ALL OR NOTHING?
EUROPEAN AND BRITISH STRATEGIC
AUTONOMY AFTER THE BREXIT

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September 2016

EGMONT

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INTRODUCTION

The Member States of the European Union (EU) must continue to deepen their military cooperation. For without cooperation, their defence efforts are just not cost-effective enough. Because of fragmentation and duplication, defence expenditure, even as in some countries it is rising, does not yield enough employable capability. Meanwhile the key capability shortfalls remain unaddressed. The public does expect European governments and the EU to deal with the security challenges in and around Europe however. So does the United States (US), whose strategic focus has pivoted to China and the Pacific. Washington has made it clear in words and in deeds that it will not, and cannot, solve all of Europe's problems. The call for "strategic autonomy", in the new *EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy* (EUGS) of June 2016, does not come a moment too soon.

The Brexit will not change these facts. Nor will it necessarily create any obstacle to overcome the lack of cooperation within the EU, for the United Kingdom (UK) never showed much inclination to pool and share its capabilities with other countries anyway. Quite the contrary, London will now no longer be able to block the remaining Member States from using EU institutions and Treaty provisions to the full. It is now up to the other capitals to accelerate cooperation, and prove that they were not conveniently hiding behind the British objections but are serious about European defence.

In multinational capability development, the Brexit might thus even make things easier. When it comes to deploying those capabilities for operations, it will likely not affect the existing situation very much. The British contribution to operations under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has always been limited, and the UK could still take part in operations if it wanted to, as many non-Member States do today. More importantly, the other countries are unfortunately not that keen to deploy troops under the CSDP either.[1] In recent years operations have increasingly been mounted by ad hoc coalitions outside the formal framework of both the EU and NATO, without all Member States or Allies participating (even when a coalition uses the NATO command structure). The Brexit will probably increase this tendency, even though chances are that the UK will be so preoccupied with the fall-out of the Brexit that its international presence will suffer – as in fact it already has ever since the Scottish referendum forced it to focus on domestic politics.

Brexit does however greatly complicate the strategic decision-making that frames both capability development and operations. The EUGS states that in order to achieve the desired strategic autonomy, "a sectoral strategy, to be agreed by the

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[1]   As a military officer put it to the author: "The current CSDP deployment of less than 3000 is hardly a comprehensive endorsement from Member States of the military role of the EU".

Council, should further specify the civil-military level of ambition, tasks, require-ments and capability priorities stemming from this Strategy". The operational dimen-sion of strategic autonomy comes down to the ability to act without the US (Biscop, 2015). From that follows the industrial dimension: having a defence industry that can produce everything that this requires, notably the strategic enablers. But should the aim now be *EU* strategic autonomy, without the UK, or can the aspiration still be *European* strategic autonomy, with the UK? If the latter, how to involve Britain? Either way, the implications for capability development are obvious. Furthermore, the reasons why and the context in which actual operations take place, are often determined by collective EU foreign policy choices, and that foreign policy will in turn be framed by the new EUGS. This is the case even when troops are deployed by NATO or an ad hoc coalition. Just think of NATO's actions, under Article 5, in response to Russian military posturing after the Ukraine crisis – in which Europe and the US got involved as a consequence of EU decisions. Thus the question also imposes itself: Should the UK not seek to be associated with the implementation of the EUGS overall? And which arrangements could be imagined?

Can nothing be achieved unless all are fully involved? Or are intermediate solutions possible? How EU Member States and the UK answer these questions will determine which degree of strategic autonomy the EU can achieve, with which degree of British involvement – and whether the UK itself will be left with any measure of strategic autonomy.

Strategy First: What Are the Military Tasks?

The first question to answer is what exactly operational strategic autonomy means: Which military tasks, in which parts of the world, do Europeans always need to be able to undertake, if necessary even without the US?

The answer can be found dispersed throughout the EUGS. This dispersion was intentional. Including a separate chapter on defence would in its obviousness have provoked greater reticence on the part of the usual suspects. Instead therefore, the defence implications of every choice were spelt out chapter by chapter. As a result the Member States favouring a strong defence dimension actually ended up becoming quite suspicious, fearing that defence would be drowned in a broad EUGS. But the EUGS turned out to be one of the most ambitious EU documents on defence to date.

The EUGS defines four major tasks for Europe's armed forces:

First, the new task, in an EU framework, of helping to protect "the European way of life" at home. While there is no need to duplicate NATO's traditional collective defence arrangements against the threat of military invasion, the EU has an increasingly important role to play in addressing "challenges with both an internal and external dimension, such as terrorism, hybrid threats, cyber and energy security, organised crime and external border management". In a democracy, the armed forces are not in the lead when dealing with such threats (and neither, therefore, is NATO), but they support the other security services and they are the last resort in times of crisis. Such internal deployments are first and foremost a national responsibility (as seen in Belgium and France after they were hit by terrorist attacks), and indeed in legal terms CSDP operations can only take place outside the EU. But *European* cooperation must nonetheless be permanently stepped up between military and civilian intelligence services, between national and EU crisis centres, police and judicial authorities and paramilitary forces such as gendarmerie and coast guard, and between all of these and the armed forces (notably when the latter operate on Europe's borders).

This first task is essential to enable the EU to live up to the expectation inherent in the Mutual Assistance and the Solidarity Clauses (Article 42.7 TEU and 222 TFEU): that as a security community, the Union will protect its citizens, territory and borders. Indeed, a strategy that would not have emphasized Europe's own security would have been utterly lacking in credibility at a time when public opinion is shaken by a wave of terrorist attacks and by the refugee crisis.

Second, to contribute to "the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa", but also, in fact, to maintain security in the neighbourhood by forceful means when necessary. For while the

overall emphasis is on building "inclusive, prosperous and secure societies" and, in the military sphere, on capacity-building, the EUGS also states that the EU "will take responsibility foremost in Europe and its surrounding regions". In other words, the neighbourhood is where Europeans must be prepared to undertake military crisis management, because it is directly linked to their own security, as the fall-out of the Syrian war has sadly demonstrated. In the neighbourhood Europeans must therefore always be able to act, even alone, so it is the focus of the aspiration to strategic autonomy.

That is a very ambitious aspiration, first of all because the EUGS defines a geographically much broader neighbourhood than the European Neighbourhood Policy. Because also in this broad region capacity-building (that is designing, training and equipping effective armed forces, and accompanying them on patrols and operations) by nature demands a very long-term involvement. But if the EU's help is requested, it should not be stingy and engage at a significant enough level to make a difference, in sufficient numbers and with enough budget. Furthermore, because when actual war is ongoing, pending a political solution the EUGS commits the EU to "protect human lives, notably civilians" and to "support and help consolidate local ceasefires". That entails deploying troops with serious firepower on the ground, backed up by air support and ready reserves, who will not necessarily seek out and destroy an opponent but who will fight when the civilians for whom they are responsible are threatened. Without that determination, the EU will not have created a safe zone but a trap – remember Srebrenica. For many Member States, land operations with such a high potential of combat go far beyond anything that they have recently undertaken, certainly in an autonomous European framework. It is vital therefore that the implications of this task are spelled out in the white paper and fully taken on board by the political and military leadership.

Third, to help maintain "sustainable access to the global commons", which is directly related to the EU's vital interests. The EUGS announces multilateral diplomatic initiatives in key areas but also envisages a stepped up military contribution, especially as a "global maritime security provider", and with a specific focus on Asia. Here the EU seeks "to make greater practical contributions" to security, including by helping to build maritime capacities and supporting "an ASEAN-led regional security architecture". The EU can engage in exchange of expertise, combined training and education (notably via the European Security and Defence College), combined exercises and manoeuvres, and actual combined patrolling and operations, with ASEAN for example, and with strategic partners such as India, Japan, South Korea and China itself. Such activities would not only create local capacity but have an important confidence and security-building effect as well. This engagement thus also contributes to another objective of the EUGS: promoting cooperative regional orders in sensitive areas. In this context, the proposal by French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, at the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, to coordinate a maritime

presence in Asia through the EU takes on additional importance after the Brexit. Increasing the visibility of the different European countries' maritime presence by putting them under the same flag can compensate for Europe's loss of face, is the best way of making the most of available means, and enhances a distinct European presence that can promote specific European interests.

Fourth, "to assist further and complement UN peacekeeping". As the EUGS proclaims the maintenance of a rules-based global order, with the UN at the core, to be a vital interest of the EU, Europeans must act when the UN decides the rules have been broken. Whether Europeans deploy as blue helmets, under direct UN command, or not is of secondary importance. The key thing is that when requested by the UN, Europeans must demonstrate more solidarity more quickly, including in areas outside Europe's broad neighbourhood (such as the CSDP operation in the Central African Republic in 2014-2015, though that also serves as an example of how tortuous the EU force generation process can be).

These four tasks represent a clear increase in the burden placed on Europe's armed forces, for expeditionary operations as well as for support to "homeland security".

ON TO A WHITE PAPER AND A NEW HEADLINE GOAL

Assuring these tasks requires "full-spectrum land, air, space and maritime capabilities, including strategic enablers", as the EUGS states. What the EUGS does not do, is to quantify these four military tasks and the desired concurrency: How many operations, of which size, should Europeans be able to undertake simultaneously, without relying on non-European assets (as strategic autonomy demands)?

That is what the "sectoral strategy" on defence, which the EUGS envisages, should now do, or the *Strategic Implementation Plan on Security and Defence* (SPIS) as the High Representative subsequently re-baptized it in a September meeting of the Political and Security Committee. What this really is, of course, is an EU defence white paper. Not calling it that is another conscious cosmetic choice on the part of the High Representative, just like dispersing defence throughout the EUGS, in order not to get embroiled in debates over symbols at the risk of endangering the substance. As this author need not worry about such niceties, this paper will henceforth simply refer to a white paper.

An Ambitious Headline Goal

An example of desired concurrency, to be achieved in different phases by a certain deadline, say 2030, could be:

- Long-term capacity-building efforts in several countries of the broader neighbourhood.
- Long-term military cooperation activities with the EU's strategic partners and with regional architectures such as ASEAN, including a naval presence.
- 2 long-term brigade-size stabilization operations (either preventively or post-conflict) in the broader neighbourhood.
- 2 long-term battalion-size contributions to UN stabilization operations (either preventively or post-conflict) beyond the neighbourhood.
- 3 long-term naval operations (before, during or after a conflict) in the broader neighbourhood.
- 1 Battlegroup-size evacuation operation of EU citizens, worldwide.
- 1 high intensity joint crisis management operation in the broader neighbourhood, of up to several brigades and/or squadrons.

In light of the crises in Europe's neighbourhood (to the east and to the south) and the global geopolitical tensions today, this level of ambition is none too high. It is but the reflection of the rhythm of operations of the last decade, in which European armed forces, under various flags, have been part of interventions in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Indian Ocean, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, the Mediterranean, and Syria.

And yet it is clear that this level of ambition cannot be achieved with the capability requirements as they are currently defined, i.e. the Headline Goal: the ability to deploy and sustain up to 60,000 troops (that is, up to a corps) for at least one year. Europe can deploy 60,000 troops – at times in the previous decade up to 80,000 troops from EU Member States were deployed – but not autonomously. It can do so only if the US provides the strategic enablers. And de facto it also counts on the US as the strategic reserve in case any deployment runs into serious trouble, for once 60,000 European troops are deployed, Europe will find itself scraping the bottom of the barrel to send out any more.

As it not only increases the tasks for the military but expects them to undertake these tasks autonomously as well, the EUGS obviously implies a new, more ambitious Headline Goal. Definitely in terms of strategic enablers, as explicitly mentioned in the EUGS (which emphasizes "Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, including Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, satellite communications, and autonomous access to space and permanent earth observation"): Europeans should be able to support the above level of concurrency with their own enablers. And in terms of numbers as well: real autonomy implies the ability to deploy the equivalent of the current Headline Goal *over and above* all ongoing operations listed above, so as to ensure the availability of a strategic reserve in case one of them goes awry or an additional crisis demands Europe's attention.

Revising the Headline Goal should not be a taboo – the 60,000 only ever was an artificial number, based on the capability requirements of the past operations, in former Yugoslavia. Revising it *upwards*, of course – but from the discourse the opposite trend it evident. In recent years, many participants in the European defence debate habitually talk as if the summit of European ambition is to have two battalion-size Battlegroups on stand-by, with the Headline Goal well-nigh forgotten. In several corners, the initial reaction to the Brexit is to simply subtract the British contribution and to downsize the Headline Goal. Some have proposed a brigade-size force as the focus of Europe's ambition for strategic autonomy (Drent and Zandee, 2016).

The question must of course be asked: if the aim is *EU* strategic autonomy, without the UK, is it realistic then to even maintain the current Headline Goal after the Brexit, let alone increasing it?

For sure, the UK represents no less than 25% of the total defence expenditure of $265 billion of the EU-28, and 10% of the total of 1.5 million troops.[2] Moreover, the very experienced British forces represent a major part of the European forces employable for expeditionary operations. This issue of quality also appears from the fact that the EU-28 today spend $175,000 per soldier and the EU-27 only $146,000. If the British contribution is withdrawn from the EU's Force Catalogue, it will create

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2   All figures calculated from the relevant edition of *The Military Balance* (IISS).

gaps that cannot be easily filled by the existing capabilities of the remaining Member States.[3] On the other hand, the current Headline Goal was set in 1999, for a Union of 15 Member States, with 1.6 million troops (including a large share of conscripts) and spending $160 billion on defence (and just $96,000 per soldier). A revised Headline Goal will be a target for a Union of 27, still with 1.35 million troops (now mostly volunteers) and a total defence expenditure of $200 billion.[4] For the EU-27 there-fore, at the very least, the current Headline Goal should remain eminently feasible. But with such overall numbers even the "double Headline Goal" that the above concurrency requires (the ability to deploy 50 to 60,000 troops supported by European enablers only, while maintaining a deployable strategic reserve of as many again) ought to be feasible, over time, on the condition that among the EU-27 defence integration is pushed much further (as we will see below).

Maintaining and, over time, even increasing the Headline Goal is the realist option therefore: in view of what is necessary, looking at the world around Europe, but also in view of what is possible, looking at Europe's military potential. Realism not only means not setting unachievable objectives – it also means not setting the bar too low and underexploit the potential that is there.

UK Involvement

It is true that until now the engine of Europe's expeditionary role was the Franco-British axis. In a Union of 27 that will have to be a Franco-German axis, with France becoming a bit more German and Germany a bit more French (Guéhenno, 2016). France, the only remaining EU Member State with a global military-strategic outlook, close to full spectrum forces, and the experience of a permanently high operational rhythm, will have to reinvest in the EU. Germany will have to continue to pursue a very active and ideally more comprehensive foreign policy, playing a leading role not only in the eastern but also in the southern neighbourhood, and increasingly support its diplomacy with a military expeditionary role. The deployment of 650 German troops to Mali in 2016, under UN command, to a theatre of operations that is far from risk-free, is a good example of the role that Germany can play. Actually, some of the smaller EU Member States have in recent years contributed very actively to crisis management operations – more than expected perhaps, which unfortunately cannot be said of many medium-sized European countries. Actively assuming the expeditionary role that the EUGS envisages will require more Member States to come more fully on board.

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[3]   It is not impossible that if the economic consequences of the Brexit are too negative, it will have an impact on British defence expenditure, and planned capabilities will have to be downsized. This could potentially greatly reduce the British contribution to European expeditionary operations even if satisfactory arrange-ments are found for close coordination between the EU, NATO and all of their European members.

[4]   Denmark has an opt-out for the CSDP, but for the EU-26 the figures still are 1.33 million and $196 billion.

At the same time, even after the Brexit the stability of Europe's broad neighbourhood especially will remain as vital to the UK as to the EU. Hence, when Europeans launch operations in the broader neighbourhood (under EU, NATO, UN or ad hoc command, for as we shall see below an EU Headline Goal does not always mean EU operations), Britain is more likely to be a part of them than not, even though post-Brexit it is less likely to take the initiative itself. What for reasons of domestic politics the UK will most probably not be able to do, is to formally associate itself with the Headline Goal process. Nor will it likely be able, for the same reasons and at least for some time to come, to join multinational capability projects under the EU-label or deeper integration into permanent multinational units (which as we shall also see below is the only way the EU-27 can achieve a new Headline Goal).

Formally therefore, the new Headline Goal can only aspire to *EU* strategic autonomy. An assumption of the availability of British forces for actual operations is more than justified however, so that in practice the EU white paper can at least define the possibility of *European* strategic autonomy as part of the context in which it operates.

Drafting the White Paper

Writing the EU white paper is an eminently political task, for quantifying the military tasks set by the EUGS is a matter of political choice, not of mathematics. Furthermore, buy-in from the Member States is as important for the white paper as for the EUGS itself, for they will eventually have to acquire the capabilities and deploy them. Defence establishments especially must sincerely commit. Rather than task the EU administration to produce a draft and negotiate the text in the Political and Security Committee, it seems advisable to follow an ad hoc procedure, just like for the EUGS. Perhaps Member States can be invited to nominate a "plenipotentiary" who is authorized to commit their foreign and defence ministries, to discuss a draft produced by a small ad hoc drafting team outside the administrative structures, including one or two senior military representatives. The opportunity for additional debate can be created by organizing one or two seminars involving the expert community and the non-EU members of NATO (including of course the UK).

The white paper need not be very long, nor therefore should it take a long time to draft – it ought to be adopted in early 2017. Important is that it spells out the military implications of the tasks set by the EUGS and provides a clear and quantified statement of military ambition – a new Headline Goal. Subsequently, the EU Military Staff (EUMS) can revisit the existing illustrative scenarios for European operations. The existing scenarios focus on peace enforcement, peacekeeping, evacuation of EU citizens, capacity-building, and supporting disaster relief. These can be updated by incorporating the implications of tasks related to "homeland security" and counter-terrorism; perhaps an additional maritime scenario can be envisaged. Then has to follow a new iteration of the Capability Development Mechanism (CDM), updating

the detailed catalogues of capability requirements, existing capabilities (minus the UK), and shortfalls. This will take time, but immediately after the adoption of the white paper, the European Defence Agency (EDA) can already update the Capability Development Plan (CDP), which was foresee in 2017 anyway, and generate a first set of capability priorities in order to link national and multinational efforts to the objective of strategic autonomy. These priorities can then be taken into account in NATO's defence planning as well.

COMPLEMENTARITY AND FLEXIBILITY IN IMPLEMENTATION: EU-NATO

EU-NATO coordination will be of the essence. Simultaneously with the expeditionary tasks outlined in the EUGS, Europeans must ensure collective defence and deterrence under NATO's Article 5. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, the Alliance is pushing its members to fulfil their capability commitments with renewed vigour. For sure, Europeans must step up their role, for today the credibility of Article 5 relies almost entirely on the fact that the US is a member of NATO, which is hardly a healthy situation.

Hence NATO initiatives such as the brigade-size Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which will deploy, in a rotating multinational composition, inside NATO's eastern borders. The capabilities from which the deployable VJTF rotations are generated can also generate forces for non-Article 5 expeditionary operations (under whichever command). When on stand-by for NATO however, a VJTF rotation will in principle not be available for other tasks (though in a real crisis an Ally can always recall its troops). Clearly, meeting the demands of both collective defence and a (when necessary autonomous) European expeditionary role is a challenge, but both are equally vital to the security of Europe.

Defence Planning

It is striking, actually, how little talk there is in NATO about expeditionary, "non-Article 5" operations. The focus is strongly on Article 5 and the east and even in NATO headquarters in Brussels one hears voices that the EU should take the lead in addressing Europe's southern neighbourhood. Furthermore, as the Americans have repeatedly made clear, when Europeans take the initiative to deal with security problems in the south, the US will support them – but Washington will no longer automatically take the initiative for them.

The EU white paper is essential therefore, for only an EU white paper can answer the question that NATO does not even pose: what exactly should Europeans be capable of alone when necessary? The NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) starts from what the Alliance as a whole, including the non-EU Allies, should be capable of, and translates that into capability targets for every individual Ally. There is no attempt to ensure that the sum of the capabilities held by the Allies that are also EU Member States alone (or by all European Allies alone, without the US, Canada and Turkey) constitutes a coherent whole, capable of operations without having recourse to assets of the others. In the area of strategic enablers especially, the US contributes more than its share, so the spread of capabilities resulting from the NDPP cannot guarantee European or EU strategic autonomy. Only if the next iteration of the NDPP

takes into account the capability requirements of European strategic autonomy as defined in the EU white paper can a capability mix be created that allows Europeans to do all: to contribute to Article 5, to undertake non-Article 5 operations with the US and the other non-EU Allies, *and* to launch autonomous expeditionary operations. In the words of the EUGS: "European security and defence efforts should enable the EU to act autonomously while also contributing to and undertaking actions in cooperation with NATO".

Command and Control

It does not follow from this however that the military tasks set in the EUGS and detailed in the EU white paper must necessarily always be undertaken under EU *command*.

Obviously, Europeans can have but one "grand strategy" – they cannot have one strategy when they meet in the EU and another when they gather in NATO. That single European "grand strategy" is the EUGS, which addresses all dimensions of external action, from aid and trade to diplomacy and the military. To implement that single strategy in the military sphere, Europeans have several instruments at hand however: NATO, the CSDP, the UN, and ad hoc coalitions.

When it comes to the security of European territory itself, NATO assumes responsibility for deterring and defending against classic military threats. The EU, as seen above, is playing an increasing role in addressing so-called "hybrid" threats to "homeland security" that fall short of war, as is NATO, and both organizations are therefore closely coordinating.[5] When it comes to expeditionary operations, Europeans can choose the command and control arrangements that are best suited to the crisis at hand. Strategic autonomy means acting without US assets, not without NATO assets – for the NATO command structure is in large part staffed by European personnel. The condition is that the availability of a NATO headquarters can be guaranteed whenever Europeans need one; in this regard, the existing Berlin Plus Agreement between the EU and NATO no longer is satisfactory. But the point is that even when Europeans act alone, without the US (and other non-EU Allies), they can launch a NATO operation, or they can opt for a CSDP operation or for an ad hoc coalition, in both cases using either a national headquarters or a NATO headquarters, or they can deploy under UN command. In all of these scenarios it will indeed increasingly have to be Europeans acting alone in their neighbourhood, in view of the US "pivot".

Not in all of these cases will the EU be formally involved from the start. Europeans can also take the initiative to launch an intervention in NATO, or in an ad hoc group

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[5]   Hybrid tactics are, and always have been, part and parcel of warfare too, and hence included in both collective defence and expeditionary operations.

outside either the EU or NATO, as for Mali and Libya. In most if not all cases though, Europeans will de facto act in the broader context of *EU* foreign policy and the EUGS, which shapes Europe's relations with for example Mali and Libya, and Syria and Iraq, and Russia and Ukraine. Even in NATO, it is the collective EU view on the future of relations with the latter two countries that shapes the actions that the European Allies are willing to take. And following the Brexit it is not unlikely that the European Allies will increasingly speak with one voice in NATO, since of all EU Member States the UK was always most opposed to this. Furthermore, it is the EU that has the instruments and the budgets to make possible the long-term comprehensive involvement in the political and economic sphere without which any military intervention in a country is meaningless.

Britain's Future Role

For the UK, the question is whether after the Brexit it wants to maintain the possibility of participating in CSDP operations, for those cases where that appears the most suitable operational framework. If the answer is yes, London could conclude an agreement with the EU to that end. The UK has already indicated however that it finds the existing agreements for third country participation in CSDP operations far from satisfactory. But the more London is willing to offer, the greater the likelihood of an enhanced agreement. The UK could agree, for example, that its operational headquarters in Northwood, currently commanding the Atalanta naval operation, remains available for future operations as well.

The UK would be well-advised however to also seek close association with EU foreign policy and the overall implementation of the EUGS. For if Britain takes part in operations but not in the foreign policy that determines why operations are undertaken in the first place, its role will be like that of Australia and New Zealand in NATO: a very reliable troop contributor – with little or no voice in strategy. As part of the Brexit negotiations, a novel arrangement can be imagined that gives Britain a seat, though not a vote, in the Foreign Affairs Council for a specific range of topics.

Finally, a question for the UK and the EU Member States alike is whether it makes sense, now that the UK can no longer position itself as the bridge between the Union and the Alliance, that the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander (DSACEUR), who under the Berlin-Plus Agreement is ex officio operations commander for CSDP operations using a NATO headquarters, is always British. A rotational scheme with France and Germany seems advisable, or the creation of an additional DSACEUR post.

BUILDING EUROPEAN CAPABILITIES

Once the new Headline Goal is established, capability development should be accelerated. The EUGS has surprisingly much to say about how to go about this. The overall principle is crystal-clear: "Member States will need to move towards defence cooperation as the norm". In practice, cooperation will have to be deepened at two levels simultaneously: that of the EU, and that of clusters of Member States.

Strategic Enablers and the EU Level

At the EU level, the focus should be on strategic enablers, which demand the participation of a large number of Member States to make any project economically viable, in view of the large cost of development. The EUGS rightly puts a strong emphasis on enablers, because in this area the EU as such can provide strong incentives: "Union funds to support defence research and technologies and multinational cooperation, and full use of the European Defence Agency's potential". Both of these are vital.

First, under the next framework programme for research (2021-2027), the European Commission will, for the first time, provide significant funding (of at least €500 million) for defence research. The procedures for this initiative, which is a concrete result of the December 2013 European Council meeting on defence, will shortly be tested by a preparatory action. When the procedures are finalized, it is key that they explicitly refer to the EU white paper and the resulting capability priorities as the formal guidance for the use of these new funds under the framework programme, so that they will directly contribute to the goal of strategic autonomy. Industry must serve the Member States and their armed forces, not the other way around.

Second, the EDA will lose the British budgetary contribution, but at the same time the UK will no longer be able to block a budget increase, so the remaining Member States must now put their money where their mouths are. On the one hand, the Commission can use its budget for defence research to co-finance research projects, for up to 50% for example, thus stimulating the capitals to step up their own defence research spending. The EDA, which the EUGS sees as "the interface between Member States and the Commission", can be the manager of all defence research projects. Member States should also increase the EDA's own budget, finally providing it with the means to act of its own accord and launch feasibility studies and pilot projects; until now, British objections had rendered this impossible. Moreover, there should be no objections against Commission participation in actual capability projects, beyond research. If, for example, a cluster of Member States embarks on a project to build an observation drone, which various branches of the Commission also require, the Commission could participate on the same level as the capitals, paying its share of the cost and receiving (drawing rights on) its share of the

capability; when managed through the intergovernmental EDA, Member States need not fear that they lose control.

All of these instruments together make the EU the best available framework for multinational capability projects. Only through the EU, furthermore, can European countries ensure the defence industrial dimension of strategic autonomy: having a European defence industry that can develop and produce all equipment that the new Headline Goal requires. Just for capability projects geared to collective defence and involving the non-European Allies, such as missile defence, is NATO the better framework. The UK has never been an eager participant in European projects, but if the development and production of European enablers takes off, it may find it to be in its defence industrial interest to participate in specific projects. It could therefore conclude an agreement with the EDA, like Norway, allowing it to take part in projects on a case-by-case basis. For the EU, the advantage would be that British participation in a project would make it easier to reach the critical mass to make it economically feasible. First, however, the future of Britain's access to the single market must be settled.

Integrated Forces and the Cluster Level

At the level of clusters, Member States can implement the "gradual synchronisation and mutual adaptation of national defence planning cycles and capability development practices" that the EUGS calls for.

To this day, the national focus remains predominant in defence planning. States draw up their national defence white paper or equivalent first, in splendid isolation and without much regard for guidelines from either the EU or NATO. Only when that is finalized do those who want to explore possibilities for cooperation with others, but by then many opportunities have already been precluded by the national choices that were made. The problem is that, with a few exceptions, this is how Europe has ended up with a plethora of small national forces, which do not cover the full spectrum of capabilities, which struggle to offer all support functions (logistics, maintenance, training etc.) for the few capabilities that they do maintain, and from which only small deployments can be generated.

The aim therefore should be to turn this around. States should stop doing national force planning separately and then decide on which aspects they want to cooperate with others. Instead, states should plan together, as if for one force, and then decide which contribution every individual state will make to that single force (including by participating in EU-level projects to acquire the strategic enablers on which the force would have to rely).

Concretely, European states need to build permanent multinational formations with dedicated multinational headquarters, such as army corps and air wings. To these

each participant contributes national manoeuvre battalions or fighter aircraft, but all the support functions can be ensured by a combination of pooling (permanent multi-national units) and specialization (a division of labour among participating countries).[6] As no longer every country has to contribute to every support function, national spending will be less fragmented, substantial synergies and economies of scale will be created, funds released for investment, and capabilities enhanced. As manoeuvre units within the multinational formation are national, one participant can flexibly deploy an infantry battalion, for example, without the others having to follow suit. At the same time, the corps or wing should be seen as the framework of choice to generate all larger-scale European deployments, so that countries do defence planning, capability development and operations in the same multinational framework. Today, the many existing multinational formations seldom or never deploy as such, which is one of the reasons why the degree of integration within each remains limited.

Ideally, once acquired, strategic enablers would also be managed on a similar multinational basis. European Air Transport Command (EATC) already does this for the transport fleet of the participating countries. It could easily be broadened (bringing in more Member States) and deepened (extending the cooperation to pooled logistics and maintenance), and can serve as a model for other capability areas.

There are different routes to pursue this deeper integration in clusters. The most obvious one perhaps, for that was exactly its purpose, would be to activate Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the hitherto unused mechanism introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. That would imply agreeing on how to quantify the criteria for participation listed in the Treaty. As the decision to establish PESCO is taken by a qualified majority of all Member States, a sufficient number of those not participating must agree as well. Another way would be to create new clusters outside the Treaty and/or build on existing ones, such as the Eurocorps (which has evolved in the opposite direction: from a corps with units assigned to it, it became a headquarters only). It might be easier to avoid the debate about criteria and to find consensus in several clusters outside the Treaty, instead of on a single PESCO addressing all capability areas.

Yet a third way would be to build on NATO's Framework Nations Concept (FNC): one or more larger countries offer the framework, such as a force or a headquarters, in which a number of smaller countries plug in with specific contributions, in order to achieve together the capability targets set by the NDPP (Ruiz Palmer, 2016). Three FNC groups have been established so far. A German-led group of 16 started out by focusing on capability development (with sub-groups of various sizes addressing

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[6]   Belgian-Dutch naval cooperation is an example, at a smaller scale, of how this works in practice: both countries contribute frigates and minehunters sailing under their own flag with their own crew, but there is only one binational headquarters and one operational school (pooling), while the Netherlands is in charge of training, logistics and maintenance for the frigates and Belgium for the minehunters (specialization).

specific capability areas), and is now also used as a framework to generate temporary multinational formations, notably to deploy to the east in the context of NATO. A UK-led group of 7 focuses on deployment, through participation by the others in the British Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). An Italian-led group of 6 focuses on stabilization and reconstruction operations. It should be noted that France is not a member of either group.

Whichever route, or a combination thereof, is chosen: real synergies, thus real savings, thus additional capability, will only result from effective *integration*. That demands that a number of conditions be fulfilled:

(1) Within every group, participating countries must exploit all opportunities for pooling and specialization of support functions to the maximum and adapt their national defence planning to the commonly agreed capability objectives, without any taboos. This means doing away with any existing or envisaged national capability that turns out to be redundant. Only a very few of the many existing bi- and multinational cooperation initiatives have already reached this stage – and the FNC groups are not among them, nor is the Eurocorps.

(2) The savings thus generated must be reinvested in commonly agreed multinational capability projects, in order to harmonize equipment across the cluster. Like the projects to acquire strategic enablers, these projects can be managed by the EDA.

(3) The membership of the various clusters must be consolidated and their objectives de-conflicted. As it is, several countries participate in two FNC groups for example, plus in other clusters, which are overlapping in terms of the capability areas that they cover. Any given national capability can cooperate with several clusters, but it can be *integrated* into a cluster only once.

(4) Finally, whichever format is chosen, integration will eventually demand a legally binding international agreement between the participating countries that states who contributes what, in order to guarantee that each will continue to finance his agreed contribution over time, and as a safeguard against national budget cuts. That agreement will also have to define the procedures for deployment on actual operations. The starting point of cooperation is trust, but integration requires guarantees. Otherwise, a model like the FNC, while avoiding the debate about PESCO-like criteria, risks ending up like the EU's European Capability Action Plan (ECAP) of the early 2000s: voluntary participation in working groups per capability area led only to the voluntary absence of any results.

Thinking prospectively, one can imagine a future grand scheme in which the German FNC group merges with the Eurocorps. This would bring in France and Spain, and consolidate German-Dutch and German-Polish cooperation into the same framework. Together with the British and Italian FNC groups, a northern, central and

southern cluster could thus emerge, with the central one being central in political terms as well, representing a Franco-German axis that is already emerging in capability development and that can expand into foreign policy and expeditionary operations. In the framework of an NDPP that incorporates the EU ambition of strategic autonomy, as outlined above, these three main clusters would each focus on building the large deployable formations from which both VJTF rotations and expeditionary operations can be generated. Each could include sub-clusters of two or three that together contribute a capability to the main cluster.

Alongside the three main clusters, there would be big clusters managing certain strategic enablers, such as EATC, and perhaps in the future a satellite or an ISTAR cluster. And there would of course remain a number of national formations, especially those geared to territorial defence, including the remaining conscript and militia-type units. That the FNC, *PESCO-esque* as it is, has been established in the context of NATO would not prevent any FNC group from making full use of the Commission and the EDA to help fund and manage any capability projects on which it decides (which requires, obviously, that the participants are either EU Member States or have an agreement with the EDA). The northern UK-led group would include most of the countries least interested in integration among themselves or in participation in EDA projects, but could always jump on the waggon when their interests compel them to – which eventually they probably will. The Franco-German cluster on the other hand could in time solidify its commitment by transforming itself into PESCO.

Such more "structured" cooperation is in the air, witness the FNC itself (initially proposed by Germany in 2013), Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's ideas on a "European army" in 2015 (Balzi, 2015), and more recently the plea by the French and German foreign ministers for a "European Security Compact" (Ayrault and Steinmeier, 2016), and by the Italian foreign and defence ministers for a "Schengen on defence" (Gentiloni and Pinotti, 2016). Rather more surprisingly, Poland and Hungary called for a European army too even as overall they want the EU to return power to the Member States (Zalan, 2016). Think-tank reports about defence integration also receive more resonance these days than before.[7]

The EU as such can facilitate such a process leading to more cooperation, but only the Member States themselves can initiate it. They need not wait to do so until the new Headline Goal has been translated into detailed requirements and a new CDP, for that will take time, and the EU should avoid the impression that the EUGS has just engendered another paper tiger. Rather a group of Member States should take the initiative as soon as the EU white paper is finished. At that point, two simultaneous processes should thus take off: while the EU institutions prepare a new iteration of

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[7]   For example Andersson et al. (2016) and Blockmans and Faleg (2015).

the CDP, one or more clusters of Member States coming it at it from the other side should immediately announce the start of closer military integration between them, in order to demonstrate a number of shorter term results.

Peer Pressure and Assessment

The EUGS itself expresses the need for more structured forms of cooperation, stating that "the voluntary approach to defence cooperation must translate into real commitment". Hence it calls for "an annual coordinated review process at EU level to discuss Member States' military spending plans" – what, in an earlier draft, was called "a European semester on defence" – adding that "regular assessments of EDA benchmarks can create positive peer pressure among Member States". An annual EU defence review should make sure to add value however to the NDPP process, which already provides for a systematic review of Allied contributions on the basis of a 4-year cycle. In terms of substance, an EU defence review could focus on strategic autonomy, analysing EU Member States' capabilities in terms of what it allows Europeans to do alone, and on defence cooperation, analysing to which extent Member States pool their efforts through EDA projects and in various clusters – and what it has cost Europe if they haven't. The EU could notably analyse every national defence white paper from this angle. For peer pressure to be most effective, the results of such a review should at least in part be a public document, like an EU defence yearbook. If that task is indeed entrusted to the EDA, it will require additional staff, however.

CONCLUSION

If one were to start from scratch, one would never create the European security architecture that exists today, in which grand strategy, defence planning, capability development and operations take place in different constellations and in different organizations, often at the same time. The Brexit will certainly not make it any easier to make this architecture work, as one of the most important military actors voluntarily withdraws from a key part of the architecture. Be that as it may, in the current strategic environment of instability in the neighbourhood and with the US increasingly focusing on Asia, the remaining EU Member States have no choice but to pursue the strategic autonomy that the EUGS has rightly put on top of the agenda.

This can work for all: *European* strategic autonomy, with the UK included, is still possible. If, that is, Britain can find its usual pragmatism again, and is willing to associate with EU institutions and to join structured multinational cooperation whenever that is the best way of getting things done. For surely those who voted for Brexit did not vote for the undermining of Europe's security. If ideology and emotions are allowed to continue to trump pragmatism however, the UK will discover that in some areas neither the US nor NATO is likely to take the lead, and nothing much can be achieved without European cooperation. Where will that leave Britain? In a worse position, alas, than the remaining EU Member States, for the absence of British engagement would be a serious obstacle to, but not the end, of European defence. If truly European defence really is what the others want. This author will assume that all the assertions from different quarters about the need for more cooperation are to be taken very seriously.

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