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EU-NATO Cooperation and Strategic Autonomy:

Logical Contradiction or Ariadne's Thread?

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EU-NATO COOPERATION AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

CONTRADICTION OR ARIADNE'S THREAD?

Jolyon Howorth

Abstract

The EU's common security and defence policy (CSDP) was launched in the 1990s as a quest for "autonomy." Fifteen years of efforts failed to deliver that objective. The coherence of the EU member states in their security dealings with the US was always vulnerable to the potentially incompatible objectives of the UK and France. But as EU leaders post-Brexit re-launch the CSDP, as the 2016 *European Global Strategy* rediscovers the virtues of "strategic autonomy," and as the world juggles with a US president who appears to question the basis of the Atlantic Alliance, it is time to radically re-think the relations between the EU and NATO. This paper argues that, in the longer term, it is through the strengthening of the EU-NATO relationship that EU strategic autonomy will become possible, and that a consolidation of the transatlantic bond will emerge.

The Author

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1. Introduction

The transatlantic relationship has always been central to security and defence policy. The complex – and often confused – interactions between the two sides of the Atlantic over European defence arrangements have demonstrated remarkable continuity – from the post-1945 discussions around the parallel formations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (1949) and the *European Defence Community* (1950), to the first period of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (1999-2014), and on to the current quest for strategic autonomy launched in 2016 (Howorth 2017a). One feature of this complexity has been what I labelled in 2005 the "Euro-Atlantic security dilemma" (Howorth 2005). Simply put, this involved an unresolved tension between a fear in London that too overt a European drive in the direction of autonomy would fuel US isolationism, and a confidence in Paris that the US would welcome and take more seriously allies that took themselves seriously. The coherence of the European Union's defense project was always shrouded in ambiguity. At the same time, the European quest for autonomy, at the turn of the 21st century, generated twin schizophrenias. The US, while actively encouraging the European Union (EU) to develop serious military capacity, also feared that such capacity might lead to Europe balancing against America (Posen 2004; Walt 2005). Washington therefore strove to maintain leadership over the process. The European Union, while keen to develop significant military capacity, feared taking this too far and triggering US abandonment (Howorth/Menon 2009).

Nobody seemed sure whether the EU's capacity strengthened or weakened the Alliance. Beginning in the mid-2000s, with the US military seriously overextended in the greater Middle East and the EU facing growing challenges in both its Southern and Eastern neighborhoods, much of this schizophrenia dissipated. Actors on both sides of the Atlantic broadly accepted that, in the crisis circumstances of the time, the EU must assume increasing responsibility for – and leadership of – the stabilization of the neighborhood (Nuland 2008). Hence, the *European Global Strategy* (EUGS) called for an end-state of "strategic autonomy" while simultaneously insisting on the need to "deepen" the EU's "partnership" with NATO (European External Action Service 2016). The principal argument in this paper is that these seemingly contradictory ambitions are in fact compatible: it is only *through* its relationship with NATO and not *in contradistinction* to it, that the EU might aspire both to achieve autonomy and to strengthen the transatlantic alliance.

The paper proceeds in four stages. In the first part, I assess the different European understandings of the process of EU-NATO cooperation, particularly in the context of the parallel drive towards "strategic autonomy." This section suggests that there are as many misunderstandings about the project as there are elements of clarity. In a second part, I rehearse the various US-American voices, both in academia and in the policy world, that have been calling for greater European capacity and responsibility and/or for a progressive transfer to the Europeans of American leadership in NATO. These approaches must be understood within the longstanding debate about burden sharing, but their recent crescendo suggests an inchoate paradigm shift in transatlantic intentions. In a third section, I examine the critical issue of the EU's level of ambition in the area of security and defense policy, concluding that while there is a growing number of voices arguing for a very high level of ambition, there remain numerous sceptics who are convinced that the EU will never succeed in emerging as a consequential security and defense actor. A final section then offers three potential scenarios for the future relationship between the EU and NATO, arguing that only a transcendence of the "relationship" itself, through the emergence, via NATO, of a genuinely autonomous

European defense capacity, can produce the healthy and balanced transatlantic partnership that was envisioned at the moment of the signing of the Washington Treaty.

One final thought is important before embarking on this analysis. Some authors have suggested not only that the EU *cannot* ever emerge as a consequential security actor but also – therefore, at least by implication – that *it should not make the attempt*, because to do so would inevitably weaken NATO (Dempsey 2015; Rühle 2016). As one who, for many years and in many publications, suggested that the EU *could* eventually emerge as a consequential actor, I should state that, personally, I am today agnostic on this issue. Much will depend on "events" as history moves forward – and also on the occupant of the White House, as has in fact been the case for the past four US presidencies[1]. I do *not* believe that the existence of CSDP weakens or undermines NATO. The Alliance has its own structural weaknesses and they are not getting any less severe. What I argue in this paper is that, if the EU is to have any chance at all of emerging as a serious security actor, it can only be through the type of scenario I sketch out in the final section. Whether that scenario will actually transpire will remain a matter of conjecture.

2. European Perceptions of Security Autonomy and of EU-NATO Cooperation

Since the EU's December 2013 special summit on CSDP, there have been incessant calls for greater cooperation between CSDP (or, more usually, between the EU) and NATO. These calls reached a crescendo in the summer and autumn of 2016, particularly after the UK referendum results presaged the departure of Britain from the European Union, now universally referred to as Brexit. The long-awaited *European Global Strategy* was published only days after the Brexit referendum result and refers regularly to "deepening" the EU's "partnership" with NATO (European External Action Service 2016). Two weeks later, on 8 July 2016, at the NATO summit in Warsaw, a "Joint Declaration" was published, signed by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg. The signatories called for "new impetus and new substance" to be given to what they called the "NATO-EU strategic partnership" (NATO 2016). Similar calls were issued in the following weeks by the European Council (2016), the European Parliament (2016), and the European Commission (2016). On 6 December 2016, NATO and the EU issued a "Statement on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration" of July, featuring a "common set of proposals" in all the areas deemed fit for cooperation (NATO/EU 2016). Reports on progress in these areas were published every six months thereafter (EU-NATO 2017). Clearly, a quasi-unanimity seemed to have arisen whereby the EU's security and defence policy and practice in the European area was required to be conducted in tight cooperation with NATO. What does this constant emphasis on EU-NATO cooperation actually amount to?

The documents themselves are extremely vague in this respect. The *European Global Strategy* refers to NATO on no fewer than ten occasions. It speaks simply of "deepening the transatlantic bond and our

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1 It was Bill Clinton who gave the green light to CSDP; George W. Bush who attempted to divide EU member states on defence issues; Barack Obama who launched US "leadership from behind"; and Donald Trump who harrumphed that NATO was "obsolete" (Gore 2016).

partnership with NATO" (European External Action Service 2016:4). Specific cooperative projects include cyber threats, security sector reform, capacity building, strengthening resilience among neighborhood states, global governance, maritime security, parallel and synchronized exercises and hybrid warfare. This is really a laundry list of issues on which cooperation ought to be taken for granted rather than needing to be loudly and repeatedly proclaimed. The same laundry list is to be found in the *EU-NATO Joint Declaration* of 8 July 2016 and in all subsequent reports on implementation. It would be astonishing – indeed incomprehensible – if NATO and the EU were not cooperating closely on all these issues. By summer 2018, the list of issues on which the two parties were cooperating had risen to seventy-four (European External Action Service 2018).

The more significant references to EU-NATO cooperation come when some attempt is made to explain how the two entities see the relationship between their respective remits. The EUGS references to the need for "strategic autonomy" hark back to the *Saint-Malo Declaration* of December 1998, where the notion that "the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action" was conceived (Rutten 2001: 8f). In the immediate aftermath of that event, Tony Blair went to extraordinary lengths to insist that the embryonic CSDP did not seek to undermine or compete with NATO, and that NATO remained the corner stone of Europe's collective defence. He further insisted that CSDP in no way implied the creation of a "European army" (Howorth 2014: 17f). In the aftermath of the EUGS, Federica Mogherini expended similar amounts of energy denying the same accusations (BBC 2016). In the highly charged political atmosphere exacerbated by Brexit, the concept of the "European Army" once again became a political football. The UK Minister of Defence, Michael Fallon disingenuously set a hare running by announcing that the UK was totally opposed to a "European army." (This was not unlike the Vatican formally stating its opposition to sin) Mogherini went out of her way to assure the gathered media that she had "never heard anybody even mention a European army" (Gros-Verheyde 2016a). And yet, if the concept of "strategic autonomy" is ever to move beyond the level of discourse, it is difficult to imagine how it would not eventually lead to some form of highly coordinated, multi-national, joint and tightly integrated defense capacity enabling the EU to engage in high intensity military (and civil–military) operations with minimal assistance from the US (Bartels et al. 2017).

Why were critics and journalists so quick on both occasions to jump to the "wrong" conclusions? The word "autonomy," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, denotes "self-government," "freedom of action" or "independence." That an agency such as the EU could promote with such force and enthusiasm the concept of strategic autonomy, while at the very same time, insisting that EU member states will remain faithful members of NATO, a body with which they intend to deepen cooperation, is indeed a puzzle. This poses both a juridical and institutional dimension and involves perspectives on a division of labor. The explanation offered by the EUGS is essentially institutional and juridical. Since some members of the EU see NATO as the alpha and omega of their security, while others are not members of NATO, an act of discursive prestidigitation is required to square the circle. Thus, to quote the 2016 EUGS:

> When it comes to collective defence, NATO remains the primary framework for most Member States. At the same time, EU-NATO relations shall not prejudice the security and defence policy of those Members which are not in NATO. The EU will therefore deepen cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance in complementarity, synergy, and full respect for the institutional framework, inclusiveness and decision-making autonomy of the two.

In other words, being different entities, with somewhat different members, and having different objectives, the two must live with and respect this difference. This is a largely legalistic argument (the two are indeed different legal entities), but one with clearly substantial political connotations (as their policies and activities in the security and defense realm overlap to a very considerable extent). This political dimension is rendered all the more acute in that clear and undisputed leadership in NATO lies with the United States – which is a different actor from either the EU or NATO. What the quotation above really implies is the recognition that the "real" partner of the EU is not so much NATO per se as the US – and that it is with this actor, above all, that the EU needs to establish a deep and complementary partnership.

This is where the discussion becomes interesting. In the EUGS, there are sentences to the effect that while NATO remains the primary actor in European collective defence, the EU should be able *both* to contribute more substantially to this objective, and to undertake robust missions in which the US has no interest:

> *While NATO exists to defend its members – most of which are European – from external attack, Europeans must be better equipped, trained and organised to contribute decisively to such collective efforts, **as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary**.* (European External Action Service 2016:22, own emphasis)

This was a refrain that was heard repeatedly after Saint-Malo, when the relevant reference was the Kosovo crisis. The repetition in the EUGS of what had, over the years, become a veritable *leitmotiv* referenced the Libyan crisis of 2011. On both occasions, Europeans and Americans deplored the fact that the former had depended massively on the latter. The unescapable implication of the repeated aspirations of the EU towards strategic autonomy is that the EU (via the CSDP) aims to become a military actor *comparable* to NATO – while not undermining it or questioning its supremacy. But why does Europe need two seemingly comparable and overlapping defense entities if strategic autonomy offers the EU the ability to cope with its regional security issues on its own? If the EU actually achieves strategic autonomy, what is NATO for? Conversely, if the EU does not achieve strategic autonomy, what is the CSDP for?

There is another interpretation of the EU-NATO relationship that implies not comparability but a *division of labor*. In the EU-NATO Joint Declaration, emphasis is placed on positive synergies between the two agencies:

> *we need new ways of working together and a new level of ambition; [...] because together we can mobilize a broad range of tools to respond to the challenges we face; and because we have to make the most efficient use of resources.* (NATO 2016)

This refers to a well-aired discussion on the so-called "comprehensive approach" to security and defense operations (Major/Schöndorf 2011; Pirozzi 2013; NATO 2017). There are two aspects to this discussion. The first, which relates more to an internal EU context, is that the EU, being an actor that covers every imaginable policy area, can bring to the task of crisis management a huge range of military and civilian assets in a way that NATO *per se* (a military alliance) cannot (Norheim-Martinson 2013). This proposition tends to overlook the fact that the US (as opposed to NATO) can bring to the task an even greater range of assets. The second aspect relates more to the EU-US context and suggests that, while, in any given overseas operation, the US will take care of the heavy military lifting, the EU is better prepared to address the follow-on,

civilian-oriented, nation-building aspects of the mission. In the mid-2000s, there was some discussion of the EU "specializing" in civilian aspects of crisis management while the US continued to dominate the military dimension (Kammer/Zyla 2011), but these discussions were rapidly ruled out of court as being both inappropriate and unworkable (Lagadec 2012). From everything that we have seen so far of the "new" framework for EU-NATO cooperation, the EU would appear to be no longer willing to play this subordinate, sous-chef, role.

Alongside discussions on EU-NATO cooperation, the post-2016 period was also marked by a generalized new dynamic in favor of a considerably beefed-up re-launch of the original CSDP project. The concept of a *European Defence Union* emerged from the chaos of Brexit and by 2017 had built up a considerable head of steam. Four apparent "breakthroughs" were: the decision to go ahead with a *Military Planning and Conduct Capability* (MPCC – the new acronym for what used to be called the *Operational Headquarters* (OHQ)); the launch of the *European Defence Fund*; new financial arrangements for Battle-Groups (BGs); and the agreement, reached at the European Council in June 2017, to operationalize the process enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty (but never hitherto acted upon) known as *Permanent Structured Cooperation* (PESCO). In addition, President Macron (2017) called for a *European Intervention Initiative* conferring on the EU a high-end capacity for military crisis management (Panier 2017). I have termed this "re-launch" of the EU defence project CSDP-Redux. I have assessed these developments elsewhere and space does not allow for any detailed assessment in this article. I argue that these developments are helpful and creative, they express the EU's strong desire to emerge as a significant military player, but they will not, in and of them-selves, change anything fundamentally (Howorth 2017b). These initiatives betoken a growing coherence in the EU's approach to the strategic challenges thrown up in Europe's neighborhood, although the former ambivalence between the UK and France has now been replaced by a new ambivalence between France and Germany. Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel agreed to kick-start a serious EU defence project, even though significant differences in ambition – especially concerning PESCO – remain (Jehin 2017; Franke 2017). In short, the Europeans, without the British, appear somewhat less fragmented than often in the past, but they still have a long way to go before they could be considered to be anywhere close of being unified in defence policy.

3. Bringing in the American Perspective

It is at this point that the US debate needs to be engaged. From the perspective of this paper, the key issue rapidly became Donald Trump's apparently cavalier suggestion that the US was fed up with paying for European (and Japanese and South Korean) "free-riders" and was prepared to reconsider some of the very bases of the Alliance. In a March 23, 2016 interview with Mark Halperin and John Heilemann of *Bloomberg Politics*, the following exchange took place (Gore 2016):

Halperin: *Should America be the leader of NATO or not necessarily?*

Trump: *I think NATO may be obsolete. NATO was set up a long time ago — many, many years ago. Things are different now. We were a rich nation then. We had nothing but money. We had nothing but*

power [...] far more than we have today. [...] you have to really examine NATO. And it doesn't really help us, it's helping other countries. And I don't think those other countries appreciate what we're doing.

Heilemann: *So, just to be clear, you made two slightly different arguments there and I just want to clarify. One of them is that you might want to see the U.S. pay less money into NATO because …*

Trump: *That one definitely.*

Heilemann: *But it's possible that NATO is obsolete and should be gotten rid of?*

Trump: *It's possible. I would certainly look at it. And I'd want more help from other people. [...] As to whether or not it's obsolete, I'll make that determination.*

On other occasions, Trump denied that he had said things he clearly did say, but his overall message was consistent throughout the campaign: European allies must start paying their way in NATO. In a key interview with *The New York Times* in July 2016, when asked if he really meant what he had said about abandoning NATO free-riders, Trump replied:

If we cannot be properly reimbursed for the tremendous cost of our military protecting other countries, and in many cases the countries I'm talking about are extremely rich [...] yes, I would be absolutely prepared to tell those countries, "Congratulations, you will be defending yourself." (New York Times 2016)

These sorts of observations elicited unprecedented commentary (Ikenberry 2017; Lind 2017), yet, as with most other aspects of Trump's policy pronouncements, there remained little clarity as to what (if anything) he really thought or intended (Kaufmann 2017). At the NATO summit in July 2018, Trump threw the Alliance into turmoil by gratuitously demanding that the target for NATO member-state spending be raised from two percent of GDP to four percent (Howorth 2018).

Nevertheless, similar sentiments on burden-sharing have been expressed by many US leaders over the decades, most recently and most starkly by US Defence Secretary Robert Gates in a valedictory warning speech to the NATO allies in 2011. Gates spoke of a "dim, if not dismal future for the transatlantic alliance" if the new generation of US leaders who did not grow up during the Cold War "may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost" (Gates 2011). Such sentiments suggest that Trump's (apparent) position on NATO is by no means as outlandish as some commentators have made it seem. The sorts of ideas he expressed have a very strong pedigree among US International Relations experts. Massachusetts Institute of Technology International Relations professor Barry Posen, in a path-breaking book in 2014, called for a gradual ten-year American withdrawal from NATO, accompanied by the progressive transfer of all its functions to Europeans (Posen 2014). Posen's primary purpose in discussing the Alliance was to make the case for the US allies taking over responsibility for their own affairs. Allies, he insisted, were costing more than they are worth. "If the US did less, and the allies perceived that this reduced their security, they could clearly afford to spend more" (Posen 2014: 34f). In a blunt assessment of NATO since the Cold War, he deplores the repeated fecklessness and cheap-riding of the European allies and concludes that "The European Union provides as good a foundation for US disengagement as the United

States will find anywhere in the world today." In short, NATO can be transferred to the Europeans and, if they don't want it, it "can be allowed to lapse" (Posen 2014: 90).

This sentiment was echoed by Boston University's Andrew Bacevich (2016), by no means a Trump supporter, in a major article in *Foreign Affairs*:

> *Should it choose to do so, Europe—even after the British vote to leave the EU—is fully capable of defending its eastern flank. The next administration should nudge Europeans toward making that choice [...] through a phased and deliberate devo¬lution of responsibility. The sequence might go as follows: Begin by ending the practice of always having an American serve as the supreme allied commander in Europe; NATO's next military commander should be a European officer. Then, establish a schedule for shutting down the major U.S. military headquarters in such places as Frankfurt and Stuttgart. Next, specify a date certain for terminating U.S. member¬ship in NATO and withdrawing the last U.S. troops from Europe. When should Washington actually cut the transatlantic umbilical cord? Allowing ample time for European publics to adjust to their new responsibilities, for European parliaments to allocate the necessary resources, and for European armies to reorganize, 2025 sounds about right. But to get things rolling, the next administration's message to Europe should be clear from day one: ready your defenses; we're going home.*

The same message was hammered home in summer 2016, also in *Foreign Affairs*, by two of the most high-profile neo-realists in the US academy (Mearsheimer/Walt 2016):

> *In Europe, the United States should end its military presence and turn NATO over to the Europeans. There is no good reason to keep U.S. forces in Europe, as no country there has the capability to dominate that region. The top con¬tenders, Germany and Russia, will both lose relative power as their populations shrink in size, and no other potential hegemon is in sight. Admittedly, leaving European security to the Europeans could increase the potential for trouble there. If a conflict did arise, however, it would not threaten vital U.S. interests. Thus, there is no reason for the United States to spend billions of dollars each year (and pledge its own citizens' lives) to prevent one.*

Among realists in American academe, such sentiments are becoming almost mainstream. But politicians are increasingly singing to the same tune. Donald Trump was not alone in expressing exasperation with NATO (Mearsheimer 2016). Bernie Sanders picked up on the same public disaffection with the Alliance as his Republican rival and expressed very similar ideas about US disengagement (Kashmeri 2016; Lee 2016). Sarwar Kashmeri has himself long advocated handing NATO over to the Europeans (Kashmeri 2011). Upon taking command of NATO in 1951, Eisenhower said, "If in ten years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project will have failed." While this gathering storm around NATO from within the US International Relations profession does not amount in and of itself to a major policy shift, it is revealing of the deep questions being asked, at least on the Western shore of the Atlantic, about the future of the Alliance. Yet the proposal to transfer NATO to the Europeans over a ten-year period is not exclusively an American idea. In a report to President Hollande in 2012, former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine argued precisely for the "Europeanization of NATO" (Védrine 2012).

4. The European Level of Ambition

The key issues really are: what exactly is the level of EU ambition; what do the Americans want and what are they planning; how can these potentially contradictory ambitions be reconciled? The texts we have examined so far giver very few clues. However, several prominent experts have recently weighed in. Sven Biscop, in one of the first major post-Brexit studies of the new European security dynamics, assesses the implications of the EUGS – as he sees them – for the EU's security project and adopts a "maximalist" approach (Biscop 2016a). He identifies four major objectives arising explicitly from the EUGS. First, protection of the "European way of life" across the EU, especially in the context of terrorism, cyber-threats, hybrid warfare and energy security. These, he notes, are not threats that should be met primarily with military means, and they are often best handled at the national level, but they do require considerable coordination. Second, maintaining security in both the Eastern and Southern neighborhoods, by forceful means if necessary. That is a very ambitious objective that requires considerable military input and preparedness. Third, helping maintain sustainable access to the global maritime commons, which essentially means keeping open the commercial sea-lanes between Suez and Shanghai – another highly ambitious objective. Fourth, to assist and complement UN peacekeeping. These tasks, he recognizes, "represent a clear increase in the burden placed on Europe's armed forces, for expeditionary operations as well as for support for 'homeland security'." (Biscop 2016a: 6) To meet these requirements, he envisages an EU *White Paper* outlining a new – and substantially beefed up – military Headline Goal – for 2030. The key question is how would this new muscular EU defense entity relate to NATO, and in particular "the question that NATO does not even pose: what exactly should Europeans be capable of alone when necessary"? (Biscop 2016a: 12). NATO has its own Defence Planning Process which allocates specific capabilities targets to each ally, the sum of the parts adding up to a supposedly viable whole for the entire alliance. But the roles allocated to the EU member states do not necessarily make sense if the Union were to attempt to run an ambitious operation alone. Biscop notes that NATO's planning for Central and Eastern Europe now massively revolves once more around Article 5, which depends crucially on US inputs. The US, at the same time, tends to assume that threats in the Southern neighborhood will be met essentially by the EU, maybe with some US assistance.

In this context, one recent development that requires careful EU-NATO management is that of the Alliance's recent unique concentration on a conventional deterrence posture in the Eastern neighborhood. Since the NATO summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016), the previous 'large end' of the Alliance – 'transformation' of its military assets into a nimble expeditionary force (the *NATO Response Force (NRF)*) for deployment anywhere in the world – has been effectively abandoned in favor of one in which the entire focus lies in creating a conventional trip-wire in Eastern Europe, with permanent deployments at brigade-level (the *Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)*), and in support of four rotating battalion-level units (the *Enhanced Forward Presence*) in Poland and the three Baltic states (Pesme 2016). This development carries two significant consequences. First, the expeditionary capacity of the NRF appears to have been sacrificed to the type of static territorial defense capacity that existed during the Cold War. Second, the long-term concentration of European forces (up to 50,000 soldiers, allowing for rotation) in the Eastern theater, and the associated costs of this operation, are likely to leave precious little military capacity available for CSDP missions elsewhere, thereby lacking from the outset the effectiveness of any purely European force. This situation calls for far greater synergy between NATO and EU planning if a situation in which a de facto division of labor (both functional and geographic) between the EU and NATO is to be avoided.

Another "maximalist" proposal is offered by Luis Simon who argues that the EU's strategic thinking since the end of the Cold War has become invalid in an era of anti-access/ area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities. He notes that many member states have not even begun to think in terms other than "light-on-risk, constabulary-like peacekeeping, stabilization or border management tasks." For Simon, the EU must speak the same language as NATO and their leading member states in terms of the level of ambition and capabilities. That means setting the bar high, i.e. thinking about deterrence and defense against significant powers, and about expeditionary warfare in highly hostile, heavily defended environments (Simon 2016). But in pondering likely scenarios, Simon seems to assume that, depending on the task at hand, the EU could pick and choose between CSDP-Redux and NATO, and concludes by saying that "greater efforts *may be needed* (my stress) to link NATO's International Military Staff and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe with the EU Military Staff, and also NATO's Allied Command Transformation and the European Defence Agency" (Simon 2016: 6).

While Biscop operates on the assumption that the EU member states as a whole (and, hopefully, the UK in association with them) will accept the ambitious objectives of the EUGS and deliver the capabilities implied by them, Daniel Keohane and Christian Mölling (2016), in a more circumspect assessment of the demands of the EUGS, start from the assumption that some - if not many - EU member states would baulk at this level of ambition. They differentiate between four approaches. A *conservative* approach would simply seek to update the existing CSDP by crafting modest and incremental improvements. A c*omprehensive* approach would leverage the EU's alleged advantage over NATO in non-military assets and would focus on stabilizing the fragile states in the extended neighborhood. An *ambitious* approach would correspond to something similar to Biscop's proposals and would require the EU to be able to address the full spectrum of threats to the EU and to meet them autonomously. Finally, a *realistic* approach would start from an assessment of what the EU is realistically capable of achieving by way of capabilities and force posture. Keohane and Mölling's paper concludes that the EU has no clear idea either of what it is capable of or of what it hopes to achieve, but the paper does set out the options (Keohane/Mölling 2016). Whatever the eventual reality, the issue of relations and interaction with NATO remains central to the CSDP-Redux project.

The question of the EU's eventual defense and security ambition becomes all the more acute in that there are parallel calls for NATO to boost its capacity, in view of Russian aggression in the East, and even to devise yet another New Strategic Concept. Karl-Heinz Kamp (2016), in a seminal paper, argues that the most recent strategic concept, agreed at the Lisbon summit in 2010 and geared mainly to summarizing changes in the strategic environment over the previous decade, is now largely out of date. The Russian incursions into Ukraine; the chaos across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region (which carry potential Article 5 connotations); the continuing destabilization of the Asia-Pacific region, on which both the US and the EU depend for their commercial life-blood; and the election of Donald Trump - all imply that NATO must "adapt its strategic foundations to the new situation" (Kamp 2016: 4). If both NATO and the EU were massively to enhance their existing capabilities, would this inevitably call for a radical rethink of the connection between these two processes? In a similar vein, Tomas Valasek (2017) argues that, in light of continuing and even growing US ambivalence about its commitment to European defense, the only course is for the EU to build up its strength within, rather than alongside NATO.

5. Three Scenarios for the Future of EU-NATO Relations

This paper will now conclude with some thoughts on the various scenarios for EU-NATO cooperation over the next decade or two, bearing in mind both that most EU agencies that have offered post-Brexit proposals for enhancing CSDP have insisted that this should be of a qualitatively and quantitatively higher order than in the past; *and* that the issue of EU-NATO relations is central to that process.

The first scenario, which cannot entirely be ruled out, would be one associated with the gradual unravelling of European integration in general, given the EU's inability to solve any of the three "crises of sovereignty" that have bedeviled its progress since the late 2000s: a crisis of money (the Eurozone crisis), a crisis of borders (the Schengen crisis) and a crisis of defense (the apparent impasse of CSDP). This scenario has been rendered even less improbable with the vote on Brexit and with the spread, across Europe, of populist forces bent on breaking up the Union (although recent elections in Austria and France suggest that process has limits). Despite all the energy that has gone into the launch of CSDP-Redux, there are many analysts who remain unconvinced that the EU member states are close to achieving any meaningful consensus on the way forward (Maher 2016; Keohane 2016; Thomson 2016; Menon 2016; Morris 2016). If these analysts are correct, then it cannot be ruled out that the EU will fail in its efforts to coordinate defense policies and will simply fall back on the US as in the past – and in effect, a return to the 1950s. This would be the worst of all possible scenarios, both for the EU itself and for the US, which has already served notice that European dependency on US military power is no longer US policy.

A second scenario would be one in which significant, yet limited, progress is made via CSDP-Redux. The full implementation of the entire raft of new initiatives referred to earlier could produce a far more effective CSDP, capable of making a difference particularly in the Southern neighborhood (Billon-Galland/Quencez 2017; Bakker et al. 2016; Gros-Verheyde 2016a; Pertusot 2016; Drent et al. 2016; Mauro 2017; Biscop 2017). This would not really amount to "strategic autonomy" in that it would still leave the EU existentially dependent on NATO and the US for its protection against a serious Russian threat (Valasek 2017). It would not allow the EU alone to offer a containment and deterrence posture against Russia, or indeed against an eventual nuclear-armed, ballistic-missile carried threat from Iran (or any other state in the Middle East). This scenario would not equate to the "ambitious" model outlined by Keohane and Mölling, which calls for the EU to be able to deploy the full spectrum of capabilities, nor would it meet Biscop's criteria for the EU to be able to play a major role in the Indian and Pacific oceans. It would represent a serious step beyond the status quo, but would still leave the EU as a subordinate security entity to NATO, while at the same time expending a great deal of money duplicating capabilities largely provided to NATO by the US. It might satisfy those who believe the EU should do more but are unconvinced that it should do much more. Would it satisfy both sides of the Atlantic in the long term? From the US perspective, this scenario's "acceptability" would depend on the occupant of the White House. A believer in US deep engagement and liberal hegemony would no doubt find it satisfactory. A believer in US restraint, offshore balancing or transfer of regional responsibilities to regional partners would find it unsatisfactory. It would certainly require a unified Europe, but it is not clear that it would lead to a permanently strengthened alliance.

The final scenario would take the dynamics and energy of the post-Brexit CSDP-Redux, situate them in the historical context of the post-Cold War world, the post-9/11 world, and indeed the post-Trump world (Bond/Besch 2016; Keohane 2016; Biscop 2016b; Valasek 2017), and lead them to their logical conclusion. There is no God-given law whereby Europe should be *utterly reliant in perpetuity* on an ally (however powerful) for its regional security. There is no question that "the West" (to all intents and purposes meaning Europe and the US) will continue to exist as a meaningful entity in world politics – at least for the foreseeable future (Solana/Talbott 2016; Baruma 2016). Europe and the United States share with one another more than either shares with any other major actor. Powerful forces in both parts of the North Atlantic space have been unleashed since the end of the Cold War calling upon the EU to become an autonomous and mature actor in international affairs. It is far from clear that the US will much longer be able – financially, politically or even militarily – to play the role of the global or regional policeman that it assumed in 1945. The world is undergoing a process of power transition and there is little doubt that the greatest challenges to the US in the remainder of the 21st century will come from the Pacific region. Europe is confronted with a set of challenges in its Southern and Eastern neighborhoods that the EUGS outlines with great clarity. Ultimately, it has to solve those challenges itself. Russia is one of those challenges, as it has been for the past three hundred years. But Russia, which is in many ways a declining rather than a rising power, will ultimately stand to benefit – as will the EU – from achieving some form of workable partnership with the European Union. In that relationship, the EU holds far stronger cards than Russia. The United States cannot "solve" Europe's "Russia problem." Only the EU can do that. However, it can only do it from a position of strategic autonomy. Such a position would represent the best-case scenario of the Framework Paper: a strongly united Europe and a strengthened, recast and balanced transatlantic relationship.

6. Conclusion

If the EU is serious about becoming a "strategically autonomous" actor, if it genuinely wishes to stabilize its neighborhood, and if it wishes to occupy a seat among the handful of major actors on the international stage in the remainder of the 21st century, it has no alternative but to develop its capacity in all areas – including in the area of security, defense and crisis management – to the fullest extent possible. This means ending its dependency on the US. This means, in effect, becoming a security actor that is at least comparable to NATO. Many US voices have called on the European Union to step up to the plate and assume leadership in its neighborhood. Several have even sketched out a ten-year scenario in which the US progressively relinquishes its leadership dominance in the NATO we have known for the past 60 years. Europe does not need two significant security entities in the same space. It is hard to imagine that such a coexistence would not exacerbate competition and rivalry rather than enhance cooperation and complementarity. It therefore seems logical for the EU to take up the American challenge, and progressively to assume leadership in meeting its own regional challenges. Cooperation thus becomes the Ariadne's thread leading through the maze towards autonomy. NATO can be a key enabler of that apprenticeship in genuine leadership. The US can continue to backstop EU security policy with critical enablers such as intelligence, logistics, heavy lift, command and control – but only as a temporary measure while Europe acquires the experience and the confidence to meet future challenges such as the Balkans, Libya, Ukraine and ISIS on its own. Such a development would greatly be in the US's best interests: to have a competent, mature and

self-reliant partner with whom to face the global challenges of the 21st century. When the EU reaches this stage, the need for a US-dominated NATO will fade away. The best way of reaching this stage is to merge CSDP into NATO, and to progressively take over command of the major agencies in NATO, as well as to allow the US to focus on the areas of the world that are of the most strategic importance to Washington. At that point, the Europeanized-NATO incorporating CSDP-Redux might sign a bilateral, co-equal and different type of alliance with the United States. That is the ultimate logic of the EUGS. That, after all, was the original intention of NATO.

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