) defines “credible” as “appearing true, correct, reliable, and thus justifying belief in it”. The effect of a nuclear deterrent threat depends on the perception of its addressee who either does or does not believe that the threat would actually be carried out. This is something undetectable from the outside. All the more so since even the party to be deterred may not be certain about what to believe or not to believe until the point at which a decision about what action to take is required.

Trump’s America is not a partner in this. Yet there is still another America that already under President Kennedy was prepared to agree on a transatlantic “Declaration of Interdependence” based on full equality. If this were not the case, there would be one more reason to strive for European self-defence. Certainly, it would be more difficult to minimise the risk described here. But Washington would still retain a vested interest in Europe: as a major trading and investment partner as well as ally vis-à-vis China, as a partner in shaping the global order, and as a valuable component of America’s global military network. Last but not least, the U.S. has more common interests, values, and history with Europe than with any other part of the world.

Nevertheless, a residual risk would remain. This also applies, albeit to a much lesser extent, to the Kennedy-style cooperative scenario. On the other side of the ledger, there are the structural and other current factors speaking in favour of a fully sovereign Europe. Whether they outweigh the risk is a matter of judgement and not something that can be scientifically proven.

## Provoking European divisions

Currently, there is no widespread support within and among EU Member States for empowering Europe to defend itself. And unless the U.S. were to unexpectedly renege on its commitment enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO treaty, this is unlikely to change soon. It could therefore be argued that propagating European self-defence would strain EU cohesion at a time when, in addition to grappling with the stabilisation of the euro architecture, unresolved migratory challenges, populism, and rule of law deficiencies, the Union has also been severely hit by the fallout of the corona pandemic.<sup>77</sup>

While this objection must be taken seriously, it does not imply relinquishing a project being pursued for all the compelling reasons expounded earlier.<sup>78</sup> Those who do not want to join cannot claim a right of veto.

<sup>77</sup> On Europe’s many lingering crises, see Eckhard Lübke-meier, *Europas Banalität des Guten. Ursachen der europäischen Dauerkrise und Auswege – ein Wegweiser (Europe’s Banality of the Good. A guide to the causes of Europe’s crises and how to overcome them)*, SWP Studie 6/2019 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2019).

<sup>78</sup> See “Why Revisit the Topic of European Defence Autonomy?”

Yet a disintegrating Europe is incongruous with a sovereign Europe. Advocates of European self-defence must therefore proceed with caution and follow a series of guidelines, including exemplary adherence to treaties and rules; readiness to compromise and extend solidarity; stabilisation of the monetary union as a pillar of a sovereign Europe; strengthening of the internal market; concerted and sustained promotion of economic recovery from the corona crisis; openness to selective participation of non-members; commitment to transatlantic partnership in general and NATO in particular.<sup>79</sup>

This applies to Germany and France in particular. Given their political, economic, and military weight, these two countries constitute the critical mass. The viability of any major European project, and certainly an endeavour as sweeping and disruptive as European self-defence, requires their active encouragement. In Article 14 of the Franco-German Aachen Treaty concluded on 22 January 2019, Germany and France professed that “their security interests are inseparably linked” and agreed on an assistance clause which is more binding than Article 5 of the NATO Treaty and which, unlike Article 42(7) of the EU Treaty (TEU), explicitly states that assistance would include military means, as well.

Germany and France face a dilemma: Due to their collective weight and because, rather than in spite of their differences, they are Europe’s indispensable duo, putting them in a position of *primi inter pares* that can evoke feelings of unease among their EU partners. The duo cannot escape the dilemma, but they can attenuate it by striving to enlist as many like-minded partners as possible;<sup>80</sup> by adhering to

**79** The issue of NATO commitment is not only important given the position of EU members such as Poland and the Baltic states, which given their reading of the Russian threat, are particularly intent on leaving no doubt about continued American backing. As long as there are recurrent hostilities between Greece and Turkey, their joint membership in an American-led NATO contributes to containing this long-standing conflict.

**80** It is not really possible to identify these partners in advance, i.e., before France and Germany agree on the project and thus force their European partners to take sides. There would, however, have to be partners who also belong to the currency union, currently the most de-nationalised part of the EU architecture and with the greatest potential for furthering the broad-based integration that a viable self-defence posture requires. There could also be non-euro coun-

tries, but any EU states clinging onto their neutrality status would be ineligible.

the aforementioned guidelines, as well as by leading through example, i.e., demonstrating that they are determined to advance their bilateral integration and take joint military action.<sup>81</sup>

Equally important, the best should not be made the enemy of the good. Europe must improve its military capacity to act. Washington will insist on this, and the EU Member States are agreed that it is the order of the day. Where there is no consensus, however, is on whether empowering Europe militarily should extend beyond Europe being *more* rather than fully autonomous.

This disunity should not deter the advocates of European self-defence, however. In any case, their goal cannot be achieved in one fell swoop, but only through progressively increasing Europe’s defence autonomy. Thus, the projects agreed in the PESCO framework, the European Intervention Initiative launched by France, as well as bilateral and multi-lateral armament programs and joint operations all serve the purpose, even in the absence of a commonly agreed final objective, and as such should be strongly supported by proponents of European self-defence.

In doing so, these advocates should, however, make no bones about their ultimate goal. Any attempt to obfuscate their long-term intentions would be doomed to fail and sow distrust, which would hamper embedding the project into an overarching strategy designed to foster further European integration and reinvigorate the transatlantic partnership. The evolution of the EU has been made possible by projects and policies such as the euro or the Schengen Area, which some members chose not to join. A Europe that has expanded to a union of 27 nation-states cannot function without differentiated integration, i.e., the possibility of not everyone taking part in everything. Both sides must respect this systemic requirement: those who want to integrate further and those who, at least initially, do not.

*Conclusion:* European self-defence is a visionary project that comes with costs and risks. These must be clearly identified and rigorously debated lest the vision becomes an illusion. Yet Europe’s inability to defend

tries, but any EU states clinging onto their neutrality status would be ineligible.

**81** The Franco-German Brigade is a case in point. Established in 1988 as a role model for Franco-German military integration, it has never been employed *in toto*.

itself also carries costs and risks that could increase even further, and as long as it depends on American protection, Europe can never be fully sovereign. Should Europe be willing to pay the price of shaking off its dependency and turn the transatlantic security relationship into a symmetrical partnership of equals? There is no one answer to this, but, before taking a political decision, the pros and cons should be the subject of a public debate. This chapter has tried to provide an informed background for such a debate. I will now set out my answer to the question in the concluding chapter.

# The Case for European Self-Defence

For Chancellor Merkel, Europe’s “task of the future” is to take its destiny into its own hands.<sup>82</sup> To do so, Europe must be able to provide for its own defence. Such autonomy neither implies autarky nor the dissolution of NATO and the end of the transatlantic partnership. What it does require is status parity. Since World War II and notwithstanding the demise of the Cold War, European-American relations have been characterised by asymmetrical interdependence. Even though the U.S. benefits from NATO and its military facilities and troops based in Europe, there remains a fundamental disparity: the U.S. does not depend on European assistance for its core national security, it cannot and will not relinquish its autonomy. Europe, in contrast, does not have this autonomy as it relies on an American defence backstop. The U.S. is the protector, Europe the protégé.

For decades, this arrangement has enabled Europe to not only survive but prosper under America’s protective mantle. But unilateral dependency inevitably comes at a price. The West’s community of values and convergence of interests, its economic success and the NATO alliance have made that price bearable for both Europe and its American protector. All the more so because there was no viable alternative: Europe was too weak and divided to stand on its own feet, while Washington had a strategic interest in Europe and an alliance with Europe in which it was *primus inter pares*.

In essence, after more than 70 years this is still the case. However, is this arrangement sustainable and even if it is – *should* it be maintained? Not only Chancellor Merkel but also others like her have raised doubts about its durability,<sup>83</sup> prompted by the devel-

opments described above and by the structural incentive inherent in a relationship of asymmetrical interdependence: “Guaranteeing protection from outside threats, being able to defend yourself, however, is a prerequisite and the innermost core of the sovereignty of states.”<sup>84</sup>

Thus, sovereignty and mastering one’s own destiny go hand in hand. In Europe, such sovereignty can only be attained collectively. On a global scale, even large European states are no more than middleweights. For European nation-states to gain parity with global state or non-state actors such as Google, Amazon, or Facebook, they have to pool their resources through European integration. Thanks to the EU’s internal market, a common currency, and its technological prowess, Europe is an economic and regulatory power with global reach. But the giant has an Achilles’ heel: Unlike the U.S., Europe cannot provide for its own defence.

Eliminating this vulnerability requires political stamina, considerable investment, and a Europe that continues to grow together. European identity and solidarity based on the convergence of national interests are the key ingredients of a European community of nation-states: a historically unique entity in which nation-states do not fade away but engage in a sweeping collectivisation of competences.

Embedded in such a community, Europe’s capacity for self-defence could gradually expand. Such a process would cast a different light on the crucial question of how to substitute the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

its allies. The fact that these guarantees have stayed in place for over sixty years is impressive, but it is a long time since they have been tested, and their foundations are becoming more fragile” (*The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* [see note 58], 678).

<sup>84</sup> Wolfgang Schäuble and Karl Lamers, *Überlegungen zur europäischen Politik*, 1 September 1994, [https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/schaeuble-lamers-papier-1994.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/schaeuble-lamers-papier-1994.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1) (accessed 18 July 2020 – my translation).

<sup>82</sup> Speech by Chancellor Merkel [see note 40].

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*; for two academic voices, see Freedman and Michaels: “The weakest link in the whole nuclear order remains extended deterrence, the requirement that the United States accepts the risk of nuclear war on behalf of

After all, as long as there is a risk of having to confront a nuclear-armed adversary, Europe cannot be sovereign without its own nuclear deterrent.

Unlike the intergovernmental NATO, the EU is a political hybrid of both inter- and supranational components. Europe's unique setup lends itself to an unprecedented type of nuclear protection: no longer the extended deterrence provided by an external power, but not yet the primary deterrence, which is reserved for the nation-state proper. This novel type of nuclear deterrence might be referred to as *integrated deterrence*. As in extended deterrence contingencies, the efficacy of integrated deterrence would depend on meeting three criteria of deterring a potential opponent, reassuring a protégé, and being tolerable to a nuclear protector. Yet unlike extended deterrence in the context of NATO's looser association of nation-states, Europe's broader and deeper integration would place less stringent demands on the scale and quality of its nuclear deterrent. Thus, a close-knit Europe could eventually be protected by an integrated French nuclear deterrent that would not have to fulfil the more exacting requirements of extended deterrence. Consequently, in terms of scale and sophistication, the French arsenal would not have to mirror America's.<sup>85</sup>

The validity of this argument could be disputed on several grounds. The weakest counterargument employs the benchmark of extended deterrence. Such reference fails to recognise geography and the differences between the nature of NATO and the EU: If the U.S. were a European neighbour and a member of the EU, NATO allies would have been spared some of the bitter controversies about transatlantic burden-sharing and the requirements for a credible U.S. nuclear commitment.<sup>86</sup>

A second objection is that there is neither a demand for nor an offer of French nuclear protection for European self-defence. While this has been and remains the case, the status quo is not immutable.

<sup>85</sup> For an elaboration of the concept of *integrated deterrence* see p. 29.

<sup>86</sup> In such hypothetical circumstances it would, for example, have been virtually impossible to differentiate between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons as Washington and Moscow have done. As explained in footnote 5, this distinction served as a trigger for the transatlantic debate in the late 1970s about a deterrence gap allegedly caused by Soviet deployment of intermediate-range and thus "sub-strategic" SS-20 missiles. Then German chancellor Helmut Schmidt was a major proponent of this thesis.

Perhaps Europe will never be able or willing to emancipate itself from reliance on American protection. But only a sustained attempt to do so can prove or disprove this.

### Political will would have to pave the way.

Europe would have the economic, technological, and financial resources to develop and deploy an effective self-defence. The key question is whether it could and should muster the political will.

Certainly, the path would still be challenging and demanding, requiring the creation of a European community of fate through far-reaching integration and cooperation. While not free of conflict, its steadily reinforced foundation of trust and solidarity would reassure its members of the solidity of their mutual defence commitments.

Not all EU Member States would participate from the outset. Who is willing to be a first-mover would only become apparent once there was an initiative and this would have to come from Germany and France. They are European heavyweights capable of being the critical mass of a self-defence project and with Brexit, France is Europe's only nuclear-armed power. European defence autonomy does not require identical strategic cultures, but it can only be achieved if there is a greater convergence of German and French strategic cultures, i.e., their approaches to the role of arms and armed forces in Europe's foreign and security policy. Such convergence cannot involve the unilateral adoption of French views by Germany, nor would it have to. While France is the nuclear monopolist, it cannot claim the same supremacy that the U.S. holds within NATO. France cannot escape its geo-strategic destiny of being a direct neighbour of Germany, a country that outstrips France in terms of economic and technological prowess.

Still, the necessary convergence of Franco-German strategic cultures will demand a great deal of Germany and its entrenched "culture of military restraint", in terms of defence spending, arms exports, and deployment of armed forces.<sup>87</sup> Germany's observation

<sup>87</sup> "If we are serious about common European defence, then all those involved must be prepared to question their own traditional positions and practices and adjust them to a certain extent [...] We Germans must understand that it is not only our domestic thinking about such questions that is at issue but also our ability to be a reliable ally" (Wolfgang

that military means do not solve conflicts is accurate and is also an appropriate admonition to prioritise conflict prevention and resolution using instruments other than military. But as long as there are actors who do not heed this admonition and continue to threaten or use force, these actors would enjoy a strategic advantage if they did not have to expect armed resistance. The self-proclaimed “Islamic State” could not be dealt with diplomatically, it had to be defeated militarily. When Russia acts as an aggressor, as it did by annexing the Crimean peninsula or is still doing in eastern Ukraine, and as long as it commits war crimes in Syria, no level of trust in Russia can develop that would obviate the need for military protection from it. The EU is a peace community in which wars have become unthinkable. A global peace community is a desirable but still unrealistic vision, and since nuclear weapons cannot be uninvented, a nuclear deterrent capability remains indispensable.<sup>88</sup>

In the land of Clausewitz, the public and scholarly debate on the military dimension of strategy has atrophied.<sup>89</sup> Referring to Germany, Peter Rudolf notes: “Today, it seems that the talk of nuclear weapons as ‘political weapons’ serves mainly to evade a discussion on nuclear deterrence.”<sup>90</sup> In the past, defence postures and their mixture of conventional and nuclear forces had been the subject of sustained and controversial debates, starting with Germany’s rearmament in the 1950s, the role of U.S. nuclear weapons for deterrence and defence against Soviet aggression in the 1960s and ‘70s and how to respond

to the Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles in the 1980s.<sup>91</sup>

When the communist empire imploded and the Cold War ended, a “New World Order” and a “New Age of Democracy, Peace and Unity”<sup>92</sup> appeared to be within reach. Even in Europe, however, just a few years later, wars erupted in the former Yugoslavia, resulting in the first ever combat mission of the German Bundeswehr in 1999. After September 11, 2001, the Bundeswehr was deployed to Afghanistan as part of an “out of area” NATO mission. Since then, Germany has contributed to military operations against the “Islamic State”, in Mali and elsewhere. Russian aggression in Crimea and eastern Ukraine rekindled the need to reinforce territorial and alliance defence capabilities. In addition, President Trump has recklessly and deliberately called into question the reliability of America’s commitment to NATO, while an assertive China stokes Sino-American rivalry.

Thus, Germany’s strategic environment has become more unstable, threatening, and challenging. However, the level and intensity of the strategic debate have not kept pace with these changes. It takes intellectual and political courage to draw both ambitious and uncomfortable conclusions regarding Germany’s security, alliance, and European policy.<sup>93</sup>

The conclusion advanced in this study is that, like the U.S., Europe should be able to defend itself. To achieve European defence autonomy, political leaders must adopt it as their objective. Germany and France must lead by example and intensify their bilateral

Schäuble, “Humboldt-Rede zu Europa”, 5 December 2019, <https://bit.ly/3jeVP0j> [accessed 18 July 2020] – my translation).

**88** More generally, this applies to all weaponry and the use of force: “Short of universal brain surgery, nothing can erase the memory of weapons and how to build them. If ‘total disarmament’ could make war unlikely, it would have to be by reducing incentives. The most primitive war could be modernized by rearmament” (Schelling, *Arms and Influence* [see note 62], 248).

**89** 2020 marks his 240th birthday. Michael Howard, historian and co-founder of the IISS, has written a vade mecum about Clausewitz’ seminal work *Vom Kriege*, in which he opens with: “About Karl von Clausewitz’s study *On War* the American strategic thinker Bernard Brodie has made the bold statement ‘His is not simply the greatest, but the only great book about war.’ It is difficult to disagree” (Michael Howard, *Clausewitz* [Oxford and New York, 1983], 1).

**90** Peter Rudolf, *Deutschland, die Nato und die nukleare Abschreckung*, SWP-Studie 11/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, May 2020), 23.

**91** See, e.g., Helmut Schmidt, *Verteidigung oder Vergeltung* (Stuttgart, 1961); K.-Peter Stratmann, *NATO-Strategie in der Krise? Militärische Optionen von NATO und Warschauer Pakt in Mitteleuropa* (Baden-Baden, 1981), and Uwe Nerlich and Trutz Rendtorff, eds., *Nukleare Abschreckung – Politische und ethische Interpretationen einer neuen Realität* (Baden-Baden, 1989).

**92** Title of the “Charter of Paris for a New Europe”, adopted by the states participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in November 1990.

**93** This applies primarily to political leaders (government, parliament, parties), but also to experts in the media and academia. For its latest *Coalition Explorer*, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) asked members of the foreign and security policy elites in all EU Member States about their political priorities: defence was ranked 14th on the list of German priorities while it came first in France (Jana Puglierin and Ulrike Esther Franke, *The Big Engine that Might: How France and Germany Can Build a Geopolitical Europe* [London: ECFR, July 2020], 27, [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/the\\_big\\_engine\\_that\\_might\\_how\\_france\\_and\\_germany.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/the_big_engine_that_might_how_france_and_germany.pdf) [accessed 14 August 2020]).

integration in the political, economic, and military spheres. A Franco-German community of fate could be the nucleus and serve as a catalyst for a European (self-) defence union.

But even if this ultimate goal were unattainable, a Franco-German underpinning of the European Union serves Germany's main interest in a strong and united Europe. Moreover, it would offer Germany a nuclear back-up that would render it less dependent on Washington, thus reinforcing its national security.<sup>94</sup> President Macron has called on his European partners to engage in a strategic dialogue on the role of nuclear deterrence for their common security.<sup>95</sup> Germany and France had already resolved to carry out such a dialogue in 1996.<sup>96</sup> Nearly a quarter of a century later, Germany should take up President Macron's offer and expand the agenda to include a dialogue on how Europe could achieve defence autonomy and thus become fully sovereign at long last.

## Abbreviations

|      |  |
|------|--|
| ECB  | European Central Bank                                      |
| ECFR | European Council on Foreign Relations                      |
| EU   | European Union   |
| FAZ  | Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung                             |
| GDP  | gross domestic product                                     |
| IISS | The International Institute for Strategic Studies (London) |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization                         |
| PPP  | purchasing power parity                                    |

<sup>94</sup> See Eckhard Lübke, "Wir brauchen Paris als nukleare Rückversicherung", *FAZ*, 15 March 2019, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Présidence de la République, "Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defence and Deterrence Strategy", Paris, 7 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defence-and-deterrence-strategy.en> (accessed 25 March 2020).

<sup>96</sup> "Our two countries are ready to engage in a dialogue on the role of nuclear deterrence in the context of European defence policy" (The German Government, *Gemeinsame Erklärung des Deutsch-Französischen Verteidigungs- und Sicherheitsrats – Tagung am 9. Dezember 1996 in Nürnberg*, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/gemeinsame-erklarung-des-deutsch-franzoesischen-verteidigungs-und-sicherheitsrats-tagung-am-9-dezember-1996-in-nuernberg-805934> [accessed 28 March 2020]).



