

The Future of the Transatlantic Alliance: Not Without the European Union

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Abstract

The debate about the division of labor between the European Union (EU) and NATO has been ongoing ever since the former was created in 1993. Much more sensitive than the details of EU-NATO relations is the question of whether the EU, as a supranational, state-like organization, is actually seeking more autonomy—not from the alliance but from the United States. The EU has become indispensable to the security of the European continent because its member states largely set overall strategy on foreign policy through the EU and because only EU membership can guarantee their political and economic power base. EU member states are now also endeavoring to generate more military capabilities through the EU. A viable transatlantic alliance, therefore, requires the US to interact more directly with the EU, in addition to its engagement through NATO.

The transatlantic security architecture does not resemble a Le Corbusier or Oscar Niemeyer design. It is not a neatly planned whole in which every component elegantly and effectively fulfils a specific function. It rather resembles a sprawling palace complex; every successive occupant has added, restyled, or abandoned another wing. It functions, but one would never build it this way if one were to start from scratch.

Unearthing the foundations of this complex architecture takes us back to the years immediately following the end of the Second World War. Initially, the US strongly supported European defense cooperation because it was wary of a permanent military commitment on the European continent. Washington pushed hard for the European Defence Community, which would have merged the armed forces of France, West Germany, Italy, and the three Benelux countries into a single European army—thus rearming Germany without recreating the German armed forces. When in 1954 that project failed, however, the emphasis shifted to

NATO. The US therefore ended up taking the lead in the security and defense sphere anyway, through NATO, while European integration assumed a mostly economic focus through the European Economic Community (EEC), created in 1957.

When the Cold War ended, this neat division of labor became more complex. In 1993 the European Union (EU) succeeded the EEC and gradually developed its own strategy, foreign policy, and defense policy for the post–Cold War world. Ever since, there has been debate between the EU and NATO about who does what. Officially, both organizations talk only about complementarity; they adopted joint declarations in 2016 and 2018 and are working on 74 areas of cooperation.¹ In reality, many decision-makers on both sides of the Atlantic see this as a zero-sum game: what strengthens the EU must of necessity weaken NATO and vice versa. An unhelpful beauty contest has developed between the two organizations. Even in the fight against the coronavirus, for example, both NATO and the EU were at pains to prove that they were coordinating the support that Europe’s armed forces were providing to the security and health services.

Nevertheless, if it were merely a matter of redefining the division of labor between the EU and NATO, this debate might have already been settled. Offering a view from Europe, the underlying and much more politically sensitive question concerns the autonomy of the EU, as a state-like organization, not from NATO but from the US. The EU has already become indispensable to the security of the European continent because EU member states largely set overall strategy on foreign policy through the EU and because only EU membership can guarantee their political and economic power base. If EU member states are successful in their endeavor to generate military power through the EU, it would require a reconfiguration of the transatlantic architecture.

The Nature of the EU-NATO Relationship

Formally at least, the EU in its 2016 Global Strategy set itself the objective of achieving “strategic autonomy” in security and defense.² The strategic community in the US nearly universally condemns this EU ambition as undermining NATO. On 1 May 2019, the under secretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment and the under secretary of state for arms control and international security even sent a joint letter to the EU in which they described some of the subsequent EU defense initiatives as “poison pills” for the transatlantic relationship.³

At the same time, the US keeps pressing its European allies to spend more on defense. The pledge they made at NATO’s Wales Summit in

2014, to “aim to move towards the 2% guideline” by 2024, has been re-interpreted in Washington as an obligation to spend 2 percent of the GDP. At the July 2018 Brussels Summit, US president Donald Trump even spoke of a 4 percent spending target, though that was quietly ignored by everybody else.⁴ In March 2019, however, he impetuously returned to the charge with the idea that allies hosting American troops should pay the US the full cost of that deployment plus 50 percent. In June 2020 he announced a reduction of American troops in Germany—apparently in retaliation for Germany’s alleged underspending.⁵ The US cannot have it both ways: it cannot realistically expect the Europeans to pay more without having more of a say.

The stated goals of the Global Strategy notwithstanding, the Europeans remain very divided about strategic autonomy themselves. Some, such as French president Emmanuel Macron, but also German chancellor Angela Merkel, have grandly stated that the EU should take its destiny into its own hands.⁶ Others, especially in eastern Europe, are wary of upsetting the US without a firm alternative in place. In the EU institutions, the debate about the meaning of strategic autonomy has created much debate since 2016, but it has remained inconclusive. In 2020, the terms of the debate shifted; increasingly, EU member states and institutions now speak of “sovereignty” or “freedom of action.” The focus has now moved to the German initiative to draft a “strategic compass” to provide more political guidance for the EU’s defense policy, starting with an updated threat assessment during the German presidency of the EU in the second half of 2020. The Europeans have yet to decide, therefore, how autonomous they really want—and dare—to be in security and defense. The fact is that in many areas of international relations, the EU has already become an autonomous actor because of its very nature.

The EU is a supranational union in which member states have pooled sovereignty. Joining the EU is like moving into an apartment building. Inside your own apartment, you can do as you please within certain rules and as long as you don’t overly disturb the neighbors. About the building as a whole, however, you still decide, but only as part of a collective decision by all the owners; you cannot decide to replace the elevator by yourself. And you better participate in the meetings, tedious though they may be, for decisions are taken by majority and are binding even if you don’t attend. The EU is not a state, but it is not just an organization of states either; it is something in between, a state-like organization. That is why the EU has become an autonomous actor in its own right, in addition to

the individual actions of its member states, including in areas of international relations (most notably trade).

Foreign policy and defense constitute an exception: in these areas the EU as such is not an actor but still operates on an intergovernmental basis; member states take all decisions by unanimity. These member states are, of course, sovereign countries in that they make their own decisions. However, their national strategic autonomy—that is, their capacity to act on those decisions and to safeguard their interests by themselves—is nonexistent for most and severely constrained for the others. The individual European states mostly have but negative sovereignty: they can in all freedom decide not to do something, but each on its own cannot undertake significant actions. France, for example, can deploy a brigade—but not much more—to Mali and, even then, only with the support of other Europeans and the US in terms of intelligence, transport, and so forth. The current European debate is about the extent to which EU member states should further pool their sovereignty, notably in defense, and thus become an autonomous actor in this area as well.

NATO, to continue the architectural analogy, is the neighborhood watch. Some of the owners in the EU building have joined it while others have not. It also has members from other buildings, including the huge mansion across the street—the US. The neighborhood watch is important, especially when security problems arise, but it does not shape your daily life; the EU building and your relations with the other owners in it does. NATO is fully intergovernmental; it is an organization of states. It can never be an actor in its own right, therefore, nor can it acquire autonomy; it always was and will be an instrument of its member states.

Whether increased EU autonomy in defense undermines NATO is, therefore, a meaningless question. One might as well ask whether US autonomy undermines NATO. If the European members (and partners) of NATO that compose the EU were to decide to pool their defense efforts that would not in any way detract from the strength of the alliance—just like bilateral or trilateral cooperation between allies (Belgian-Dutch naval cooperation, for example, or the Dutch-German army corps) does not. Of course, if the EU member states were increasingly to act as a bloc within NATO, it would be more difficult for the US to maintain its predominant position in alliance decision-making. That is why the EU ambition of strategic autonomy is such a sensitive political issue.

The US has been facing this dilemma since the end of the Cold War. Should it continue to prioritize working with individual European allies through NATO? That would make it easier to maintain American leader-

ship—but of less capable allies. Or should it support defense integration through the EU in the hope that this would render the Europeans militarily stronger and more capable of relieving the burden of the US, even if that would mean accepting a greater EU role in decision-making? Arguably, whichever option the US chooses, it will have to accord a greater role to the EU. Today, although foreign policy remains an intergovernmental area, the EU plays an indispensable role in strategy making.

A Strategy for Foreign Policy

NATO was, of course, created long before the EU. As a consequence, many still perceive a hierarchy in which NATO comes first and the EU second, as if the EU can make decisions only within a prior strategic framework set by NATO. In reality, things work the other way around: NATO provides a military instrument that is put to use within the framework of a foreign policy strategy defined elsewhere. As far as the US is concerned, it is in Washington; for EU member states, it is in Brussels—that is, if the EU works as it should. In practice, EU member states indeed do not arrive at a common EU strategy on each and every specific issue. The fact is that, in general, on issues of strategic importance, the Europeans cannot have much impact unless they adopt a collective EU approach. What could even the largest European states do alone about the war in Ukraine, the war in Syria, or the rise of China? If the EU does adopt a strategy and it coincides with US strategy, Europeans and Americans can then opt to have recourse to NATO if implementation requires military action.

The measures taken since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 clearly illustrate the actual strategic “line of command.” The European reaction to the invasion depended on the relationship Europe wanted to offer Ukraine, the price Europe was willing to pay for it, and how Europe saw the long-term future of its relations with Russia itself. Certainly, the Europeans took into account Washington’s position. Nevertheless, these political and economic decisions could only be taken collectively, through the EU. Within this broadly defined EU understanding, the Europeans contribute military forces to Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics and Poland, under the NATO flag, while applying sanctions against Russia through the EU. Diplomatic initiatives at the highest level to end the conflict have mostly been undertaken by Germany and France. But their leverage also derives to a large extent from their membership in the EU: only the EU can apply or end economic and diplomatic sanctions. No individual European state will adopt sanctions unilaterally and risk the ire of Russia on its own.

In those instances when the EU does not set strategy, NATO cannot fill the void. NATO obviously has neither the competence nor the authority to step in and decide on issues of foreign policy, trade and investment, or energy; but even in defense, NATO will find it difficult to act if the EU is divided.

Absent an EU strategy, the majority of EU member states will have at most a token policy on big questions of foreign policy and security for lack of leverage, or they may simply follow US policy. Even larger member states, though perhaps more vocal, will find it difficult to act by themselves. If the lack of EU strategy is mostly the result of inertia, the US may still be capable of convincing many or most Europeans to follow its lead and to act jointly, either through NATO or through a broad coalition of the willing. Sometimes, even when there is a common EU position, an ad hoc coalition rather than NATO is the preferred option. This was the case of the US-led coalition against ISIS, created at NATO's Wales Summit in 2014 but not run as a NATO operation.

If, however, EU member states are actively divided on an issue, the US will find that it will then also be very difficult to mobilize NATO or to have more than a handful of European states sign up for an ad hoc coalition. If the Europeans are divided when they meet in the EU, logically they will be no less divided when they meet in NATO or with the US. The example that best illustrates this scenario is the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. As the EU was split right down the middle over the invasion, the US had to forgo the active support of all but a few European allies. The 2011 air campaign in Libya is another example: formally presented as a NATO operation, it was in fact a British-French-US led coalition that made use of the NATO command structure. Very few European allies participated, and the EU initially abstained in the face of German disagreement with the intervention. In such cases, the EU's political and economic instruments and resources, many of which are controlled by the supranational European Commission, cannot be made available or at least not from the start. The implementation of a comprehensive approach will then be very difficult.

On issues of foreign policy, therefore, the US would be well advised to consult with the Europeans directly through the EU on a permanent basis. The EU is the only forum where the European allies can adopt and implement strategies on the major foreign policy issues of the day—strategies that will shape the framework within which transatlantic cooperation can take place. Deepening US-EU interaction on strategy is all the more necessary because the trend is for American and European poli-

cies to diverge. The differences are obvious in the Middle East and the Gulf: the US has withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal, while the EU continues to support it, and declines to choose sides in the regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In Brussels, undermining the nuclear deal is widely seen as detrimental to Europe's security interests. On multilateralism as well, divergences are growing. Washington and Brussels often identify the same problems with entities such as the World Trade and World Health Organizations. Whereas the EU answer is to engage and seek reform, the US has opted to withdraw and pull funding.

Future US administrations may perhaps shift gears again on these issues, but on China there is a strong bipartisan consensus that the US is engaged in a long-term strategic rivalry. This is the most important divergence, therefore, because it concerns the world order as a whole and China's place in it and because it is unlikely to diminish. The Europeans are increasingly aware of the need to safeguard their sovereignty in the face of China's growing influence but do not perceive China as a strategic threat in the same way as the US.⁷ The EU's High Representative, Josep Borrell, has made it clear that Europeans cannot accept the idea that the world should organize itself around a new bipolarity between the US and China.⁸ Europeans, in other words, are not keen to pick sides in Sino-American rivalry. This is a key reason why there is a desire in Europe to increase the strategic autonomy of the EU rather than stepping up defense efforts through NATO. At its December 2019 London meeting, NATO put China on its agenda—but that will not be sufficient. For the European allies, deterring Russia remains NATO's *raison d'être*, and they do not see the alliance as the forum to make strategy on China. Any US administration will have to directly engage the EU on China because on many of the political and economic issues at stake, the EU rather than the individual member states has decision-making power.

Integrated Political and Economic Power

Supranational European integration is the foundation of the political and economic power of the EU member states. Although inequalities remain in their societies, the single market has allowed the Europeans to achieve unprecedented levels of prosperity. For most member states, quitting the single market would amount to economic suicide. Thanks to EU measures, member states recovered from the 2008 financial crisis; the crisis, in fact, led to further economic and financial integration. Likewise, recovery after the crisis caused by COVID-19 will be thanks to an EU support package. Member states do not always show solidarity from the

start, and the EU often arrives at decisions only after lengthy and painful negotiations. The point is that member states have pooled their sovereignty to create the single market with (for most members) a single currency; hence, only the EU can now make the required decisions in an economic or financial crisis. Thanks to European integration, the Europeans have also achieved the scale to hold their own against the continent-sized great powers of the US, China, and Russia in economic and, to a lesser extent, political terms. The EU could certainly improve its geo-economic performance—as in putting its economic clout to use to pursue its strategic objectives—but if it holds any sway in world politics, it is because of European unity. The same goes increasingly for innovation and technology: here too scale has become ever more important. In the areas in which Europe has fallen behind, such as artificial intelligence, only a concerted EU effort could redraw the balance.

Post-World War Two, the US strongly encouraged European integration. The success of the EEC was intertwined with the success of NATO, cementing the American security guarantee to Europe. This has now come to work both ways, however. Before, the EEC and then the EU could not do without NATO. Now, because the EU has become indispensable to the political and economic stability of Europe, NATO can no longer do without the EU either. Without the EU, there would be political instability and economic crisis, which could only result in rivalry between European states with limited power but a lot of mutual suspicion. And if the states of Europe once again became rivals, Europe would no longer be a source of allies for the US but of risks. In sum, if the EU were to flounder that would be the end of NATO as well. In such a scenario, the US might seek to replace a defunct NATO with a set of bilateral alliances—but not necessarily with all current allies. Europeans would do well to understand that if another power would seek to exploit the floundering of the EU and NATO to gain control of significant parts of the European continent, the US might intervene but not necessarily in defense of all European states. Where the US would draw the line would depend on which parts of Europe it would judge to be essential to the American interest and on how many resources it would be willing to spend on Europe in the context of its strategic competition with China.

There are important tensions within the EU already today as some member states, such as Hungary, appear to be returning to more authoritarian forms of government. Such governments feel that they can safely violate fundamental EU values like the rule of law and human rights and antagonize their fellow EU member states because, in terms of defense,

the US will always have their back. The Trump administration has even openly sided with the Polish and Hungarian governments in their disputes with EU institutions. Yet undermining the EU might precisely provoke other powers to leverage that to their advantage while, as stated above, one cannot be sure of future US strategy. The current Polish government may feel that inviting the US to build a “Fort Trump” on its territory is a sufficient guarantee against any eventuality. During conflict, though, the cavalry manning the fort may decide that those living around it are expendable. This is why the populist European political parties and governments actively undermining the cohesion of the EU are playing with fire—as are those Americans who support them. Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán may espouse the fiction of “illiberal democracy,” but he forgets that today the purpose of NATO is to defend not just the territory of its members but also the democratic model that they have created in their countries. That was not the case when NATO was founded, when for strategic reasons more than one dictatorship was invited to join. Today, any democratic government in a NATO ally would be hard-pressed to convince its public to put its armed forces in harm’s way to defend a dictatorship in another NATO country. It is first and foremost the EU’s responsibility to uphold democracy for all its members, yet it is surprising, and worrying, how little NATO, and the US, have to say about the democratic backsliding of several allies.

The worst-case scenario of disintegration of the EU will not come to pass. As the drawn-out Brexit process shows, leaving is easier said than done. The current lack of unity within the EU also weakens NATO. Unfortunately, the Hungarian government and others willingly allow themselves to be instrumentalized by other powers and, at their behest, tone down or block EU decision-making altogether. Since nearly all decisions on foreign and defense policy require unanimity, it is sufficient for another power to convince one or two capitals to betray the EU. So far this stipulation has not appreciably affected the EU stance on Russia and Ukraine despite continued Russian attempts to divide the union. Nevertheless, China has often been very successful in recruiting member states as its agents and weakening or avoiding EU policies that it considers detrimental to its interests. Once again, since there is little scope for concerted transatlantic action in the absence of a broader EU strategic consensus, this weakens NATO and transatlantic cooperation as well.

Given that the European states gain leverage on the international scene through the EU, leaving the union is equal to giving up that leverage and becoming vulnerable to outside pressure from other powers. Brexit did not

even have to become a reality for the UK to already experience this. When in September 2018 a Royal Navy ship sailed through what China considers its waters in the South China Sea, Beijing explicitly warned London that such actions might jeopardize the future bilateral economic relationship post-Brexit.⁹ China could never blackmail Britain to such an extent if it stayed in the EU, for it cannot afford to put economic relations with all of the union at risk. This means that, contrary to Britain's assertions, Brexit does weaken NATO. London may decide not to give in to other powers, but it does provide China in particular with more leverage to influence British decision-making through nonmilitary means.

Generating Military Power

In the field of defense, European integration has finally become indispensable as well, but defense is far less advanced than other areas. During the Cold War, when the European states maintained large conscript forces, each had the scale to create a full-spectrum force or at least a very broad range of capabilities; integrating defense efforts was not necessary. Today, however, smaller-scale forces, smaller defense budgets, and inordinately more expensive arms and equipment mean that not a single European state can maintain a full-spectrum force of any significant size. Fragmentation and protectionism have resulted in a patchwork of national forces of mostly low readiness. Taken together, these national forces do not constitute a comprehensive full-spectrum force package. There are critical shortfalls in terms of strategic enablers, reserve forces, and stocks of munitions and equipment. Consequently, Europe depends on the US for any major deployment. The European allies have agreed, in the framework of NATO, to spend more on defense. But if each state continues to do so separately, the status of Europe's armed forces and their dependence on the US will basically remain unaltered, even if they all spend 2 percent of their GDP. Only by pooling their defense efforts could a group of European states field a comprehensive full-spectrum force package, including the strategic enablers that allow capabilities to be projected at the borders of Europe and beyond.

The EU is not the only framework in which the required pooling of efforts could be organized, but it definitely is the most promising one. Twenty-five EU member states have joined Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) institutionalizing defense collaboration in the union, while the commission has set up the European Defence Fund (EDF) that, for the first time ever, will provide defense funds in the EU budget. If it is put to maximum use, PESCO can become the single platform where Eu-

Europeans organize themselves to collectively develop all the capabilities that they require to meet their EU as well as NATO targets. Rather than undermining NATO, PESCO could help NATO ensure that the additional means that the European allies are making available are put to the best possible use.¹⁰ Many Americans and Europeans are understandably skeptical of PESCO since, in the past, so many EU (and NATO) attempts to promote defense cooperation failed to produce meaningful results. PESCO is different in that unlike all previous informal initiatives (such as “pooling and sharing” in the EU and “smart defense” in NATO), it is now part of the institutional setup of the EU. In other words, it will not go away. Just like under the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), member states will be systemically held accountable. That does not guarantee that PESCO will work (just like few allies meet all of their NDPP targets)—but that is all the more reason why NATO and the US should encourage rather than question it.

Naturally, if and when the Europeans spend more, they will purchase European arms and equipment. For NATO, that is not an issue, but it has become one for the Trump administration. It was always unrealistic of Washington, however, to expect that all additional means would be used to place orders in the US. One of the reasons why the “poison pill” letter mentioned above caused such a stir in Brussels is that Europeans read it as being motivated by narrow US defense industrial concerns rather than by strategic interests. For the Europeans, defense industrial autonomy is but a logical exponent of the overall economic and technological autonomy that the EU, just like all other powers, aspires to. So if PESCO works, Europe will buy more—but not only—European products. If PESCO and the EDF are successful, the EU could become indispensable in military capability development.

The EU aims also to put those capabilities to use and to conduct certain expeditionary operations autonomously in the broad neighborhood of Europe. Doing so is in line with the long-standing but still unachieved EU objective of being able to deploy and sustain up to an army corps and equivalent naval and air forces (the so-called Helsinki Headline Goal from 1999). Autonomous operations do not necessarily mean EU operations, though. In practice—yet not always apparent from EU rhetoric—these can be operations under any flag (EU, NATO, UN, national, ad hoc coalition) but under the political control and strategic direction of European governments, with a European general or admiral in command, and relying only on European forces and assets.

Seen from NATO, the bone of contention is the command and control (C2) of such operations: Is the EU seeking to create a standing operational headquarters alongside the NATO C2 structure? NATO and the EU do have an arrangement, the Berlin Plus agreement, to allow the EU access to NATO C2. Many in Europe see this as unsatisfactory, however, because it requires the EU to pass through the North Atlantic Council and then SHAPE rather than directly interacting with a specific NATO headquarters. Such a circuitous delegation amounts to an abdication of control. If a standing EU headquarters is undesirable, the only other alternative would be to give the EU or an ad hoc coalition of European states direct access to the NATO headquarters, which would conduct an individual operation (such as Naples that commanded the Libya air campaign). Arguably, the US should welcome autonomous European operations. If the Europeans were capable of singly handling any contingency in their neighborhood falling below the threshold of Article 5 (NATO's collective defense guarantee) that would allow Washington to focus its attention on Asia.

Precisely because Asia and, more specifically, China, is now the focus of American strategic attention, the Europeans might also have to consider whether even in the area of collective territorial defense they should not aspire to more autonomy. The US has adopted a one-war standard for its defense effort geared to defeating a great power.¹¹ The question for the Europeans is what would happen if the US were absorbed in an escalating crisis in Asia: Should they be able to deter and, if necessary, defend themselves against any military threat? Would American reinforcements arrive as soon and in such numbers as expected? The idea of more European autonomy in territorial defense (whether imagined as a European pillar within NATO or through the EU) is anathema to the US and to most European governments. It is the US pivot to Asia that has invited such thinking, however. Washington could indeed also wish to see more European independence in defense as enabling its pivot. The fact is, given the resources and the willpower required, European autonomy in territorial defense could only become reality in the long term.¹²

Conclusion

The most strategic decision that the European states have taken since the end of the Second World War was to launch European integration. This could not have taken off without NATO: it prospered thanks to the stability that the American security guarantee, embodied in the alliance, provided. Today, the EU itself has become indispensable to the stability of Europe, and now NATO can no longer do without the EU either. There is

no going back to pre-EU days, at least not as a matter of choice. For the first time in history, Europe has united voluntarily rather than through force of arms (as Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Wilhelm II, and Hitler all attempted—and failed). Therefore, the unravelling of the EU could only be the result of a catastrophic crisis; it would signal the return of intra-European rivalry and possibly even war. In a world that has seen a return to great power rivalry, in political, economic, and military terms the Europeans should strengthen their unity and deepen EU integration to maintain their chosen way of life. The US ought to encourage them in that effort and work more directly with the EU, in addition to NATO, if it wants the Europeans to support its strategy.

It is always likely, of course, that Europeans and Americans will just muddle through without any fundamental change in the way that EU-NATO and EU-US relations operate. The current situation may, at times, suit the US. An EU that can muster but a weak strategic consensus and does not adopt strong courses of action may be easier to mobilize for US-led initiatives—and will at least not cause interference with American policies. Herein lies the eternal dilemma for the US: relatively weaker European allies may be easier to recruit for American designs, but will they be able to contribute much to their implementation? If allies are too weak, they might actually hinder implementation and handicap the alliance. They may even become a source of security problems.

The other option therefore is to deepen EU integration and reconfigure the alliance with the US accordingly. The obvious steps to take would be to introduce decision-making by majority in EU strategy and foreign policy and to use PESCO and the EDF to maximally streamline the European defense effort. The aim would be to shift the center of gravity from the national capitals to Brussels in both diplomacy and defense. If the EU were to manage this—but it is a very tall order—then over time it would make sense to begin to think of NATO as a bilateral alliance between the US and the EU as such rather than between the US and a host of individual European states. This is what some American authors are proposing as the only way of actually forcing the Europeans to shape an adequate defense.¹³ For the US, the dilemma remains: What is worse—European strategic autonomy or the absence of it? For the EU itself, muddling through remains the most likely scenario. Taking this route is highly unlikely to be sufficient to safeguard the European interest in the face of external powers actively trying to divide and subvert EU member states. For the great powers, Europe is but one of the theaters where their rivalry is playing out. Basically, Europe's choice is this: to be an actor or to be a theater prop. **SSQ**

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Notes

1. Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 8 July 2016, NATO, <https://www.nato.int/>; and Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 10 July 2018, NATO, <https://www.nato.int/>.

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