

Beyond Burdensharing and European Strategic Autonomy: Rebuilding Transatlantic Security After the Ukraine War

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The war in Ukraine unleashed in early 2022 may temporarily obscure the long-term trend that the United States is shrinking its military footprint in and around Europe, as the defence posture of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Central Europe suddenly was bolstered by tens of thousands of additional US troops. For as long as the war drags on, certainly, these reinforcements will stay in place. But if, and when, the war ends or shifts to attrition warfare stretching out for years, as was the case after the 2014 annexation of the Crimea, one can easily envisage changes in how European governments manage security and defence issues among themselves and in relation to their North American counterparts. While the debate on transatlantic security so far has played out in two distinct modes, either focusing on the economic side of burdensharing or projecting a vision of European strategic autonomy, there is a need for a more sober understanding of the future division of labour, one that would be grounded in the right blend of economics and deterrence. The main suggestion of this article is that stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean ‘split the difference’ and strike a new grand bargain on the basis of their respective strengths. Once key issues of financial equity and military deterrence have been adequately addressed, European governments will still have their work cut out for themselves. They must elaborate solutions to specific challenges at the sub-strategic theatre level and at the same time navigate the complexities of optimizing defence reforms, aligning regional force designs and rendering foreign policy compatible with the strategic priorities of the European Union (EU) and Europe at large.

Keywords: Transatlantic relations, foreign and security policy, burdensharing, strategic autonomy, financial equity, deterrence, nuclear weapons

1 INTRODUCTION

Even though the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 prompted America’s reengagement with European security in the short term, the writing is on the wall. The United States will slowly, but surely, reduce its military footprint in Europe, after having advertised that this would happen in three consecutive administrations. Already the Obama administration announced the

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‘rebalancing’ toward the Asia-Pacific and a key prerequisite to this shift – a draw-down in Europe – was forcefully communicated by the Trump administration. Prior to Russia’s incursion into Ukraine, transatlantic relations were clearly in a state of transformation, as the administration of Joseph R. Biden was actively searching to recalibrate responsibilities via progressive, mutual adjustments between European and American allies, while demonstrating a robust political commitment to European security overall.

Moscow’s brutal yet haphazard offensive in Ukraine, directly challenging the European security order and in some respects exposing insufficient preparedness and intra-Alliance political fissures, is unlikely to be the last challenge that European political leaders face in the 2020s. If global geopolitical rivalry continues to escalate as dramatically as in the past decade, it may become just one of several thorny issues that will need to be handled primarily by the Europeans themselves. The US Armed Forces, in other words, will increasingly serve as an asset of last resort in the European theatre of operations. US forces stationed in Europe, furthermore, may not be operating the most recent or sophisticated military equipment that is available to the Pentagon, as those are seen as more urgently needed in the Asia-Pacific region.

More than thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, the debate about stability on European continent and its vicinity is still influenced by Cold War perceptions of transatlantic relations. Even if it remains true that the past is always prologue, established concepts change meaning according to shifts in context and at some point become confusing when used to examine present and future challenges. The very term ‘burdensharing’, widely used in traditional debates about transatlantic ties from before the end of the Cold War, has become inadequate in at least two respects. First, the term erroneously implies that the onus of responsibility for European security continues to lie on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Second, speaking of a ‘burden’ suggests that there is no upside to this arrangement for the United States, which is equally misleading.¹

But the European debate informed by the notion of ‘strategic autonomy’, launched more recently, does not necessarily constitute an improvement. Judging by the internal deliberations among European Union (EU) Member States since the June 2016 Brexit referendum and the election of Trump in November that year, the idea of strengthening Europe’s strategic autonomy has increased its appeal. Within the EU, this prompted work on a ‘strategic compass’ intended to establish close linkages between four types of security-

¹ For an overview of the political economy of so-called Pax Americana, see S. G. Brooks & W. C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: Why the Sole Superpower Should Not Pull Back from the World* (2d ed., Oxford University Press 2018).

enhancing measures: capability development, resilience, crisis management, and partnerships with other international organizations.² When it comes to the practical implementation of this framework, though, the political vision of a self-reliant, vigorous Europe on issues of security and defence remains deeply problematic. This is, first of all, because the notion of European strategic autonomy grossly underplays the present level of dependence on American military, diplomatic, economic, and logistical capabilities underlying the European security order.³ Moreover, this language risks prematurely signalling to Washington D.C. that the Europeans are prepared to take matters into their own hands. A greater sense of responsibility among Europeans is an inherently good thing, but a lot needs to be done before Americans can start to hand over some of the levers.

In this article ‘burdensharing’ is understood to reflect a traditional, conservative view of transatlantic relations, whereas ‘European strategic autonomy’ is emblematic of a visionary, yet presently unrealistic, view of the trajectory of the ongoing process of transformation. The aim here is to ‘split the difference’ and identify the basis of a new transatlantic division of labour that saves money, redistributes assets, and gives rise to a more productive set of roles than hitherto. In highlighting the upside of America’s continued involvement in European security while approaching a mutually more beneficial way of structuring the respective roles, the focus is on three critically important dimensions of a revamped division of labour: the financial equity dimension; the deterrence dimension, and the sub-strategic theatre dimension. Each dimension forms part of a grand strategy debate that must involve key stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, if NATO is to move toward implementing sustainable defence reforms and address the structural problems facing the contemporary European security order.

To the extent that the NATO Strategic Concept adopted at the mid-2022 Madrid Summit – under the impression of the Ukraine war – opened a path toward a new transatlantic grand bargain, it did so without describing the exact mechanisms that would bring such a deal to fruition. While the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept commits NATO members to ‘significantly strengthen our deterrence and defence posture to deny any potential adversary opportunities for aggression’, it does not examine issues of financial equity and it lacks guidance as to how capability development should be coordinated.⁴

² *A Strategic Compass for the EU*, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/106337/towards-strategic-compass_en (accessed 10 Feb. 2022).

³ S. G. Brooks & H. Meijer, *Illusions of Autonomy: Why Europe Cannot Provide for Its Security If the United States Pulls Back*, 45(4) *Int’l Sec.* 7–43 (2021).

⁴ S. Monaghan, P. Morcos & C. Wall, *What Happened at NATO’s Madrid Summit?* (Washington D. C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies 1 Jul. 2022), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-happened-natos-madrid-summit> (accessed 31 Jul. 2022).

2 THE FINANCIAL EQUITY DIMENSION

The NATO burdensharing debate goes back at least to the early 1980s and has typically focused on total defence expenditures and relative contributions of funding made available for collective defence efforts. A key concern from the outset was what some American defence economists, in the era of détente, perceived as a propensity of allies to lessen their financial commitments to national defence – including assets that formed part of shared defence planning in Brussels.⁵ In the 1980s and early 90s, the examination of burdensharing became a regular feature of annual transatlantic summits. While smaller alliance members today appear to be footing less of the joint bill than in the past,⁶ there has also been a tendency – at least intermittently – to overdramatize the issue of financial inequity. For sure, the United States always upheld much wider commitments to stability in Asia and the Pacific, with the US strategic nuclear forces and the US Navy in particular serving purposes beyond those of defending Europe.

All Western countries including the United States benefited from the so-called ‘peace dividend’ at the turn of the century, downsizing their militaries and spending substantially less than during the Cold War on defence. But there were also rude awakenings as significant new security challenges arose in the first half of the 1990s, the first being the violent breakup of Yugoslavia. The 1998 Kosovo campaign demonstrated the overwhelming predominance of US military capability over that of European allies, prompting a much broader set of concerns than the economic dimension of burdensharing. Whereas aggregate European spending at the turn of the century constituted two thirds of US levels, the inability of countries like the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Canada to assume responsibility for important elements of the overall military effort in the Balkans during the 1990s unleashed a discussion about military ‘underachievers’. Among the vulnerabilities identified were insufficient investments in military technology, strategic transportation capacity, and a general lack of focus on deployability.⁷

This discussion deepened in the aftermath of the 2011 Libya intervention, undertaken by a number of NATO allies and partners.⁸ Since France and the United Kingdom were in the forefront of Europe’s effort to thwart atrocities being perpetrated by the regime of Muammar Gaddafi against segments of its own

⁵ R. W. Thomas, *Burdensharing in the North Atlantic Alliance: A Preliminary Review of the Evidence* (Washington D.C., National Security Division/Congressional Budget Office Jan. 1985), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA452672.pdf> (accessed 11 Feb. 2022).

⁶ W. Kim & T. Sandler, *NATO at 70: Pledges, Free Riding, and Benefit-Burden Concordance*, 31(4) *Def. & Peace Econ.* 400–413 (2020).

⁷ B. Finlay & M. O’Hanlon, *From Burdenshedding to Burdensharing*, 7(4) *Int’l Peacekeeping* 145–160 (2000).

⁸ E. Hallams & B. Schreer, *Towards a ‘Post-American’ Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing After Libya*, 88(2) *Int’l Aff.* 313–327 (2017).

population – namely those who sided with pro-democratic forces during the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ – US military service professionals had not expected to do much of the heavy lifting. The latter included the initial air campaign conducted to destroy air defence systems and defeat the Libyan air force. As the operations progressed, it nevertheless became clear that several European NATO members lacked key military capabilities and were also unable to replenish ammunition stocks and other types of important equipment.⁹

Because American strategists never considered Libya a top priority in the first place, disappointment regarding European performances apparently lingered in the minds of US political and military leaders. When, five years later, the Obama administration handed over the reins of government to the team led by Donald Trump, patience was already running thin with Europeans’ weak performance concerning security problems in their own backyard. The two per cent demand as a floor for defence expenditures became a useful shorthand for President Trump, who to his domestic electorate wanted to create an image of assertively confronting underperforming European allies. While the two per cent goal originally had been set at NATO’s 2014 Wales summit during the Obama administration, it thus rose to the top of Trump’s agenda and forced Member States – with the exceptions of the United Kingdom, France and Greece that never dropped below that figure – to justify their low spending on security and defence matters. By the end of 2020, every NATO Member State could report a substantive though not dramatic rise in defence expenditures, reaching a median of 1.6% and countries exposed to Moscow’s military power projection significantly north of that figure.¹⁰

The two per cent target, while effective in mobilizing more funding, nonetheless failed to inspire political will and induce serious defence reform for the benefit of the entire continent. As already alluded to, the narrow economic focus of the traditional debate on burdensharing was neither fair, as it underplayed that European military resources stay ‘in theatre’ (as opposed to American spending, which serve non-European purposes as well), nor suited to encourage the right kind of military investment. Financial equity aside, a more precise definition of defence spending could potentially clarify collective goals, as might a greater emphasis on military output and on particularly valuable resources such as enhanced logistics capability and forces deployable outside of the national territory. In addition, for European defence spending to be more appropriately utilized it would be necessary to specify categories of countries exposed to higher security

⁹ B. J. Palmer & K. Engelbrekt, *Libya*, in *Oxford Handbook on NATO* (J. Sperling & M. Webber eds, Oxford University Press forthcoming).

¹⁰ *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2021)*, Communiqué PR/CP(2021)094 (11 Jun. 2021), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/6/pdf/210611-pr-2021-094-en.pdf (accessed 4 Feb. 2022).

risks, as well as those possessing the economic wherewithal with which to rapidly build military capability and societal resilience.¹¹

It is only in the past few years that we can observe a greater reliance on strategic and military expertise in European defence reforms and an associated trend toward building security from the ground up. Although top-down policy documents outlining a *European Security Strategy* (2003), a *European Global Security Strategy* (2016) and *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (2022) may be useful to mitigate the heterogeneity of foreign policy and military-strategic culture, there is no substitute for military force generation at the national level.¹² With the current European Council president, Charles Michel, declaring 2022 a ‘year of European defence’, there appears to be a growing realization that security must be created in increments, and that consistent funding, logistics infrastructure, and practical collaboration among Member States should be given priority. The Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD) process, launched 2017, is supposed to help sustain a high tempo in capability-enhancing defence reform in the coming years.¹³

Indeed, small but concrete steps were taken in this direction after Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea, with some measures initiated by the Alliance and others by the EU. NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) mission enhances deployability of small-scale forces on short notice, as does the European Intervention Initiative (E2I) led by France within the EU. There is since 2017 also the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) package presently involving twenty-five of the twenty-seven Member States (and presumably Denmark joining as well, following its June 2022 referendum to drop objections against an opt-out from EU defence). Within the framework of the European Defence Fund (EDF) operating on a budget of close to EUR 8 billion for the period from 2021 to 2027, moreover, there are opportunities to significantly reduce wasteful defence spending and encourage defence industry and national procurement agencies to collaborate across the continent. Notably, the latter includes submitting multinational bids for defence-related equipment, and, more recently, proposed financial incentives to close defence investment gaps.¹⁴ A few long-term projects, such as Nordic

¹¹ D. Chollet, S. Keil & C. Skaluba, *Rethink and Replace Two Per cent* (Washington D.C.: Scowcroft Center for Security and Strategy/The Atlantic Council 14 Jun. 2020), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Rethink-and-Replace-Two-Percent.pdf> (accessed 13 Feb. 2022).

¹² H. Meijer & M. Wyss, *Introduction. Beyond CSDP: The Resurgence of National Armed Force in Europe*, in *Handbook of European Defence Policies and Armed Forces* (H. Meijer & M. Wyss eds, Oxford University Press 2018).

¹³ J. Šedivý, *Light and Shade: European Defence Five Years After the EU’s New Global Strategy* (The Parliament Magazine 7 Dec. 2021), <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/light-and-shade-european-defence-five-years-after-the-eus-new-global-strategy> (accessed 25 Jan. 2022).

¹⁴ J. Belin et al., *Defence Industrial Links Between [the] EU and [the] US* (Swedish Defence University 2017), <http://fhs.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1140610/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (accessed 5 Jan.

Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO) among the northernmost European States, or the Organization for Joint Armament Co-operation between Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom, also bridge institutional affiliations by integrating NATO and EU members.

In other words, by increasing defence expenditures through national defence budgets as well as through jointly funded programs such as PESCO and the EDF, EU and NATO Member States may within a few years attain a combined funding level that will significantly exceed that of all competitors in the neighbourhood, including Russia. Put together, this level of expenditure in the security realm would go a long way toward matching the military capabilities, crisis management resources and other societal assets required to withstand a very wide range of external threats and challenges. To the extent that governments can reduce bureaucratic impediments overall and resist the temptation to skew regulations in favour of ‘national champions’ in particular,¹⁵ significant new investments in the European defence sector would most likely render the traditional burdensharing debate obsolete and help redirect the political energy to more useful purposes in the years to come.

3 THE DETERRENCE DIMENSION

Whereas numerous measures can be undertaken at the national and regional level by ‘NATO Europe’ and EU countries to address growing concerns about security on the continent and its vicinity, there is one set of issues that substantially undercuts the lofty short- to mid-term ambitions that some governments have expressed regarding strategic autonomy, not least in light of the Kremlin’s actions and diplomatic messaging in the first half of 2022. This is the idea that Europe would wield an independent capability, let alone be wholly self-sustainable, when it comes to nuclear weapons.¹⁶ In reality, there are at least three major obstacles to this becoming a reality within the next 10–20 years.

First, existing arrangements in the industrial, research and technology development sectors of Western countries cannot be easily transformed into a nuclear weapons program over which Europeans would have ultimate control. The technologies that France and, above all, the United Kingdom rely on for their nuclear weapons are largely derived from the effort of the US nuclear industry, and this cannot be easily remedied for a variety of economic, organizational and legal

2022), and European Commission, *Defence Industry: EU to Reinforce the European Defence Industry Through Common Procurement With a €500 Million Instrument* (19 Jul. 2022), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_4491 (accessed 31 Jul. 2022).

¹⁵ S. B. H. Faure, T. Joltreau & A. Smith, *The Differentiated Integration of Defence Companies in Europe: A Sociology of (Trans) National Economic Elites*, 6(2) *Eur. Rev. Int’l Stud.* 135–162 (2019).

¹⁶ K. Egeland & B. Pelopidas, *European Nuclear Weapons? Zombie Debates and Nuclear Realities*, 30(2) *Eur. Sec.* 237–258 (2021).

reasons.¹⁷ In other words, the relatively modest nuclear weapons programs run by France and the United Kingdom, respectively, cannot simply be scaled up to build a capability that would replace a strategic nuclear deterrent developed and maintained by the United States for nearly eight decades.¹⁸

Second, there is no simple way of organizing an adequate military chain of command, subordinated to a political leadership, within the constitutional setting of the EU or ‘NATO Europe’.¹⁹ Arguably, the political leadership with the awesome power to unleash nuclear weapons on Europe’s adversaries would have to be made directly accountable to a legislative body representing the majority of Europeans, and not via the convoluted way in which elections to the European Parliament operate today. Some form of directorate among Member States would probably need to be created for the purposes of taking highly consequential decisions on short notice in wartime, for which the current executive bodies, the Commission and the Council, are ill suited.²⁰ The High Representative, who heads the European External Action Service (EEAS), cannot reasonably be vested with such executive power, nor can the European Council president. Moreover, the European Council presidency rotates and the North Atlantic Council, the Alliance’s supreme body, is dominated by the United States.

Third, there is the considerable influence of European political and strategic culture, informing how governments and armed forces professionals think about the ends and means of warfare,²¹ including nuclear weapons.²² Given Europe’s long-standing ‘strategic cacophony’ with widely varying stances on what constitutes threats and sources of regional instability,²³ as well as how legitimate means of managing such challenges are envisioned,²⁴ there is even after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine only limited cohesion around contemporary political and strategic culture. As a result, it is difficult to see a majority of Europeans coming together to forge a common nuclear weapons doctrine that is a prerequisite for integrating these instruments into an overarching grand strategy. Although the Ukraine war clearly nudged several countries in such a direction, we are still lacking evidence of deeper

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For a succinct overview of how America’s nuclear weapons program evolved, see F. J. Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America’s Atomic Age* (Cornell University Press 2012).

¹⁹ S. Rosato, *Europe’s Troubles. Power Politics and the State of the European Project*, 35(4) *Int’l Sec.* 45–86 (2011).

²⁰ M. Riddervold, *(Not) in the Hands of the Member States: How the European Commission Influences EU Security and Defence Policies*, 55(3) *J. Com. Mkt. Stud.* 353–369 (2016).

²¹ M. Britz et al., *European Participation in International Operations: The Role of Strategic Culture* (Palgrave 2016).

²² B. Irondelle, F. Mérand & M. Foucault, *Public Support for European Defence: Does Strategic Culture Matter?*, 54(2) *Eur. J. Pol. Res.* 363–383 (2015).

²³ Brooks & Meijer, *supra* n. 3.

²⁴ G. Faleg, *The EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy: Learning Communities in International Organizations* (Springer 2017).

convergence of political and strategic culture, for instance in the work of the EU Military Staff, the EU Intelligence Centre, or the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC), the latter charged with fusing the military and civilian intelligence perspectives ahead of the EU adopting the 2022 Strategic Compass.²⁵

A more feasible solution, at least in the mid-term, would be a division of labour in which France and the United Kingdom adjust their respective doctrines to entail a second-strike option in the eventuality of a nuclear attack on Europe, while wholly deferring to the United States on the core, strategic deterrence function. By deferring to the United States on matters of strategic deterrence, Europeans could focus on building a sufficient conventional military capability to respond to virtually any threat that might arise out of the vicinity. In fact, merely strengthening military mobility, which is now underway as part of the PESCO and EDF programs, can go some way toward making conventional deterrence credible as it simultaneously facilitates rapid NATO deployment.²⁶ While such a compromise on nuclear weapons capabilities is unlikely to satisfy the majority of those who sympathize with the notion of European strategic autonomy – and typically have higher ambitions, it might bridge the gap between pro-European and pro-transatlantic constituencies who realize that Europe must urgently step up its contributions to alleviate America’s commitment to extended deterrence overall.

At the time of writing, it looks highly likely that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and attempts to curb the sovereignty of small Western neighbours regarding military alignments will end up eliciting a response by EU countries that puts conventional and nuclear deterrence at the centre.²⁷ After repeatedly having utilized military force and threats of coercion to urge deference to Moscow’s preferences in the past 10–12 years, renewed diplomatic outreach is no longer a plausible alternative to a stronger military posture. Even before the assault on Ukraine, the Putin regime clearly sought to mislead, obfuscate and even humiliate the EU and its top emissaries – such as its High Representative Joseph Borrell visiting Russia in February 2021.²⁸ A year later, the Kremlin had

²⁵ European Union External Action Service, *Questions and Answers: Threat Analysis – A Background for the Strategic Compass* (20 Nov. 2020), https://www.eas.europa.eu/eas/questions-and-answers-threat-analysis—background-strategic-compass_en (accessed 31 Jul. 2022).

²⁶ A. Vershbow & P. M. Breedlove, *II. Permanent Deterrence and the US Military Presence in Europe*, 95(1) Whitehall Papers 26–41 (2019).

²⁷ J. Barigazzi, *EU Offers More Talks, Pushes De-escalation in a Letter to Russia*, Politico.eu (9 Feb. 2022), <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-diplomacy-talks-russia-deescalation/> (accessed 2 Feb. 2022); S. Sprenger, *NATO Planners Put the F-35 Front and Center in European Nuclear Deterrence*, DefenseNews (13 Apr. 2022), <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2022/04/13/nato-planners-put-the-f-35-front-and-center-in-european-nuclear-deterrence/> (accessed 22 May 2022).

²⁸ C. Quinn, *EU-Russia Tensions Flare in Diplomatic Tit-for-Tat*, For. Policy (9 Feb. 2021), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/09/european-union-russia-tensions-flare-in-diplomatic-tit-for-tat-borrell-lavrov/> (accessed 9 Feb. 2022).

completely exhausted the patience of European political leaders and made them prioritize security and defence at an unprecedented level.²⁹ Membership applications to join NATO, handed in by formerly nonaligned Sweden and Finland in late May 2022, underscored the latter point, as did Denmark's decision to join the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) a few days later.³⁰

4 THE SUB-STRATEGIC THEATRE DIMENSION

Having Europe spend significantly more on defence while carving out strategic nuclear deterrence as a long-term, residual US contribution to transatlantic security will not suffice. That is, a third component is required to align political and legal commitments with interests and capabilities. In theory, the basic logic of an appropriate, future transatlantic division of labour in the sub-strategic theatre dimension is straightforward and goes something like this: NATO Member States share, to begin with, a formal responsibility for the defence of their own territory and that of their allies. This is the essence of mutual obligations derived from Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which, while not absolute, encompasses collective defence at its core. Second, EU members are supposed to band together for purposes of regional stability including military assistance, as expressed in the mutual defence clause of Article 42.7 of the Treaty on the European Union.³¹ Third, EU countries should look out for each other and assist whenever a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a man-made or natural disaster, in terms of the political solidarity laid out in Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Combining all three layers of formal responsibilities but extending the latter, 'milieu-shaping' role to Europe's immediate neighbourhood can be described as a minimum requirement for a revised division of labour from a sub-strategic theatre vantage point.³² That being said, this effort will be politically more demanding than simply increasing defence expenditures and spending them wisely, as it involves supple coordination between Member States, EU institutions, defence industries and other stakeholders. Apart from European leaders proactively insisting

²⁹ I. Krastev, *Putin May Not Like How He's Changed Europe*, New York Times (26 Apr. 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/opinion/ezra-klein-ivan-krastev-podcast.html?showTranscript=1> (accessed 3 May 2022).

³⁰ D. Sanger, *Biden Endorses Finland and Sweden's Bids to Join NATO*, New York Times (18 May 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/world/europe/finland-sweden-nato-us.html?searchResultPosition=3> (accessed 21 May 2022).

³¹ Since the financial and military support to an outside party such as Ukraine is not covered by EU treaties, off-budget mechanisms were created for this purpose. The EU is thus not directly financing so-called lethal aid to Ukraine.

³² S. Economides & J. Sperling, *EU Security Strategies: Extending the EU System of Security Governance* (Routledge 2018).

that they aim to share this responsibility with their counterparts in Washington D.C.,³³ this would involve pooling resources in a variety of defence-related areas at the EU level with the purpose of further consolidating institutions, jointly plan for contingencies and coordinate policy and practices.³⁴ For example, closer collaboration must be achieved between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) and Member State coast guard services, between the EEAS and national institutions responding to disinformation campaigns, as well as between Europol and Member State law enforcement agencies combating organized crime, illegal financial transactions, and the like.

Although synchronizing the force postures of the armed forces of individual EU countries may at some point become natural to broader security efforts, so far the potential focus was always as on agile, small-scale units for deployment in Europe's neighbourhood. In late 2021, it was proposed that a 'Rapid Deployment Capacity' (RDC) be established with 5,000 troops made up of land, sea and air components, to be ready by 2025. In March 2022, under the impression of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the RDC was integrated as a component in the Strategic Compass, along with the enhancement of intelligence sharing, command and control functions, cyber and hybrid response efforts and, crucially, the setting up of a more robust process for decision-making and financing of EU military operations.³⁵

Different from the Rapid Reaction Force and Battle Groups launched in the 1990s and early 2000s, the RDC is supposed to be wholly independent of US military assets.³⁶ However, precisely because of the disappointing experience of previous initiatives in this realm, the Union is still a long way away from putting together a robust joint military force of 50–60,000 troops, as envisaged at the 1999 EU summit in Helsinki.³⁷ Not least because the EU Battle Groups, which have been operational since 2007, were never deployed, observers know that the RDC

³³ S. Rynning, *A Europeanized NATO? The Contemplates the Trump Era and Beyond*, War on the Rocks, Commentary (25 Sep. 2018), <https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/a-europeanized-nato-the-alliance-contemplates-the-trump-era-and-beyond/> (accessed 13 Feb. 2022).

³⁴ N. Tocci, *Towards a European Security and Defence Union: Was 2017 a Watershed?*, 56(S1) J. Com. Mkt. Stud. 131–141 (2017); R. Csematoni, *The Evolving Role of the European External Action Service in Security and Defence*, 26(1) Eur. Foreign Aff. Rev. 87–100 (2021).

³⁵ European External Action Service, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (24 Mar. 2022), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf (accessed 21 May 2022).

³⁶ *EU to Aim for Rapid Deployment Force Without U.S. Help by 2025*, Reuters, Brussels (16 Nov. 2011), <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/eu-aim-rapid-deployment-force-without-us-assets-by-2025-document-says-2021-11-16/> (accessed 13 Feb. 2022).

³⁷ S. Biscop, *From Global Strategy to Strategic Compass: Where Is the EU Heading?* 3 (Egmont Security Policy Brief 121 Dec. 2019), <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/from-global-strategy-to-strategic-compass-where-is-the-eu-heading/> (accessed 18 Jan. 2022).

or another, more ambitious scheme, will only become reality once instilled with political credibility, sustainable funding, and a clear legal mandate.

Given the perceived threat of a swiftly rising, increasingly assertive China, it is nonetheless true that liberating US Armed Forces from a conventional combat role on European soil in the next few years would be much welcomed in Washington D.C. Much less certain is whether American political leaders at some point will be able to call on robust European military and political assets for deployment in South Asia, Southeast and East Asia, and the Pacific region. Judging by the reluctance of European governments to confront China on foreign investment in sensitive industrial sectors, such as telecommunications,³⁸ artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cyber, and space technology,³⁹ we are likely to continue to see similar ambivalence about power projection beyond the continent's immediate vicinity. The same applies to individual European States – France, Germany, Italy or even the UK – if and when they are asked to participate in US-led naval exercises in the Indian Ocean or patrol contested portions of the South China Sea.

This ambivalence does not preclude largely symbolic gestures undertaken by European allies and partners. The already established practice of 'power projection light' along the coasts of Africa or in the Indo-Pacific region by way of UK, French, German, or Italian naval resources appearing alone or in concert with their American counterparts is envisaged to continue in terms of coordinated maritime presences around the world, according to the 2022 Strategic Compass. This can help keep trade routes open and lower costs for the shipping industry and the financial sector. In East and Southeast Asia, moreover, such demonstrations of political alignment are seen as valuable to stability, as they are not nearly as contentious to China as the deployment of US, Japanese or Australian military vessels.

Again, the major problem facing the Europeans is how to rebuild a security order that relies less on Cold War understandings of burdensharing but also avoids the temptation of striving for 'full' strategic autonomy. This means to develop and consolidate the existing institutional frameworks that have served the continent well, yet allow for greater variation at the sub-strategic level. For instance, countries with a long coastline toward the Mediterranean Sea could collaborate closely on addressing common problems in this theatre, with the blessing of north European governments that indirectly benefit from it. Along the Union's eastern

³⁸ M. Bromley & K. Brockmann, *Implementing the 2021 Recast of the EU Dual-Use Regulation: Challenges and Opportunities*, SIPRI Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers, no. 77 (Sep. 2021), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/eunpdc_no_77.pdf (accessed 23 Jan. 2022).

³⁹ M. Nouwens & H. Legarda, *China's Pursuit of Advanced Dual-Use Technologies*, IISS Research Paper (18 Dec. 2018), <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2018/12/emerging-technology-dominance> (accessed 10 Feb. 2022).

boundary, meanwhile, countries ought to be able to come together and bolster the integrity and sovereignty of otherwise vulnerable nations, in ways that are flexible and respond to changing threats. If a NATO option of sub-strategic collaboration happens to be blocked, an EU alternative may be available, and vice versa.

Short of a regionalization of responsibilities that would be anathema to the collective security principle at the core of the alliance, pragmatic coordination of defence capabilities and readiness at the sub-strategic level can help close the gap between expectations and realities. Once the Europeans, through the Union or NATO's European pillar, are able to respond more robustly and cohesively to challenges in their respective vicinities, the continent will most likely also emerge as a reliable partner to America on the global stage, even if this may come to pass in successive stages. The evolution of Europe as a 'strategic actor' outside of its immediate neighbourhood will no doubt take time.⁴⁰ Yet, under almost any conceivable scenario, the interests of most nations inhabiting these two continents will be more closely aligned, rather than less so, in the decades to come.

5 THE ADDED VALUE OF SCALABLE ALIGNMENTS

As already alluded to above, a vigorous EU defence is still a project in its infancy.⁴¹ While some institutional underpinnings such as the EU Military Staff and the EU Military Committee have been in place since the early 2000s, sufficient political will to push this project forward was never available. In the meantime, America's commitment to European security remained steadfast. As numerous observers believe that the US global military posture is becoming overexposed in the 2020s, the EU is asked to do more on non-military crisis management, intelligence, defence industry integration, counterterrorism, and cyber defence. Due to concerns that this may weaken transatlantic relations, though, there is reticence on moving ahead on matters of hard, military defence. Collective institutions such as the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff neither have military units at their disposal, nor direct authority over the handful of operations presently

⁴⁰ For an early attempt to employ the term 'strategic actor' to the EU, see *The European Union and Strategy: An Emerging Actor* (K. Engelbrekt & J. Hallenberg eds, Routledge 2010). For a more recent example examining the energy sector in particular, see M. Siddi & I. Kustova, *From a Liberal to a Strategic Actor: The Evolution of the EU's Approach to International Energy Governance*, 28(7) J. Eur. Pub. Pol'y 1076–1094 (2021).

⁴¹ For upbeat versus skeptical views articulated before the Ukraine war, see S. Blockmans & D. M. Crossons, *PESCO: A Force for Positive Integration in EU Defence* (14 Sep. 2021), <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/pesco-a-force-for-positive-integration-in-eu-defence/> (accessed 31 Jul. 2022), and R. Csernatori, *A European Defense Winter?* (Carnegie Europe 11 Nov. 2020), <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/11/eu-security-and-defense-challenges-toward-european-defense-winter-pub-82032> (accessed 27 Jan. 2022), respectively.

taking place under the auspices of the Union.⁴² Since late 2018 the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) may be tasked with the execution of one military operation of the size of an EU Battle Group, though this mechanism has so far never been utilized. In the first half of 2022, the MPCC merely oversaw smaller, simultaneous EU Training Missions in the Central African Republic, Mali, and Somalia.

As long as transatlantic solidarity remains a top priority for most governments in Europe, NATO and its well-established system of legal procedures, professional staff, assigned logistics resources, operational headquarters and other assets will be essential features of a renewed division of labour. Virtually all militarily significant European States are represented at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) headquarters in Brussels as allies or partners, and wide consultations on military issues are held on a regular basis. In past decades, moreover, Partnership for Peace (PfP) several EU Member States elevated their positions toward NATO by demonstrating their usefulness in various contexts and are today more integrated into the Alliance's decision making than was the case at the turn of the twenty-first Century. In 2014, NATO launched its Enhanced Opportunities program and extended it to Sweden, Finland, Jordan, Georgia, and Australia. In 2020, notably, Ukraine was added to the list. As already mentioned, in May 2022 Finland and Sweden applied for full membership and, at the Madrid Summit 28–30 June, membership negotiations went ahead.⁴³

But already today, there is a whole spectrum of measures on which NATO members continuously interact with partners in their respective regions, to be better prepared for contingencies. This scalability of individual alignments – short of formal, mutual defence obligations – yields obvious benefits for partner countries and prospective allies in that they receive relevant training through exercises and become more acquainted with the operations and tactics of the armed forces of likeminded nations. By the same token, NATO defence forces become acquainted with their counterparts in partner states and with the operational area and the strategic culture of a nation's armed services. Those experiences might, in turn, be valuable in contingencies demanding rapid action by both sides. By reinforcing the likelihood of a predictable and robust response to a specific military challenge, they

⁴² In mid-2022, eleven civilian and seven military EU operations were underway, involving a total of some 4,000 personnel. For details, see European External Action Service, *Missions and Operations: Working for a Stable World and a Safer Europe* (6 Aug. 2021), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/missions-and-operations_en#11930 (accessed 3 May 2022).

⁴³ Turkey's president Erdogan raised objections to Finland's and especially Sweden's membership bid in mid-May 2022, criticizing the latter's record of providing refuge to Kurdish exile groups working for a free Kurdistan and reluctance to sell certain defence industry products to Turkey. At the Madrid Summit, however, Turkey did not block formal membership negotiations, which were completed already on 4 Jul. Ratification by all Member States is predicted to last into 2023.

may even have a stabilizing impact on a particular region, including the Middle East and North Africa.⁴⁴

In northern and north-eastern Europe, the opportunities for scalable alignments have expanded greatly in recent years. This is in part due to the existence of dense, regional collaborative practices and networks, as well as bi- and multilateral organizations with formal commitments to security and neighbourly relations.⁴⁵ Intra-Nordic defence cooperation is deepening, for instance via NORDEF, and so is coordination between NATO and non-NATO countries in this part of Europe. Ever since Sweden and Finland signed host nation agreements with NATO, military deployment by US and other alliance Member States can occur on short notice, something that has enabled the evolution of a more cohesive regional deterrence posture.⁴⁶ Sweden's deployment of the Mobile Interceptor Missile (MIM)-103 Patriot system from Raytheon and Finland's recent decision to procure Lockheed Martin's F-35 Lightning II combat aircraft, both prominent US defence corporations, will further deepen collaboration.

Clearly, Finnish and Swedish NATO membership would mean that the alliance acquired a 1,300 kilometres long border with the Russian Federation, with important repercussions for regional security. Merely days after both countries' membership bids were formally submitted, Russia's defence minister Sergey Shoigu announced that twelve new military units would bolster the Western Military District in the near future.⁴⁷ Building on the history of relatively low tension in the region, however, it is conceivable that the peacetime defence posture of both sides will ultimately not change dramatically, other than in terms of bolstering border controls and adding rapid deployment units.

By contrast, in southern and south-eastern Europe there is less alignment of purpose and, consequently, more of a patchwork of collaborative networks and institutions. Several countries in the Western Balkans, for instance, are not members of the EU or NATO. With Montenegro and North Macedonia joining the Alliance while Serbia historically often supports Russia's positions on foreign and security policy, the gap has been widening rather than closing in recent years. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea 2014 and covert military assistance to

⁴⁴ E. Hagström Frisell & E. Sjöqvist, *Military Cooperation Around Framework Nations: A European Solution to the Problem of Limited Defence Capabilities*, FOI-R—4672—SE (FOI 2019), <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R-4672-SE> (accessed 13 Feb. 2022).

⁴⁵ J. A. Olsen, *Security in Northern Europe: Deterrence, Defence and Dialogue* (Routledge 2019).

⁴⁶ R. Ellehus et al., *Security in Northern Europe in the Biden Era: Redesigning Multilateralism* (Center for Strategic and International Studies Apr. 2021), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/security-northern-europe-biden-era> (accessed 18 Jan. 2022).

⁴⁷ *Shoigu Says Russia to Strengthen Its Western Defenses in Response to NATO Growth*, RFE/RL's Russian Service (20 May 2022), <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-shoigu-new-military-bases-west-nato/31859938.html> (accessed 21 May 2022).

separatist forces in Donbass over eight years, and before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Moscow was quite successful in enhancing its influence in the Balkans and the Black Sea region.⁴⁸

To be sure, in each of Europe's sub-strategic theatres but especially those vulnerable to renewed Russian military aggression, there is clearly a need to further deepen institutional arrangements and enhance coordination between EU and NATO activities.⁴⁹ The seventh progress report on EU-NATO cooperation, published ahead of the Madrid Summit, spoke of tangible deliverables being achieved in all relevant areas, many seemingly facilitated by a renewed sense of purpose following the outbreak of a major European war.⁵⁰ In turn, this widens the space for scalable alignments with non-EU or non-NATO members under certain circumstances. But the outcome of NATO's 2022 Madrid Summit is also positive in that it includes several concrete commitments regarding capabilities, as well as an ambition to dovetail capability development with the use of 'milieu-shaping' instruments. The latter is not least reflected in the pledge to 'step up tailored political and practical support to partners, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Moldova', and to 'enhance our capacity-building support to partners in the South'.⁵¹

6 CONCLUSIONS

The starting point of this article was that conversations about the fairness of transatlantic burdensharing tend to be stale and repetitive, whereas those focusing on European strategic autonomy are lofty and abstract. By contrast, it is both necessary and appropriate to engage in a serious and sustained discussion about the exact division of labour among members and partners of the transatlantic alliance in the European theatre of operations. The reason is that discussions directly

⁴⁸ On the EU dimension of contemporary Russian ambitions to project power in the Black Sea, see A. Paul & I. Ciolan, *Kremlin's Quest for Mare Nostrum: Enhancing Black Sea Security to Stop Russian Encroachment* (European Policy Centre) (8 Jun. 2021), <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Kremlins-quest-for-mare-nostrum-Enhancing-Black-Sea-security-to-stop~3fcff0> (accessed 23 Jan. 2022). On the NATO dimension, see M. Sokolov, *NATO, Russia, and the Security Dynamics in the Black Sea* (International Centre for Defence and Security 30 Nov. 2021), <https://icds.ee/en/nato-russia-and-the-security-dynamics-in-the-black-sea/> (accessed 30 Jan. 2022).

⁴⁹ S. N. Litsas, *The European Common Security and Defense Concept: Opportunities and Challenges*, 18(3) *Medit. Q.* 56–67 at 67 (2017).

⁵⁰ The first few paragraphs of the report are devoted to the Ukraine war; European Council, *Seventh Progress Report on the Implementation of the Common Set of Proposals Endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017* (20 Jun. 2022), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57184/eu-nato-progress-report.pdf?utm_source=dsm-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EU+NATO+cooperation%3a+seventh+progress+report (31 Jul. 2022).

⁵¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, *Madrid Summit Declaration* (29 Jun. 2022), para. 17, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm (accessed 31 Jul. 2022).

addressing the division of labour emphasize the 'here and now' and the functional needs of European security and defence, required to offset a variety of crises currently impressing on the political and military leadership in Washington D.C., as well as in Brussels and European capitals. The contention here is that the pragmatism underlying the approach outlined above envisages a realistic model for equitably sharing responsibility that seriously engages both sides of the Atlantic. It does so by implying that the Europeans 'put their money where their mouths are' and that Americans renew previous pledges to sustain a strategic nuclear deterrent for the benefit of Europe, a traditional cornerstone of transatlantic relations.

Arguably, a recalibrated arrangement that satisfies the financial equity and deterrence dimensions utilizes the recognized strengths of both sides. But, as importantly, a new arrangement 'splitting the difference' and building – from the ground up – on these two dimensions will free up space for multiple initiatives within the sub-strategic theatre dimension. It is in this dimension that security and stability must be constructed in the mid- to long-term, and where the political challenges for multiheaded regional organizations such as the EU and NATO need to be constantly managed so that they actually deliver the goods. This is done through integrated operational planning, always weighing in geographic proximity as well as the capabilities required. At the end of the day, it is only by identifying who ensures security to whom, with whom, against whom, with what means and how, that Europe will be able to assume greater responsibility for its own integrity, stability, and freedom in decades to come.

No doubt, Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine and the concomitant demands that NATO stop expand eastwards provided an impetus toward a more robust European security and defence posture, irrespective of whether the latter is solely underpinned by NATO or by a more assertive and militarily capable EU. The question is if this impetus will produce a sustained effort on the part of European nations, and to what extent concrete results ensue that render Europe more self-reliant in security and defence matters. Strategic nuclear deterrence, for reasons explained above, must remain the primary transatlantic commitment of the United States, at least for the foreseeable future.

