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NATO and the CSDP after the Ukraine War: The End of European Strategic Autonomy?

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Abstract
The paper debates the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the relationship between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It argues that the invasion has dramatically changed Europe's security landscape, carrying major implications for both organizations and their relationship. After NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and persisting frictions between the US and its European allies about burden-sharing, the war instilled a new sense of purpose into the Alliance, placing renewed emphasis on its core functions of territorial defence and deterrence. However, the war was also a reality check for the EU, raising important questions about the future of the European security architecture, the Union's role within it, and its relationship with NATO (hereafter also referred to as the Alliance). The aim of this article is to try to answer some of these questions by providing an assessment of the impact of the war on the relationship between NATO and CSDP and to discuss potential avenues for strengthening the EU's role in transatlantic security. More specifically, the paper will try to answer the following questions: what are the implications of the conflict on NATO and CSDP? How did the war impact the EU's aspiration to strategic autonomy? Will the conflict trigger more effective burden-sharing within the Alliance as the US prepares for deepening systemic competition with China, or will it be another missed opportunity to strengthen the EU's role in transatlantic security?

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Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shocked the foundations of Europe's post-Cold War security architecture, ushering in a critical junction for European and transatlantic security. After the 2008 economic crisis, frictions about burden-sharing between the US and its European allies had cast a sense of fatigue over the transatlantic partnership, fuelling American threats of disengagement from Europe as well as European fears of de-coupling and calls for strategic autonomy from the US. However, the outbreak of the largest and most brutal war on the European continent since 1945 made it evident that European countries remain heavily dependent on the US both in terms of political leadership and military capabilities. Nevertheless, the war also highlighted the need for an expanded EU role in security and defence and intensified cooperation between NATO and CSDP. In future years, closer coordination between the Alliance and the EU will be particularly needed, as the revamped American commitment to Europe is unlikely to usher in a structural "pivot in reverse" of US strategic priorities (Haroche and Brugier 2023, 6). Rather, increasing US concerns about China's assertiveness will require Europeans to carry a bigger share of the burden of transatlantic security. While in the aftermath of the invasion, both organizations updated their key guiding strategic documents, in January 2023, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the President of the European Council Charles Michel, and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen signed a Joint Declaration on NATO-European Union cooperation, promising to bring their partnership to the 'next level' (Council of the EU 2023). This document was the fourth joint declaration signed by the two organizations after the 2002 EU-NATO Declaration (NATO 2002), the 2016 Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation (Council of the EU 2016), and the 2018 Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation (Council of the EU 2018). While condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and restating a common determination to act together against a wide array of security threats, the declaration confirmed NATO's premier role for Euro-Atlantic security, firmly enshrining the prospect of closer European security cooperation within the boundaries of the Alliance. To a degree, it also cast aside calls for European strategic autonomy.

Nonetheless, the paper argues that, in the current systemic context, European leaders should grab onto the momentum created by the war to further institutional integration in security and defence. In the face of the ongoing conflict in Europe as well as deepening systemic tensions between the US and China, the risks implied in inaction were summed up in 2021 by the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, who remarked that the EU could no longer afford to be an herbivore in a power struggle between carnivores (Borrell 2021, 292). Rather, the paper argues that in the current systemic context, Europeans need to make a quantum leap towards achieving a degree of supranational centralization of the decision-making process in order to endow the EU to play a larger role in European and transatlantic security. It is from these assumptions that the paper proceeds as follows. The first section discusses the impact of the war on NATO. The second section debates the implications of the war on the CSDP. In the third section, the paper assesses the impact of the conflict on the relationship between the two organizations, arguing that the war confirmed NATO's premier role for European and transatlantic security and the CSDP's inability to act effectively without support from the Alliance. Lastly, it sketches out potential future scenarios for the relationship between the two organizations, concluding that EU members need to take stock of the current situation to further advance integration in security and defence.

The Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine on NATO

A Revamped Transatlantic Alliance

The beginning of Russia's 'special military operation' in Ukraine at the end of February 2022 ushered in a critical junction for European and transatlantic security. For the first time since the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, prolonged and high-intensity warfare returned to European soil. Although Ukraine was neither a NATO nor an EU member when the invasion began and is unlikely to secure

membership in any of these institutions anytime soon, Russia's invasion shook the foundations of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture that was established at the Cold War's end and gradually consolidated between the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. This architecture was based on the Alliance's premier role for European and transatlantic security as a provider of both collective defence and as a crisis management tool but also on the development of European capabilities for the conduct of peacekeeping and crisis management operations (the so-called Petersberg Tasks). This architecture also relied on the search for a durable accommodation between the Euro-Atlantic institutions and Moscow. While relations with Russia had already begun to deteriorate during the late 1990s and early 2000s and never fully recovered after the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 (Ratti 2013), the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full-blown invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have caused significant harm to the prospect of a durable arrangement between the West and Russia.

With the war in its second year, the European security architecture has now been radically transformed with immediate consequences for both NATO and the EU as well as their relationship with the Russian Federation. More specifically, the war has produced three main consequences for the Alliance and the EU. First, rekindling a security discourse based on deterrence and territorial defence, rather than crisis management and cooperative security, it triggered a reinvigoration of the US role on the continent and strengthened transatlantic cohesion. The war brought about a tactical reorientation of the US priorities towards Europe, leading, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, to a significant enhancement of NATO's forward presence on the eastern flank. It also gave a fundamental impulse towards allied unity, acting as a catalyst for transatlantic unity and firmness. The US used intelligence, diplomatic, defence, deterrence, and economic assets to respond to the invasion, reassuring its European allies and consulting extensively with them to support Ukraine and provide a coordinated response. The Biden administration's policy thus restored a strong sense of unity between the two sides of the Atlantic. Both the 2022 US National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) stressed the importance of working closely with the NATO allies (Department of Defense 2022; White House 2022). The US lead allowed the allies to signal unity and showcase their ability for joint action (Simón 2022).

Second, the war has been a reality check for the EU and for the ambition of some European leaders to achieve strategic autonomy from the US. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, due to deepening frictions within the Alliance about burden-sharing, and even more so during the troubled years of the Trump presidency, some European decision-makers began calling for the EU to acquire strategic autonomy from the US and NATO. Burden-sharing disputes are as old as the Alliance itself and are certainly not a novelty (Pothier and Vershbow 2017). They reflect a long-standing view in Washington that there is a dysfunctional disproportion in the contribution made by member states to the Alliance's management and operations. In the aftermath of NATO's intervention in Libya in March 2011, in his last official speech as Secretary of Defence, former CIA director Robert Gates brandished NATO as a two-tiered alliance and warned Europeans that future US leaders "may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost" (Joyner 2011). Similar views were also expressed by his successor Leon Panetta on his first trip to NATO's headquarters as Secretary of Defence (Michel 2013, 257). In 2016, then-US President Barack Obama openly criticized Washington's European allies, accusing them of acting like "free riders" (Goldberg 2016). Under the Presidency of Donald Trump, these disputes intensified further and received widespread publicity. More specifically, the President openly adopted a critical position towards NATO, calling the Alliance obsolete and claiming that Europeans owe "vast sums" of money to the United States (Morin 2017). The severity of Trump's position and his administration's concerns about the systemic threat posed by China deepened fears that the US might abandon its contractual obligations to Europe's defence. In response to Trump's vociferous and repeated criticism of the European allies, French President Emmanuel Macron championed the notion of European 'strategic autonomy' as one of the key objectives of the EU foreign and security policy. In a speech at the Sorbonne in September 2017, the French President called on the EU to develop an autonomous capacity for action (Macron

2017), while in August 2018, he publicly remarked that Europe "cannot entrust its security to the United States alone," urging the EU to develop autonomous capabilities (Macron 2018). In a famous 2019 interview with *The Economist*, Macron scornfully described NATO as "braindead" (The Economist 2019). The French President also embarked on a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening cooperation among EU members and pursuing the EU's strategic autonomy. In 2019, Macron and Germany's then-Chancellor Angela Merkel signed the Aachen Treaty, promising to deepen bilateral cooperation and extend it to their European partners. Their initiative mirrored the 1963 Franco-German treaty, which Charles De Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer had signed at the height of a prolonged period of transatlantic frictions with the US —which stretched from the Anglo-French debacle at Suez to the Cuban missile crisis—to assert a degree of European autonomy in the bipolar structure of the Cold War. At the same time, both Borrell and his predecessor Federica Mogherini in the post of High Representative for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy called for the EU to acquire the institutional capacity to independently plan and conduct military operations across the full spectrum of conflict—including high-intensity military operations, such as expeditionary warfare and territorial defence missions—and to autonomously develop and produce the related defence capabilities with minimal or no assistance from the US (Howorth 2017; Meijer and Brooks 2021). Russia's invasion of Ukraine, revamping conventional high-intensity warfare and raising the prospect of a tactical nuclear strike in Europe, downplayed these ambitions. Whereas during the Trump administration, calls for European strategic autonomy had fuelled fears of a transatlantic drift, the debate on US detachment from Europe and the tussle for relevancy between NATO and the EU in defending the continent has been considerably softened (Maze-Sencier 2022).

Third, although restoring a strong sense of purpose among the allies, the war also highlighted the need for an expanded European contribution to transatlantic security. The National Security Strategy approved by the Biden Administration in October 2022 makes a specific distinction between the "immediate" but localized threat of Russia and the "systemic" and "global" challenge posed by China (White House 2022). In February 2023, the US Congress established a new committee on the pressing threat of the Chinese Communist Party to US national security. Although the Alliance was expressly designed to address threats to the Euro-Atlantic area, in recent years, it expanded its focus to the Indo-Pacific region, inviting the leaders of Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand to participate in its 2022 Madrid and 2023 Vilnius summits. The New Strategic Concept (NSC) adopted in 2022, while focusing on the consequences of Russia's invasion, names China as one of NATO's priorities, stating that Beijing's ambitions challenge the West's "interests, security and values" (NATO 2022a, 5). Strategic competition between China and the US is poised to deepen further in future years, requiring EU members to assume greater responsibility for the security and defence of the continent and show a willingness to act collectively to address complex and substantial challenges.

Deterrence and Defence of the Eastern Flank

The more direct consequence of Russia's invasion has been a robust reinforcement in the Alliance's posture on the eastern flank. Whereas after the end of the Cold War, NATO had refrained from deploying considerable military forces on the territory of its new members since the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 over the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO had begun to carry out small deployments of forces in frontline states – the so-called "tripwire" model to deter Moscow (Ratti and Leonardi 2019). These token deployments occurred in the context of the European Reassurance/Deterrence initiative, which the Alliance launched in 2014 with the aim of reassuring its East European members. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine made this approach no longer sufficient, leading NATO to significantly strengthen its posture and increase the number of forces on its eastern flank (Bond and Scazzieri 2022). Washington and its European allies committed significant resources, agreeing on unprecedented steps to reinforce deterrence, establishing four additional multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. This measure effectively doubled the number of battlegroups deployed on the Alliance's eastern flank.

NATO's strengthened posture on the eastern flank was also reflected in the evolution of the Alliance's official strategy. Almost half a year into the conflict, the Madrid Summit of the Alliance in June 2022 approved a New Strategic Concept. While the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997—though effectively torn to pieces—was not formally revoked at the Summit (Pszczel 2022), the New Strategic Concept describes Russia as the most significant threat to allied security. In the NSC, the allies affirmed their commitment to "defend every inch of Allied territory" (NATO 2022a, 6), agreeing to strengthen NATO's "deterrence and defence posture to deny any potential adversary any possible opportunities for aggression" (NATO 2022a, 6). They also agreed to "deter and defend forward with robust in-place, multi-domain, combat-ready forces" and to increase their operational readiness, including by pre-positioning ammunition and equipment, reaching an agreement to expand the number of troops in NATO's rapid response force from 40,000 to 300,000 (NATO 2022b). Although the details of this reinforced posture still need to be fully worked out, this enlarged force is supposed to have a higher level of readiness than the current response force (Bond and Scazzieri 2022). Some allies have already agreed to commit more troops. The US will set up a permanent army corps headquarters in Poland and send more troops to Romania and the Baltic states. Canada, the UK, and Germany have committed to strengthening their existing deployments in the Baltic states, while Italy and France will increase their forces in the Balkans. The allies also agreed to upgrade the strength of the forces deployed on the eastern flank from battalions to brigades.

These joint commitments will lead to a major increase in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in future years. Currently, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) has operational command authority over some 42,000 combat troops, 60 plus warships and hundreds of combat aircraft now in Eastern Europe as part of NATO's new posture of Forward Defence (FD). The new NATO Force Model is planned to be completed by the end of 2023 and envisions a mainly European force of some 300,000 troops maintained at high alert, with roughly 100,000 troops to be deployable within ten days (NATO 2022b). For the first time, all rapid reaction forces under NATO command will be committed to playing both a deterrence and defence role. All such forces will be consolidated within one command framework. Whilst the new force will be held at 24 hours "notice to act," the bulk of the NATO Force Structure will be held at 15 days "notice to move." This would be a marked improvement over previous arrangements in which some forces were held at 180 days' "notice to move" (Lindley-French 2022).

New Defence Investments

At their Madrid summit, the allies agreed to ensure a substantial and persistent presence on land, at sea and in the air, including through strengthened integrated air and missile defence, while committing to increased defence spending and investing in major equipment through the creation of a new NATO innovation fund. As of 2022, there have been eight consecutive years of increased defence spending, with the European allies' and Canada's cumulative investment of almost 350 billion US dollars (USD) since 2014 (NATO 2022a). Nonetheless, the availability of troops at high readiness will require concrete pledges of national contributions (Pszczel 2022). The European members of the Alliance now need to quickly implement their pledges and plan for the scenario of protracted high-intensity conflict in Europe.

Thus far, Russian leaders have had no incentive to test the credibility of NATO's Article 5. The alliance's response has offered a sufficient degree of dissuasion. NATO has balanced incremental support to Ukraine with a reluctance to risk open conflict with Russia, implementing a form of deterrence by denial rather than punishment and devising a new beefed-up forward defence strategy. Substantial and persistent military presence, backed by the prepositioning of equipment and strategic pre-assigning of combat forces, has now become part of the new NATO Force Model (Pszczel 2022). Furthermore, NATO has opened its doors to two additional members—Sweden and Finland—which, as a result of the war, formalized their application for membership. While in April 2023, Finland became NATO's 31st member, Sweden's application awaits ratification from Turkey and Hungary.

Once finalized, their membership will bolster security on the Alliance's northern flank, allowing NATO to establish a robust deterrence-by-denial posture in the Scandinavian and Baltic regions (Alberque and Schreer 2022). Both countries can make a significant contribution to burden-sharing and enhance NATO's ability to modernize its defence planning and capability development.

In the NSC, the allies have also made no ambiguity on the continued role played by nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantee of their security, stressing that "the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security" of its members (NATO 2022a, 8). Nonetheless, they will also need to invest significant sums to increase their conventional forces, particularly military deployments and pre-positioned stocks on NATO's eastern flank, and to improve their readiness and ability to operate together. These measures might be particularly needed also in the context of the crisis of the global and European arms control regimes following the collapse of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces in Europe Treaty (INF) and Russia's announcements in 2023 of its withdrawal from the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). In order to put flesh on the bones of these plans, NATO has recently launched two initiatives to foster defence investment and innovation: the NATO Innovation Fund (worth 1 billion euros) to invest in start-ups and technology, and the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA), which is designed to harness emerging and disruptive technologies by bringing together civilian and defence experts. Finally, the NSC has acknowledged the need to strengthen the Alliance's 360-degree approach to security (NATO 2022a, 8). This is particularly important to ensure that the strengthened posture along NATO's eastern flank will not undermine security in other parts of the Euro-Atlantic region. The NSC did not overlook NATO's southern neighbourhood, particularly the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel, emphasizing the ongoing interconnectedness between NATO's eastern and southern flanks (NATO 2022a, 3-4).

The Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine on the CSDP

The CSDP before Russia's Invasion

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to a reinvigoration of NATO, confirming the Alliance's role as the primary framework for collective military planning in Europe. However, what are the implications of the conflict on the EU and the CSDP? Technically, the EU has had a common foreign and security policy since the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. During the 1990s, European military cooperation was conducted mostly through the Western European Union (WEU). However, at the 1998 St. Malo Summit, the UK and France called for the development of an EU "capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces…in order to respond to international crises" (UK Parliament 1998). The Anglo-French initiative paved the way for the creation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) at the Cologne European Council meeting in 1999. In 2001, the signing of the Treaty of Nice transferred the WEU's competencies in peacekeeping, peacemaking, and crisis management—the revised Petersberg Tasks—to the European Union. The EU's acquisition of these competencies was followed by the publication of the first EU Security Strategy in 2003, which called for the EU to be more active in the pursuit of its strategic interests (Council of the EU 2009).

Nonetheless, in the following years, most EU members continued to rely on the Alliance for concrete military protection and to regard the ESDP mostly as an enhancement of NATO. As a result, its capabilities remained limited and never exceeded the range of the Petersberg Tasks. Furthermore, in 2002, the Berlin Plus set of agreements between the EU and NATO left the ESDP heavily dependent on the Alliance for key strategic assets and resources, such as intelligence, planning, and logistic facilities. This dependence proved to be a major obstacle to the development of a capacity for autonomous military action. Berlin Plus made use of NATO's assets subject to a right of refusal by the Alliance and conditional upon the consensus of all NATO members, including Turkey, thus

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constraining the EU's ability to act as an autonomous crisis manager (Howorth 2017). The signing of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 and, more specifically, the provisions enshrined in the new Article 42(7) further expanded the EU's security competencies, transferring the common defence clause of Article V of the WEU to the European Union. The shift from Article V of the WEU to Article 42(7) of the Treaty of Lisbon marked the formal establishment of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), leading to the WEU's effective termination in 2011. Nonetheless, in the following years, despite including the word "defence" in its title, the CSDP did not live up to the promise of its name, remaining more of a foreign policy and crisis management tool than a defence policy (Simón 2022). Furthermore, EU member states remained reluctant to pursue institutional integration, preferring to establish bilateral and mini-lateral arrangements, such as the 2010 Anglo-French Lancaster House agreement, the Nordic defence cooperation, and the Visegrad Battlegroup, rather than endeavouring to take steps towards supranational centralization.

The sluggishness of the institutional process tampered with the EU's ambitions and also impacted relations between the CSDP and the Alliance. The EU-NATO Declarations of 2016 and 2018 acknowledged that European security and defence instruments were inadequate to address the new security challenges and set out to create greater synergies, setting into motion unprecedented cooperative dynamics between the two organizations (Schuette 2022). In 2016, however, the result of the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump raised the prospect of a transatlantic drift and triggered a plethora of new proposals to spur EU defence, rekindling hopes that the EU would be able to claim a larger role and take steps, such as the creation of military headquarters (Biscop 2016; Tocci 2017). In 2016, EU's Global Strategy called for the EU to develop "strategic autonomy" (EEAS 2016), while in 2017, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was activated among 25 EU members, with only Denmark, the UK, and Malta declining participation at the time. While the narrative of strategic autonomy fuelled US fears of functional overlap with the Alliance, it also proved a largely rhetorical and amorphous concept, exposing a dangerous gap between rhetoric and delivery. This debate failed to promote a dramatic U-turn in European defence or usher in an effective empowerment of European institutions, confirming the EU's persisting dependence on the US and NATO. Furthermore, UK's withdrawal in 2020 deprived the EU of its member with the largest military budget and one of only two members possessing "full-spectrum" military capabilities—including a nuclear deterrent—as well as removing the automatic security guarantee, which the UK government had provided since the 1948 Brussels Treaty. In 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron first proposed the creation of a European Intervention Initiative (EII) as a forum for preserving cooperation between the EU and the UK after Brexit, while in 2022, the French President launched the project for a European Political Community (EPC) as a platform for political coordination across the entire European continent and as a forum for engaging countries, such as the UK itself, that do not have formal frameworks for dialogue with the EU. Nonetheless, both the EII and the EPC have no resources, staff, or budget of their own. As such, they might function as additional forums for political dialogue but are unlikely to turn into catalysts for increased European security cooperation.

The CSDP's Response to Russia's Invasion

Despite CSDP's weaknesses, like NATO, the European Union responded swiftly and decisively to Russia's invasion, helping coordinate the initiatives of member states. However, the CSDP was never conceived to face the prospect of high-intensity warfare on European soil but rather as a crisis response or management tool. As a result, the EU's initiatives have been mostly confined to the realm of economic and financial measures. More specifically, the EU imposed eleven sanction packages on Russia and adopted a wide array of measures to support Ukraine, sanctioning hundreds of individuals as well as Russia's central bank, its aviation, finance, energy, media, transport, and technology sectors. The EU also banned imports of Russian coal and oil and plans to do the same with gas by 2027. More significantly, in an unprecedented step, through the newly created European Peace

Facility (EPF), the EU also gave Kyiv substantial military support to help finance the transfer of weapons from member states to Ukraine. As a reaction to the war, member states also took measures to develop the EU's Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). In July 2022, the Commission presented the European Defence Industrial Reinforcement Procurement Act (EDIRPA), aimed at supporting procurement cooperation among members. In March 2023, the European Council agreed on a three-track approach calling members to jointly procure ammunition and, if requested, missiles to refill their stocks while enabling the continuation of support to Ukraine. In this context, the Defence Joint Procurement Task Force—made up of the European Commission, the European External Action Service, and the European Defence Agency—coordinated the most urgent and critical needs of EU member states and produced a mapping of the supply capacities of the European defence industry to meet the identified demand. In May, the Commission adopted the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) with the aim of ramping up the EU's production capacity and addressing the current shortage of ammunition and missiles as well as their components. The EU also granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, despite the skepticism of many of its member states (Biscop 2023a).

Nonetheless, the EU’s reaction to the war continued to highlight the absence of centralization in EU security and defence policy. Initiatives were taken by member states informally rather than through the use of existing treaties. Rather, treaty mechanisms for differentiated cooperation among members, such as the execution of a task by a group of member states and enhanced cooperation, were not activated. Consequently, member states were rarely subject to EU central guidance, while in the first months of the war, there was no centre at the EU level to coordinate increases in defence spending and bilateral provision of military aid to Ukraine (Amadio Viceré 2022). This caused friction between Ukraine and some member states. In February 2023, for example, Italy’s Prime Minister Georgia Meloni openly criticized France’s President Emmanuel Macron’s invitation to Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky to meet in Paris with him and Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz ahead of the EU summit in Brussels. Furthermore, although Russian armed forces’ performance in Ukraine showed that earlier assessments of Russian military capabilities might have been largely exaggerated and looking ahead, the conventional threat from Russia seems less daunting than previously thought (Dalsjö, Jonsson, and Norberg 2022), the war also made it clear that without NATO’s involvement, the CSDP cannot counter hard security threats.

Rather, the lack of centralized strategic guidance and a shortage of military capabilities have made it clear that NATO remains more essential than ever to preserve European security. Already in 2016, the joint EU-NATO declaration adopted at the end of the Alliance’s Warsaw summit had reaffirmed that collective defence is mainly NATO’s responsibility and that there will be no European duplication of the Alliance’s command structures, thus confirming a willingness on both sides not to allow heated rhetorical debates to drive a wedge between the two organizations (Schuette 2022). The current conflict in Ukraine has revitalized the commitment of NATO’s members to invest economically and militarily within the alliance. It has also prompted two new EU member states, Finland and Sweden, to seek NATO membership. The reality is that NATO, and the protection and assets it provides through its association with the US, continues to be the most attractive option for most European states. For instance, in the event of an attack on Finland or Sweden before their formal admission into the Alliance, under the current CSDP framework, there would have been little that the EU could do without NATO’s involvement and support (Lowings 2022). As a result of the war, calls for a truly autonomous EU military policy have become a moot point in the present security environment, while the debate on strategic autonomy has become partly redundant (Lowings 2022). Rather, the war has quenched this debate, making it clear that, through its extended deterrence and unique capabilities, NATO remains the indisputable bedrock of European security. Nonetheless, the war also highlighted once more the risk of European overreliance on American strength. More specifically, Russia’s campaign confirmed that the European Union neither has the institutional capacity to independently plan and conduct military operations across the full spectrum of conflict—

including high-intensity military operations, such as expeditionary warfare and territorial defence missions—nor to autonomously develop and produce the related defences capabilities with minimal or no assistance from the United States. It is, therefore, likely that in future years, the prospect of closer European security cooperation will remain firmly anchored within the boundaries of transatlantic solidarity. Rather, uncertainty about the duration of the war has revitalized the notion of a European pillar within the Alliance to be embedded in nodal defence, in increasing European defence budgets, and in contributions to missions (Ringsmose and Webber 2020).

At the same time, however, the military threat from Russia and strategic concerns about China from the US have highlighted the urgency to deepen institutional cooperation within the EU. While most European initiatives have been confined to the non-military realm, Europeans have had little choice but to take on a larger share of the burden of their own defence. Since Russia's invasion in February 2022, EU countries have announced an extra 200 billion euros (EUR) in defence spending. For the first time, the bloc also funded the delivery of weapons and military support to the tune of EUR 2.5 billion under the newly created European Peace Facility. EU countries were quick to tear down old taboos: Germany decided to spend more on defence, providing military assistance to a country at war; most notably, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged that Germany would finally meet its NATO commitment to spend 2 percent of its GDP on defence, establishing a EUR 100 billion ad-hoc fund to help reach that target. As a result, in 2022, Germany's military budget became the seventh largest in the world, with further increases planned. Germany also established an extra-budgetary fund to increase its armed forces' military capabilities. Defence spending in Western and Central Europe has now surpassed that of the last year of the Cold War (SIPRI 2023). Denmark reversed its 30-year opt-out from the CSDP, while Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership. Finland's accession in April 2023 brought an additional EU member into the alliance, strengthening NATO's European pillar and serving as an additional bridge-builder between NATO and the EU. Once Sweden's accession process is complete, 23 members of the EU will be members of the Alliance, while only four EU members—Malta, Cyprus, Ireland, and Austria—will formally retain a neutral status, further easing coordination between the two organizations.

The EU's Strategic Compass, which was approved by the European Council in March 2022, leaves no doubt about European dependence on NATO and, specifically, US defence capabilities. Rhetorically at least, the EU's Strategic Compass sets a high level of ambition for the EU's security and defence role. However, it also makes it clear that "NATO…remains the foundation of collective defence for its members. The transatlantic relationship and EU-NATO co-operation...are key to our overall security" (Council of the EU 2022, 15). The EU will not take on a major role in the defence of European territory – at least not in the short term. The Compass sets out plans for the EU to improve its ability to carry out medium-sized military operations by building a flexible force of 5,000 that could be deployed in a range of circumstances entitled the "Rapid Deployment Capacity" (RDC). However, these numbers mark a significant reduction in the EU's level of ambition. In 1999, the EU committed to deploying 60,000 troops at short notice, but in the following years, it never came close to achieving this target. The Compass acknowledges that NATO is the pre-eminent organization when it comes to collective defence and explains how a stronger EU is complementary to NATO, thus making European strategic autonomy consistent with the strengthening of the transatlantic link. While the RDC would be a significant upgrade to the EU's two existing battlegroups (both of which are only 1,500 strong and have never been used), being able to deploy a force of 5,000 will take years, as member states will need to acquire the military capabilities for which they currently depend on the US, including a full-scale command structure, intelligence, reconnaissance, air-to-air refuelling, and strategic airlift (Bond and Scazzieri 2022). These shortages were made patently clear with NATO's operation against Libya in 2011, which highlighted Europe's difficulties in sustaining a relatively small military operation over an extended period of time.

There are also some additional issues. On the surface, the war seems to have wiped out strategic undercurrents among EU members. However, some nuances have not been transcended. Hence, some

EU members may be unwilling to assign troops to the RDC, or the HQ needed to command it, given competing demands from NATO structures. East European members, for example, have been traditionally lukewarm about assigning forces to the EU, fearing a weakening of the Alliance. Furthermore, even if the RDC became fully operational, all member states—especially those providing it with essential assets—would have to agree before it could actually be deployed (Bond and Scazzieri 2022). Members who want to use military force might continue to find it more practical to do so through NATO if there is consensus in the Alliance or in ad-hoc coalitions. In order to turn the EU into a more effective agency, member states will require a willingness to pursue forms of supranational integration in security and defence but current dynamics and post-Cold War history indicate that this is highly unlikely to happen. As long as unanimity formally remains the rule in EU foreign and security policy, the EU's contribution to European security is, therefore, bound to remain ephemeral and inherently vulnerable to the contingent preferences of member states (Amadio Viceré 2022).

The Impact of Russia's Invasion on NATO-EU Cooperation

NATO-EU Cooperation before the War

How will cooperation between NATO and the EU adapt and respond to the new scenario and challenges created by the war? The formal establishment of the EU-NATO partnership dates back to the late 1990s and early 2000s. After the appointment of former NATO Secretary General Javier Solana to the post of High Representative for the CFSP at the 1999 Cologne European Council summit, it was formalized with the signing of the Berlin Plus arrangements in December 2002. In the same month, a NATO-EU declaration welcomed the strategic partnership established between the EU and NATO but also reaffirmed that the Alliance remains the foundation of the collective defence of its members (NATO 2002). These arrangements allowed the EU to borrow NATO's facilities and structures to carry out crisis management operations, as was the case with the EU operation Concordia in North Macedonia and Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina. More specifically, the EU's Bosnian deployment has made extensive recourse to NATO's assets and resources and has been headquartered in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE).

Strategic cooperation intensified in the following years, particularly after France's reintegration into NATO's military command in 2009. The EU and NATO attempted to coordinate their efforts and conducted operations in the same country or region, first in the Balkans and later in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and off the Horn of Africa. The two joint declarations in 2016 and 2018 set the agenda for additional cooperation, expanding it to such fields as cyber and hybrid threats, defence capabilities, countering terrorism, and military mobility. In 2016, the EU and NATO set up the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, held common exercises on responding to cyber threats, worked together in fighting disinformation, and intensified dialogue and contacts between officials and leaders. Additionally, each organization's leaders began to attend the other's ministerial-level meetings (Bond and Scazzieri 2022). In recent years, EU initiatives on defence have tended to complement NATO and draw on the particular strengths of the EU with the aim of strengthening the Alliance's European pillar.

EU-NATO Cooperation after the War

Russia's invasion of Ukraine further strengthened the need for closer coordination between the EU and NATO. While in the aftermath of the invasion, both organizations updated their key guiding strategic documents; in January 2023, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the President of the European Council Charles Michel, and the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen signed the fourth Joint Declaration on NATO-European Union cooperation. The declaration highlighted "the value of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to, and interoperable with, NATO" (Council of the EU 2023).

By undermining the prospect of strategic autonomy in favour of European efforts within NATO itself, the war reinvigorated the notion of NATO's "European pillar" but also strengthened the need for closer cooperation between the alliance and the CSDP. Nonetheless, there are still many question marks and grey areas. First, the CSDP continues to experience important shortcomings due to incomplete institutional reforms and severe capabilities shortfalls (Bergmann and Mueller 2021; Meijer and Brooks 2021). In total, since 2014, the United States has provided more than USD 39.7 billion in security assistance for training and equipment to help Ukraine (Department of State 2023). In January 2023, the Biden administration agreed to supply Ukraine with a limited number of US battle tanks, and in May, it endorsed plans to train Ukrainian pilots on US-made F-16 fighter jets. However, while in August, the US approved sending F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine from Denmark and the Netherlands, the prospect of sending war planes to Kyiv remains a contentious issue for many EU member states, which fear that the sending of potentially offensive weapons could escalate hostilities.

Second, despite an apparent show of unity in the aftermath of the invasion, the CSDP continues to be hampered by varying threat perceptions and strategic priorities (Meijer and Brooks 2021). Some European nations have clearly signalled their lack of appetite for a wider confrontation with Moscow or to risk an escalation. After failing to dissuade Putin in the run-up to the invasion, France and Germany slowly stepped up their support to Ukraine. Nonetheless, their attitude was long perceived as more cautious than those of other EU members, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and the three Baltic states. Although German bilateral support to Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion has amounted to EUR 17 billion, making it the largest donor of military aid after the US, in early 2023, Germany hesitated before providing Ukraine with Leopard 2 Tanks or even allowing other European nations in possession of German military equipment to transfer it to Ukraine. Furthermore, although in May 2023, the German government promised to double its commitment, the issue remains politically contentious in Germany. EU member states have also shown a different determination to reduce energy dependency on Russia. Only after months of wrangling and protracted negotiations in December 2022, EU members agreed on a full ban on Russian seaborne crude oil imports and a price cap for Russian gas. However, whereas Poland and the Baltic States have called for lowering the price of oil, Croatia and Bulgaria were granted temporary derogations, and Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Austria have argued that any overly aggressive market cap would destabilize global energy markets and called for conditions such as an automatic suspension of the cap in certain circumstances. These dynamics highlight the difficulties in coordinating policies among member states in the lack of centralized decision-making. In order to become truly effective, a European pillar within the Alliance should provide both more military capabilities and a coordinated policy.

Third, the fragmentation of the European armaments market remains a problem. European nations are still working on developing two different next-generation fighter aircraft programs: the Franco-German-Spanish Future Combat Air System (FCAS) and the British-Italian-Swedish Tempest. While there are political and technical obstacles to merging the two, doing so would allow greater economies of scale (Taylor and Antinozzi 2022). European industrial cooperation is barely advancing despite increased military budgets. The European defence industry remains fragmented along national lines, except for the aviation and missile sectors, while each country continues to prefer to buy from its own firms. More integration between European military forces would also lead to greater efficiencies. For example, the Belgian and Dutch navies have integrated training, logistic, and maintenance arrangements, allowing them to make substantial savings and, at the same time, keep military capabilities that they could not afford to maintain individually (Bond and Scazzieri 2022).

Finally, China represents another potentially divisive challenge for the future of transatlantic unity and European security cooperation. Asian partners attended NATO's 2022 Madrid summit and have been invited to attend the Alliance's 2023 summit in Vilnius, while Europeans hardened their views on China in the last few years. However, unlike in the US, China is still perceived by many EU members as a potential economic partner rather than a strategic or military threat. Although there is

increasingly greater alignment between European and US positions, a further deterioration in relations between Washington and Beijing could raise questions as to how far the US-European allies will be willing to sign on to additional initiatives containing China (Gramer and Iyengar 2022). In April 2023, French President Macron's statement about Europe's need to avoid being sucked into a hypothetical US war with China caused unease within the Alliance but also highlighted the need to forge a clearer and more detailed common European approach on China (Biscop 2023b). Although China is currently unable to invade Taiwan in the short term, many observers believe that it will be capable of doing so as early as 2027 (Haroche and Brugier 2023).

What is the way forward for NATO and the CSDP in the current systemic context? First, there are areas where the EU could contribute more efficiently to European security. More specifically, the EU has a crucial role to play in enabling defence investment and encouraging member states to cooperate more in defence research, development, and procurement. The EU's EUR 8 billion European Defence Fund (EDF) finances both defence research (including disruptive technology) and the development of new capabilities. While European collaborative spending in 2021 accounted for 18 percent of total defence equipment procurement, bolstering European capabilities will also require other initiatives: additional adjustments to the EU's fiscal rules to encourage member states to invest more in defence and incentives in the EDF and in PESCO to promote joint procurement and deeper cooperation between military forces. Second, the EU should be more ambitious: it should coordinate increased defence spending, support efforts to strengthen European military capabilities and push countries to cooperate more in developing and procuring military capabilities as well as joint maintenance and logistics. These steps would help achieve efficiency gains and support the scientific, technical, and industrial capabilities that Europe needs for its security. Some PESCO projects, such as the ones focusing on military mobility, help military forces better prepare for conflict by making it easier for them to move around in a crisis. This would be crucial, for example, to allow faster reinforcement to the Baltic States, which are currently poorly connected to other allies by land (Bond and Scazzieri 2022). In November 2022, the United Kingdom joined the military mobility program led by the Netherlands, which the US, Canada, and Norway joined in 2021 and which has been a flagship of NATO-EU cooperation. Although the 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy identified China as the foremost threat to the UK's long-term security interests (UK Cabinet Office 2021), Russia's invasion of Ukraine reinforced the logic that the UK should concentrate its strength on bolstering the deterrent power of NATO within the Euro-Atlantic area (Magill and Rees 2022).

Third, in the following years, the EU and NATO should continue to coordinate and find a division of labour that avoids the risks of duplication. NATO and the EU will both have roles to play. Unlike the Alliance, the EU is neither equipped to dissuade or deter Russia nor face the prospect of an escalation or expansion of the conflict. Close coordination and permanent dialogue between the EU and NATO should also support efforts in defence spending. It will be particularly important to make sure that levels of troop commitment and readiness are not mutually detrimental while avoiding waste and duplication, which hamper economic growth and fuel higher inflation in Europe. This coordination will be particularly important also to guarantee the security of other regions where the US might be less willing to counter threats or deploy forces, such as the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Endeavours to deepen military and technical cooperation represent an additional challenge for both NATO and the EU. European forces have limited stocks and are lacking in important capabilities, such as air and missile defence, modern tanks, artillery, and intelligence. Since Russia's invasion, the number of US troops in Europe has increased by approximately 20,000, bringing the total number to over 100,000, and it is set to grow further. However, Europeans cannot expect Washington to continue to shoulder the lion's share of their defence willingly. Even before Donald Trump's presidency, US complaints about unfair burden-sharing were growing more frequent. Washington's increased focus and posture on the Asia-Pacific region does not mean that it will stop underwriting European security, but resource constraints mean that the US contribution to Europe's

conventional and nuclear defence might not be taken for granted in future years (Bond and Scazzieri 2022). The potential redistribution of US efforts among theatres might leave Europe in a vulnerable position. Rather than taking US support for granted (Haroche and Brugier 2023), Europeans should acknowledge that the US attitude might be considerably affected both by dynamics in East Asia and the outcome of the 2024 presidential elections. Hence, Europe should not only continue to invest in capabilities but also make a quantum leap beyond the instruments in place and towards centralized forms of decision-making.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on NATO and the CSDP. It has argued that the war has reinvigorated NATO and cast aside calls for European strategic autonomy, emphasizing the EU's ongoing reliance on the US as a security supplier. The war has made it evident that when it comes to deterrence and defence, NATO is clearly the indispensable organization for European security. It is through NATO's military structures that most European states organize their collective defence and allied armed forces get used to operating together effectively. While the EU is gradually stepping out of its previous role as a crisis manager, its contribution to Euro-Atlantic security continues to be hampered, however, by a number of shortcomings. All the evidence suggests, therefore, that future steps towards allowing the CSDP to make a credible and more effective contribution to European security will be primarily channelled through NATO. Nonetheless, as strategic competition between the US and China deepens, EU members cannot take it for granted that Washington will continue to bear a disproportionate share of the burden of transatlantic security. Rather, the US will likely call upon its European allies to do more. America's long-term strategic priorities lie in the Indo-Pacific, and the outcome of the US presidential election in November 2024 may well impact the US role in the Alliance. It is in the very interest of the EU itself to learn the right lessons and make the necessary changes. Even though both the Alliance's New Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass emphasize the importance of strengthening the EU-NATO partnership, the crisis in Ukraine has not only shown the need to strengthen European capabilities but also the dangers of overreliance on the United States.

Rather than taking strong US support for granted, in order to be able to address current and future security challenges, EU members should strengthen their contribution to the Alliance but also endeavour to rekindle and deepen integration. While the European priority should remain to keep the US engaged in European security, in future years, the EU should direct its efforts towards achieving a degree of centralization in security and defence decision-making. This is an essential precondition if the EU wants to be able to define its own collective interests and objectives and acquire sufficient instruments to make an effective contribution to European and transatlantic security.

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