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Summary: The EU has not lived up to its ambitions for decisive, autonomous military action, nor has there been sufficient NATO-EU coordination, let alone cooperation. For many years, the EU could afford to live with these inconsistencies. But the Russia/Ukraine crisis and the uproar in the Islamic world have fundamentally altered the strategic landscape in Europe and are likely to have a deep impact on how NATO and the EU will operate in the future. It might take an initiative from major EU member states to again adapt existing policies to new realities. The forthcoming Council meeting on the Common Security and Defense Policy in June 2015 should be used for a substantial debate on a true Euroatlantic approach.

Closing Ranks: Aligning NATO and the EU's Strategic Priorities

by Karl-Heinz Kamp

Euroatlantic security and defense policy is characterized by a number of truisms:

- The EU, which has transformed from an economic institution to a political union also needs the capacity to act autonomously in the military field. This is why it has established the instrument of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).
- EU military action will be confined to crisis management or peacekeeping/peace-enforcing measures; military self-defense will remain the task of NATO.
- Close cooperation and coordination between NATO and the EU is indispensable to exploit existing synergies and to make best use of the comparative advantages of both institutions.

Alas, these common points have not led to the necessary action on the ground. The EU has not lived up to its ambitions for decisive, autonomous military action, nor has there been sufficient NATO-EU coordination, let alone cooperation. Meaningful EU military operations or fruitful EU-NATO discussions hardly taken place because certain countries in the EU and NATO did not *want* them to take place. The reasons for this are well known and have been broadly debated on both sides of the Atlantic: European concerns about the United States having too much influence in EU affairs and U.S. worries about a duplication of existing transatlantic military structures are two of them.

For many years, the EU could afford to live with these inconsistencies. Given its economic weight and global engagement, the EU became a major player on the international stage. If decisive military action was required, NATO, or more precisely the United States, stepped in — sometimes reluctantly but in the end always reliably. Such nonchalance, however, will no longer be possible. Two recent developments have fundamentally altered the strategic landscape in Europe and are likely to have a deep impact on how NATO and the EU will operate in the future. These developments are the Russia/Ukraine crisis and the uproar in the Islamic world.

Changing Strategic Priorities

Arguably the most important game-changer has been Russia's annexation of Crimea and its proxy war in Eastern Ukraine. By presenting itself as a revisionist power, changing borders in Europe by force and breaching existing treaties, Russia has

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profoundly altered Euroatlantic security policy priorities. Territorial defense according to Article V has again become the main concern of NATO — not only rhetorically but also with respect to concrete military steps taken. Deterrence as the core concept to prevent aggression against NATO territory is back on the agenda. Credible U.S. defense commitments are again regarded as key requirements for the security of Europe, and not only by NATO's Eastern European members.

At the same time, NATO and the EU proved to be united against Moscow's aggression. A natural division of labor emerged, with NATO focusing on the military steps to deter potential Russian expansionism and the EU — together with the OSCE — dealing with the non-military aspects of security policy. EU military capabilities did not play any role in this crisis, but the EU's political tools (sanctions against Russia, support for Ukraine, and mediating a gas compromise between both countries) were indispensable in trying to defuse the conflict.

Another decisive turn of events has been the chaos in the so-called MENA region (Middle East and Northern Africa). The region is not suffering from temporary crises or revolutions that would sooner or later lead to a new order, but rather from a general and lasting erosion of statehood. Governments disappear and get replaced by militias. Caliphates or tribal realms emerge and transcend existing borders. Powers in the region do not contain the erosion but fuel it by supporting numerous groups fighting each other. This confronts the Euroatlantic community with a terrible dilemma: the situation in MENA is highly perilous for global external and internal security, but at the same time, the options for actively stabilizing the region are extremely limited.

Crisis management through military intervention hardly seems an option. First, in MENA's messy situation, it would be difficult to define against whom (or in favor of whom) to intervene. Second, there is widespread intervention fatigue in all NATO and EU countries following the missions in Afghanistan and Libya. Both interventions have taught the international community to be humble with regard to what can be achieved, even if military means have been applied successfully. No one is ready to risk the lives of their soldiers if the chaos is likely to be even greater after an intervention than before. Third, the conflict with Russia is likely to deepen the rift between the permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC), which will make any

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agreement on a UNSC mandate for a military intervention very unlikely. Without a mandate, neither the EU nor NATO will act.

Four consequences will follow from the game-changers mentioned above:

- While (military) strategic priorities in the pre-2014 NATO and EU world were focused on crisis intervention, nation building, or expeditionary operations, today's priorities are clearly directed toward territorial defense and deterrence. In fact, crisis management through military intervention has become increasingly unlikely.
- For NATO, this means that from the three core functions defined in the 2010 Strategic Concept — self-defense, crisis management, and partnership — the first one (again) becomes the ultimate justification for the North Atlantic Alliance.
- For the military capabilities of the EU (CSDP), such a development poses a conceptual problem as EU military action is explicitly confined to crisis management by intervention. If military crisis management becomes less likely, the justification for EU military capabilities will erode.
- The new security environment and the EU's successful performance as a non-military security policy actor increase the need for a closer EU-NATO cooperation.

A New EU-NATO Deal

In addition to all the challenges that the new security environment poses to the transatlantic community, it also offers an opportunity to test those arrangements and regulations that have not worked well in the past. One of the key questions to be re-evaluated is whether the (undisputed) EU demand for autonomous military action still requires a military structure *outside* of NATO or whether broader synergies can be achieved by organizing the EU's military capabilities *within* the NATO framework.

This is neither a revolutionary question, nor a new one. As early as 1996, it was agreed at a NATO ministerial meeting in Berlin that the still-existent Western European Union (WEU) should oversee the creation of a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within the NATO structures. Such a European pillar within NATO should enable the WEU-members (which all belonged to NATO) to act militarily where the United States wished not to. The "Berlin Agreement" permitted Europeans to use NATO structures for that purpose. Two years later, France and the United Kingdom (U.K.) extended this idea and proposed in Saint Malo that the EU should have the capabilities for "autonomous action" and planted the seeds for a CSDP outside of NATO. The "Berlin Agreement" got upgraded to "Berlin Plus," permitting the entire European Union to use NATO structures for military crisis management operations.

Today, after years of dispute about the EU's autonomous military (non)action, with military crisis management on the decline, with France almost fully reintegrated into NATO, with the U.K. probably on its way out of the EU, and with a fundamentally different international setup, the idea of a European pillar *within* NATO is timely again. Given the shortcomings of CSDP, the old concept of ESDI (a European caucus within NATO) seems the more promising one. This holds all the more true as NATO is already able to operate in various configurations of NATO and non-NATO participants. For this purpose, the Alliance had long developed a "Combined Joint Task Force" concept (CJTF), which enables NATO and/or EU members to act militarily in crisis management operations in flexible numbers and groupings — "separable but not separate" from NATO structures. Through CJTF, the Alliance can embrace those few states that belong to the EU but not to NATO, which means that a military operation conducted only by EU members but using NATO structures is well possible.

Of course, those countries in NATO but not in the EU — first and foremost Turkey — would still have the possibility of blocking a consensus on European countries acting militarily in the framework of NATO. However, consensus could be prevented by any of the 28 NATO members as well — for example by France or Greece. It seems likely that if European countries no longer strive for military action strictly in the EU context (thereby excluding Turkey), the reasons for Ankara to block any agreement might disappear.

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A return of the two-pillar idea of ESDI could strengthen the EU defense project in many respects. It would embed Europe's military ambitions into NATO, a successful military alliance that has proven its competence in military action time and again. It would not preclude the EU members from acting on their own and it would also not keep the European states from further evolving their military capabilities since the forces for EU or NATO missions are the same. Reorganizing Europe's defense industrial capacities would be equally possible, be it in the sense of a "smart" use of synergies or as "Framework Nation" concepts, with some nations taking the lead in providing key military components and others grouping around them. Costly redundancies and inefficient duplications could be prevented even more efficiently.

Furthermore, the old arguments that EU defense as a part of NATO would grant the United States an inappropriate influence on European affairs does not apply in today's world. Given the U.S. feeling of being overloaded with international responsibilities, Washington is extremely unlikely to block any EU military action. On the contrary, the United States prefers to either stay out of strictly Europe-related contingencies or to offer only limited support. The well-known "beauty contest" of whether NATO or the EU is more relevant is over.

NATO's 2011 operation "Unified Protector" in Libya is an example of the new realities of military action beyond the "either NATO or the EU" approach. Two EU members, France and the U.K., took the lead in pushing for military action to prevent the atrocities of the Libyan regime. NATO took the command as the EU structures were regarded as incapable for such an operation. The United States provided some critical support without being fully engaged. A considerable air force component came from Sweden — a nation that emphasizes its neutral and non-aligned status. Even Qatar, a non-EU and non-NATO country, (unofficially) provided troops on the ground. Moreover, France and the U.K. acted militarily under the

auspices of NATO but also independently in their national capacity.

Given these realities, one might even ask why there is a need for a new NATO-EU agreement at all. If the option of the EU acting militarily in the NATO framework already exists, why then raise the idea of going back to the ESDI concept at all, and thereby admit that CSDP has come to a dead end? Why not leave everything as it is: the EU sticking to the CSDP concept on the declaratory level, using it for minor missions at most but acting militarily under the NATO umbrella if a substantial performance is required? Why change something conceptually that already long exists in practice?

The main reason for a conceptual adaptation lies in the fact that the European Union is currently not in good shape. Unlike years ago, EU integration is no longer a no-brainer in the member states. Instead, different goals pursued by different allies plus the pressure of a financial crisis raise doubts in the wisdom of bringing EU members ever closer together. Unease about perceived domination from "Brussels" as the synonym of centralized decision-making goes way beyond economic policies but also includes the security and defense sector. In the U.K. — a country crucial for a common European foreign and security policy — an ever-growing part of the electorate is in favor of leaving the EU for good. In such a situation, striking mismatches between European ambitions and realities or pipe dreams of a "European Army" do not help foster trust in the seriousness of the European defense ideas. Every inconsistency and every gap between words and deeds can deepen the cracks in the legitimacy and practicability of the integration project. Keeping up the illusions of the EU becoming a key military player will create frustrations, which in the end will damage the image of the EU as a reliable security policy actor and further erode public support.

As France and the U.K. fundamentally changed the course of the EU's common security policy in Saint Malo more than 15 years ago, it might take an initiative from major EU member states to again adapt existing policies to new realities. The European Council meeting in December 2013 has proven that even meetings on the level of heads of states and governments do not suffice to breathe fresh life into European security policy. The forthcoming Council meeting on CSDP in June 2015 should be used for a substantial debate on a true Euroatlantic approach. Changing the current policies is not an opportunity but a necessity.

About the Author

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