

Defence 25: thinking outside the box

• Summary

Europe is under more threat today than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Above and beyond the war in Ukraine, the greatest threat lies in the major uncertainty governing the policies of the two powers that will determine its future: the United States and Russia. No one knows what Donald Trump has in store for us, just as no one knows exactly what the weaknesses and strengths of Vladimir Putin's Russia are. It is this double confusion that requires European states and institutions to give priority to strategic issues. But this double uncertainty also requires Europeans to think outside the box when it comes to European defence.

1. BEWARE OF THREE ILLUSIONS

- The industrial illusion
- The institutional illusion
- The strategic illusion

2. FACING TEN NEW QUESTIONS

- In Trump's world, what kind of European defence with what kind of NATO?
- Will the war in Ukraine determine the future of European defence?
- Is the CSDP legacy untouchable?
- Is defence possible without growth?
- Is defence compatible with EU enlargement?
- Common defence and the rise of sovereignty: is it consistent?
- What about the future of opex?



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**#EuropeanDefense
#Trump
#EU**

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- Which countries are the driving forces behind defence?
- What role for nuclear deterrence?
- Is defence as a political project obsolete?

3. CONCLUSION

Ten recommendations

- Revision of the traditional “three Ds” doctrine and development of a new defence concept between NATO and the EU, based on the European pillar.
- Autonomy for the Defence Councils, following the Foreign Affairs Council, which remains the political decision-making body.
- Creation of a High Level Group Defence, reporting to the President of the European Council and chaired by the HR/VP, with responsibility for short and medium-term strategic planning.
- Strengthening the European Military Staff, with the task of analysing military threats and proposing a European doctrine on the use of force.
- Strengthening Russia’s intelligence and satellite surveillance capabilities.
- Definition of an incompressible ratio of European armaments purchases (in relation to external purchases) to strengthen the European DTIB. Tougher conditions of access to European defence funding for subsidiaries of foreign companies.
- Elaboration of an EU collective defence policy, on the basis of a report on the scenarios, conditions and means for the operational implementation of Article 42-7.
- On Ukraine: drawing up a European plan for resolving the conflict, with a requirement to be at the negotiating table, insofar as Ukraine is a future EU member state.
- Possibility of informal meetings of the 5 leading defence countries: creation of a “Quint-EU”
- Priority given to defence over enlargement.

• Defence 25: thinking outside the box

Putin and Trump: these two non-Europeans will decide the future of EU defence policy. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 had already convinced Europeans to take their defence policies very seriously. The spectacular election of Donald Trump in November 2024 could represent a second strategic boost for the EU. This was already the case in 2016, when the combination of Brexit and Trump’s first term in office had profoundly shaken Europeans’ atony in this area.

Yet there is a glaring paradox between a remarkable consensus on the need for a common defence policy and, over the last two years, an equally great stagnation in the policy in question.

The Europeans have made enormous progress on defence since 2022: they are rearming, they are arming Ukraine, they are rationalising their arms industry, they are providing financial support for industrial production, they are increasing their defence budget, they are all talking, albeit more or less loudly, about strategic autonomy, even France has rallied to the idea of a European pillar of Nato, but ... nothing is really changing: the arms market remains largely an Atlantic market; the European pillar of NATO remains a magic formula with no real content; the war in Ukraine has not triggered any diplomatic innovation, or any EU defence doctrine. In short, if Donald Trump were to decide tomorrow to renege on American membership of NATO, or to make American protection very costly, we would be in the same position as in 2016: bereft, unprepared and powerless.

It is this paradox that we need to resolve through a two-pronged approach: strengthening the Euro-American alliance, and being ready to take its place if need be.

I • Beware of three illusions

Much progress has been made since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, armies are being re-equipped, budgets are becoming more serious, the European arms market is getting organised, and the relationship between the EU and NATO is calmer than ever. However, this dynamic is skewed by at least three illusions.

I THE FIRST ILLUSION IS INDUSTRIAL

It assumes an automatic link between the industrial and political aspects of defence. Nothing is less certain.

There are several reasons why Europeans have given priority to the industrial aspects of defence. The war in Ukraine is obviously one of them, insofar as Kiev needed to be supplied with a considerable quantity of munitions, while not stripping Europe's own arsenals. Thierry Breton's creativity and dynamism did more in a few months than fifteen years of ESDP. But there were other reasons for this consensus. The first is institutional: industry is the Commission's responsibility, and the rationalisation of the arms supply and market is an area in which it can invest, without raising legal or political reservations about its legitimacy in this area. The second reason is political: insofar as the Member States do not agree on the format, role, mission and autonomy of a possible common European defence policy, it is absolutely essential to avoid the political terrain if we want to make progress. Industry has all the advantages in this respect, because you get down to the nitty-gritty, the technical, the organisational and so on, all things you can argue about without going to the point of a major crisis. The third reason is more cultural, some would say ideological. From the outset of European integration, the idea of a causal link between economic integration and political integration has been at the heart of European philosophy. Robert Schumann, Jean Monnet and all the European architects of the time firmly and sincerely believed that a series of successive technical and sectoral integrations would gradually lead to greater political solidarity between the Member States. Fifty years later, the fathers of the euro still shared this belief in the political effects of the single currency. Not so: the Member States of the eurozone are as divided as ever. In 2024, it is the link between industrial capabilities and defence policy that is fuelling the illusion.

This belief in the induced effects of industrial cooperation has also marked the short history of WEU¹. Under the impetus of France, the latter had tried everything to create a common defence policy: forces assigned to the WEU (the WEUDFs), industrial building blocks within the WEAG², already with the aim of strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (DTIB), out-of-area operations, etc. All this came to nothing. The WEU legacy was absorbed into the EU in 2001, including WEAG's merger with the European Defence Agency.

In reality, there is a glass ceiling between industrial integration and the creation of a common defence policy. The former is necessary but insufficient. The second is essential, but depends on nothing other than the goodwill of the Member States. One example among many would suffice to remind us of this: in 2012, when French,

1 Western European Union: Defence alliance between 10 European countries, created by the modified Brussels Treaty in 1954 and self-dissolved in favour of the EU in 2011.

2 Groupe armement de l'Europe Occidentale, created in 1992, dissolved in 2005

German and British industrialists had announced the merger between EADS and BAE systems, in order to create the world leader in defence aeronautics, Angela Merkel finally decided to block the agreement.

A final reservation must be made before putting all the eggs in the industrial basket: the arms market in Europe has historically been a captive market for the American industry. The guarantee of protection from the United States, as well as the need for interoperability of equipment, make the idea of European industrial autonomy in armaments illusory for many Member States. This is why the “European preference” clause in arms purchases has never been accepted. American diplomacy is not above exerting strong pressure on its European allies in order to maintain control over the progress made in Europe. US industry, for its part, is not lacking in imagination when it comes to setting up European subsidiaries to qualify for the EU’s new arms policies, in particular the Defence Fund. As a result, the Commission had to find a compromise to allow non-EU countries to participate in the Fund under certain conditions, which were favourable to American companies.³

These reservations in no way diminish the need to rationalise, strengthen and better integrate the defence industrial base, against a backdrop of rapidly deteriorating European security. It is vital that the industry responds to any defence needs by producing faster and better. They only point out the limits of the exercise, and the need to complement it with other dimensions, this time political.

I THE SECOND ILLUSION IS INSTITUTIONAL.

It is closely linked to the previous one and is the result of the Commission’s long struggle to play on an equal footing with the Member States on security and defence issues, from which the Treaty excludes it a priori. The Commission has long understood that the European defence market, the famous DTIB, was the royal road to full entry into the highly regal domain of defence. In 1997 it published an initial communication entitled “Implementing the European Union’s strategy defence-related industries”, in which it advocated for the first time the creation of a European defence equipment market. The Member States rejected what they saw as an infringement of the exceptionality of defence equipment (ex Article 223 of the Treaty⁴). In 2003, the European Commission published another communication, “Towards a European Community Armaments Policy”, aimed at creating a European Defence

3 “In order to be eligible to EDF funding, recipients and subcontractors involved in the action must be established in the EU, have their executive management structure in the EU and must not be subject to control by a non-associated third country or by a non-associated third-country entity. Regarding this last point, a derogation exists if guaranties approved by the Member State or associated country where the entity is established, and substantiating those security-based conditions are met, are provided to the Commission.” To be eligible for the defence fund, an entity must be established in the EU, have its executive management also based in the EU, and not be controlled by third countries or a third entity not associated with the EU. On this last point, a derogation exists if guarantees approved by the Member States and the associated State in which the entity is located and ensuring that the security conditions are met, are provided to the Commission. Personal translation.

4 Introduced into the Treaty of Rome in 1957, this article excluded defence equipment from Community competence. It was taken over unchanged by Article 346 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU: “1. The provisions of the Treaties shall not preclude the following rules: (a) no Member State shall be obliged to supply information the disclosure of which it considers contrary to the essential interests of its security; (b) any Member State may take such measures as it considers necessary for the protection of the essential interests of its security which are connected with the production of or trade in arms, munitions and war material; such measures shall not adversely affect the conditions of competition in the internal market regarding products which are not intended for specifically military purposes. 2. The Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission, may make amendments to the list of products to which the provisions of paragraph 1(b) apply, which it drew up on 15 April 1958. (This is followed by a long list of equipment).

Equipment Market (EDEM). These efforts culminated in 2007 in the adoption of the “defence package”, which lays the foundations for the current consensus. The Member States adopted the Commission’s view that there can be no autonomous European Security and Defence Policy without a competitive Defence Technological and Industrial Base (DTIB), which presupposes an efficiently functioning European Defence Equipment Market (EDEM).⁵

Since then, the Commission’s role has continued to grow in legitimacy. The creation of the European Defence Fund in 2016, on the initiative of Claude Juncker, then President of the Commission, was a turning point, in that industry itself applied for such funding: for the first time, part of the Community budget could be used for defence research and development. Another institutional initiative was the creation in 2017 of a Defence Directorate within the Directorate-General for the Internal Market, of which Thierry Breton was the first director. From 2022 onwards, the war in Ukraine also enabled the President of the Commission to attempt to personalise the spirit of European defence in the media through her many trips to Kiev, her unwavering support for Volodimir Zelinsky, and her rhetorical skill: for a large proportion of the public, it is now the Commission that embodies the Europe of defence. After the 2024 elections, new innovations were adopted: the creation of a genuine Defence Committee within the European Parliament, and the creation of the post of Defence Commissioner, now embodied by the former Lithuanian Prime Minister, Andrius Kubilius.

Will this institutional turmoil change things? Without wishing to insult the future, it has to be said that there are many reservations about the contribution of this new function. The ambiguity of the title - Defence Commissioner - suggests that the Commission now has the same legitimacy in this area as the Member States, when in fact it does not. The Commissioner’s remit is strictly limited to organising the defence industry, but it will be difficult for him to avoid political issues: the new Commissioner has promised to write a White Paper on defence within the first 100 days of his mandate, and he is calling for a “genuine single defence market” and a “space revolution”. More problematically, his powers overlap with those of the High Representative, who is also Vice-President of the Commission, in this case Mrs Kaja Kallas. As for the head of the European Defence Agency, he must be asking himself a lot of questions about his missions. It is doubtful whether the institutional mess that has been created is the best way of putting order into the European defence market.

Finally, there is the idea of calling into question unanimity on foreign and security policy issues. Clearly, the right of veto is an obstacle to the implementation of a common policy. However, when it comes to defence, in other words a policy that concerns the lives and potential death of European citizens, it seems out of place to do without it.

I THE THIRD ILLUSION IS STRATEGIC.

It leads to the construction of a European defence without a common foreign policy and without a defence strategy

The Common Foreign Policy has been the poor relation of the European security acquis. Despite the efforts made over the last two decades, the Member States still do not share the same vision of the world, nor the same vision of the EU’s role in

5 For a detailed history of European defence industry initiatives, see the Senate report “*Bill on the control of imports and exports of war material and related material, on simplifying transfers of defence-related products within the European Union and on defence and security procurement*”, Issue 306, 15 February 2011.

the world. Geography (North and South), political heritage (West and East), the distant past (colonial or not, imperial or not, state or not, etc.), all these factors feed notorious divergences: some countries only have a foreign policy in their neighbourhood, others have global ambitions, and still others simply adhere to American policy. Despite a very substantial European External Action Service, there is no common European strategic culture. European diplomacy therefore lacks ambition, visibility and effectiveness. And what is the point of a common defence policy if there is no minimum agreement on how, where and when it should be implemented? There is a risk that the world's largest army will remain in its barracks unless there is a consensus on how, where and when to use it.

The war in Ukraine provides a sad and frightening example of the possible divergences over the Russian aggressor. All the Member States recognise Russian responsibility for the attack on Ukraine. But the consensus breaks down when it comes to defining the contours of the best possible strategy towards Russia: containment behind a new "iron curtain" erected to the west of Ukraine? Exhausting and destroying Russia's military and economic capabilities as far as possible through a prolonged and costly war? Join NATO? Territorial compromise in exchange for security guarantees for Ukraine's sovereignty? Partial and cautious reintegration of Russia into the European architecture of the future? The Europeans are not talking about this, no doubt waiting for the United States to define what will probably be the only legitimate strategy in their eyes, the Atlantic strategy. However, the victory of Donald Trump as future President of the United States creates a new risk: that of a diplomatic decoupling between the two sides of the Atlantic. Trump's United States seems to be in favour of negotiating with Putin, while Europeans are worried about the terms of any agreement. Why wait to be presented with the *fait accompli* of a deal that runs counter to our interests? Why not draw up a common European position on the future security of Ukraine as soon as possible, in consultation with Kiev?

More generally, what vision of the world would a common foreign and defence policy embody? Do Europeans subscribe to the idea of a global confrontation between democracies on the one hand and authoritarianism on the other? Does our future lie in this global, ideological, commercial and perhaps military confrontation with Iran, Russia and China? As long as Europeans have not clarified their views on this issue, talk of common defence will miss the mark: who is the enemy?

As for defence strategy, it remains embryonic. However, since the inception of the ESDP in 2003 - the date of the Union's first external operations - Europeans have not ignored collective strategic reflection. They have even succeeded in defining an overall security strategy, together with the principles that would determine the use of their armed forces in stabilising external conflicts. The European Security Strategy of 2003, under the aegis of Javier Solana, is the first founding text. It will be followed in 2022 by the adoption of the EU's "strategic compass", under the leadership of Josep Borrel. However, these two documents are based on a restrictive consensus: the common European defence policy is a crisis management policy for others, outside the EU. It has nothing to do with the EU's policy of self-defence, which must remain the preserve of NATO. In other words, to date, Europeans have not thought of European defence independently of American strategy.⁶

It is this strategic heritage that needs to be enriched, by thinking in terms of self-defence between Europeans. If the Americans were to withdraw from NATO, which no one wants to see happen, how would we defend ourselves? How much would it cost? At what point, in what situation, would the collective defence of the EU be

⁶ This move towards a competent European defence for the EU's self-defence was one of the recommendations I made in "*Europe, changer ou périr*", published in 2022 by Editions Tallandier.

considered necessary? What is the minimum threshold for going to war? Who would command the necessary forces? What would be the role of the United Kingdom? Should there be a European nuclear deterrent? etc. These considerations are all part of a very narrow path, because it is a veritable taboo within the Union. While all the Member States agree that European defence should be strengthened, they are all careful not to do too much to avoid precipitating the very thing they want to avoid: American disinterest in NATO and disengagement from European defence. Would it be “doing too much” for Europeans to reflect independently on what it would mean to implement Article 5⁷ (Article 42 of the Treaty in this case)? ⁸

It is true that such an exercise would require two complementary chapters: independent analysis of the threat on the one hand, and collective reflection on the conditions and rules for the use of force on the other.

Analysing the threats facing the EU is a legal requirement: Article 222(4) of the Treaty on European Union⁹ stipulates that the European Council shall draw up a list of the threats facing the EU. The adoption of the Strategic Compass in 2022 represents the most accomplished, and finally consensual, form of such an analysis of the international environment. However, these analyses, which are very accurate, remain general, global and descriptive of a certain state of the world, but they do not address the real state of the forces and dynamics hostile to the EU. This more precise analysis requires resources, intelligence and the pooling of data between Europeans, in order to reach a consensus that is as well-founded as possible. The war in Ukraine demonstrated the excellence and effectiveness of American satellite intelligence and data analysis technology in real time. Are we capable of performing as well? Or do we want to? The war in Iraq in 2003 revealed a real divide between the intelligence provided by the United States on Iraq’s chemical and nuclear proliferation and that provided by the IAEA and French intelligence. The same opposition between what America was saying (without any proof) and what the other partners in the JCPoA¹⁰ (including the International Atomic Energy Agency) were saying broke down efforts to combat Iranian nuclear proliferation in 2018. How to respond to this challenge of the most autonomous possible threat assessment, in other words how to build a shared European intelligence capability, is one of the major challenges

7 Article 5 of the NATO Treaty: “*The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against all of them, and consequently they agree that, if such an attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking prompt action individually and in concert with the other Parties to the conflict, or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.*”

8 Article 42-7 of the Treaty: “Should a Member State be the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall afford it aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments and cooperation in this field shall remain consistent with the commitments entered into within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which remains, for the States which are members of it, the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation.

9 The Treaty limits this analysis to the terrorist threat, but in no way prevents it from being extended to all strategic threats. Article 222: “The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. The Union shall mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available to it by the Member States” Paragraph 4: “In order to enable the Union and its Member States to act effectively, the European Council shall regularly assess the threats facing the Union”.

10 *Joint Comprehensive plan of action*: agreement signed in 2015 between the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany and the EU, on the one hand, and Iran, on the other: the aim is to control Iran’s nuclear activities in exchange for a gradual lifting of economic sanctions.

raised by any serious analysis of threats by Europeans. In some cases, moreover, it is possible that the United States might find it in its interest to have Europeans with such an analytical capability, in geographical areas such as the Maghreb or Africa, in which the allies have historically been more involved. In the case of Afghanistan in 2001, for example, virtually no American university had any expertise on the country's tribes and languages, so European expertise was a welcome addition.

As for considerations on the use of force by EU Member States, they do not exist beyond the general principles laid down by the United Nations. Insofar as self-defence was not a European preoccupation, this deficiency is historically normal since it was devolved to the United States within the framework of NATO. Will this always be the case? The war in Ukraine shows, if proof were needed, the extent of the strategic questions that a conventional war can raise: what is the role and use of air forces in relation to the role of ground forces? What about the use of special forces? Is the defence of democracy a sufficient argument for the use of force (as in the case of Taiwan)? The nature, scope and geography of strikes, the battlefield or strategic depth, the conditions for escalation and de-escalation - military strategy is a complex science that Europeans do not discuss. They are divided on these questions when they arise in relation to the war in Ukraine. How can such differences of analysis be avoided in the future when it comes to Europe's defence as a whole?

II • Ten questions

A strategic rethink of the EU is all the more necessary given the new issues on the agenda.

I 1. IN TRUMP'S WORLD: WHAT EUROPEAN DEFENCE WITH WHAT NATO?

The disappearance of NATO does not seem a credible scenario. The advantages of NATO for Washington are numerous, and Donald Trump experienced them during his first term in office, when NATO even expanded to include two new countries¹¹. It would be useful to remind him of this. NATO offers the Americans a vector of major political influence over important allies; virtually free military bases and pre-positionings for possible American operations in the South; the assurance of captive markets for American manufacturers, who absolutely want to keep NATO; and the justification of Western political leadership. If he wants to "*make America great again*", he will not achieve this by abolishing the world's largest military organisation.

However, the mere fact that Donald Trump was elected with an indisputable majority represents a direct weakening of NATO: because there is total uncertainty about what the President of the United States will do, because Russia prefers uncertainty to a certain automaticity in NATO guarantees, and because the Europeans themselves may doubt American support and be prepared to do anything to consolidate it. In other words, even if Donald Trump does not call Nato into question, it becomes a weak link in Europe's defence. For Europeans, the military alliance with America is a vital issue. For Trump, it is essentially a bargaining chip that could prove "juicy".

Four new conditions could be imposed on the Europeans: increase national defence budgets to 4 or 5% of GDP; change the distribution key for Nato's civil and military spending, significantly increasing the European share; obtain a commitment from the allies to buy up to 90% of their armaments from American industries in the

11 Montenegro and Northern Macedonia

sector; obtain Nato's competence, without changing the Treaty, to follow the United States against China if the need arose.

Between pure and simple acceptance of these conditions, renegotiation of certain aspects, and the invention of possible counter-proposals, the major risk for Europe is that of division: the States that have no defence industry, nor capacity for projection outside the area, can accept these conditions, whereas they will pose a real problem for the largest countries that have a strong industry (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden), or an army with a global vocation (France), or a major commercial relationship with China (Germany, Italy). The most urgent thing we can do is to come up with common responses before these challenges are imposed on us.

We should therefore be delighted that the new President of the European Council and the Polish Presidency have called a "special European defence summit" for February 2025: on Ukraine, as on their defence, Europeans must come up with a strong common position in the face of the new American administration.

Europeans have a choice of three strategies:

- **NATO as a whole**, in other words, accepting all American conditions to maintain the Alliance's credibility, be they budgetary, industrial or strategic. This is undoubtedly the first reflex of a majority of Europeans, even if some conditions seem more unacceptable than others, particularly in the industrial field. Much will depend on the perception of the Russian threat by EU members: this is one of the reasons why a common analysis of the military threat has become necessary.
- **Nato and dispersed bilateralism**: panic at the deterioration in the EU's strategic situation, between an unpredictable Trump and a reinvigorated Russia, could give rise to a kind of race to the good graces of Washington. Some will try to sign bilateral defence agreements, especially if Trump decides to withdraw as many of his troops as possible from Europe. There is nothing to indicate that this strategy would bring new American guarantees, but it could put a lasting brake on intra-European solidarity in this area. It is not antagonistic to the first scenario of submitting to the new conditions for keeping NATO in force.
- **NATO and the Union**. Articulating an Alliance in the throes of uncertainty and a European defence system in the process of consolidation is undoubtedly the best possible formula. It is also the most difficult, because there are many risks of misunderstanding: the Americans may take advantage of the increased efforts of the Europeans to disengage even further; the Europeans may refuse to go too far in creating a real defence for fear that the Americans will use this as an argument to disengage. The only option is to build European autonomy in harmony with Washington¹², as close as possible to the following formula: **the Alliance when possible, the Union when necessary**.

¹² It should be pointed out, however, that the foreseeable crisis in transatlantic relations does not lie so much in military affairs as in the enormous deficit in the US balance of trade with Europe. For Donald Trump, this is an unbearable reality: Europeans have to buy American, especially shale gas and oil, otherwise high tariffs will be imposed on European imports. This is undoubtedly why the two European presidents of the Commission and the Central Bank have urged Europeans to buy more American shale gas and armaments: but between reassuring Donald Trump before he takes office and calling into question European priorities (environment, defence market), one hopes that the margin is immense.

I 2. IS THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION CRUCIAL TO THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S DEFENCE?

Is it possible to separate the issue of European defence from that of the war in Ukraine? The question may seem absurd, given that the strategic awakening of Europeans and their recent defence efforts are so closely linked to the war in Ukraine. It is not necessarily so if we accept that Europe's security cannot be reduced to the Russian threat: the knock-on effects of the wars in the Middle East, the disintegration of the African countries on our southern borders and terrorism are all factors that continue to threaten European security and require national armies to make the necessary adaptations (in terms of strategic transport, deep strikes, counter-terrorism, etc.). That said, it is undoubtedly the war in Ukraine that, in the short term, constitutes the most structuring element of Europe's future defence, according to the four scenarios that can be envisaged at this stage.

If a ceasefire is signed in 2025, the question of ground forces to ensure and guarantee its solidity will be the major strategic challenge for the EU (alone or in association with others). The EU has some experience of missions of this kind: in 2008, as part of the ceasefire signed between Russia and Georgia, the EU set up a civilian observer mission in that country (EUMM - 200 observers).¹³ Monitoring a possible ceasefire in Ukraine would certainly be more demanding in military terms, in particular to guarantee the protection of the forces deployed, especially if Putin refused the NATO card. But within the framework of the CSDP, the EU Member States, along with others, notably the United Kingdom, should be able to take on such a mission.

While security guarantees must be given to Ukraine, in the long term, the challenge is different. The question cannot directly concern the EU, which has neither military competence nor legitimacy. The question is which Member States will take on the responsibility of acting and/or being accepted as military guarantors, and with what credibility.

If the war in Ukraine continues without negotiations, Europeans will be faced with the risk of an escalation into direct conventional war with Russia, within the framework of NATO.

Finally, if the Russian threat remains recurrent in the medium term, even after an agreement on the end of hostilities in Ukraine, the question of deterrence will arise, with or without the United States.

These questions are not likely to receive a clear answer at this stage of the strategic situation in Ukraine and Europe. But they should guide European defence efforts in a more concrete and operational direction, in consultation with Washington.

I 3. IS THE CSDP LEGACY UNTOUCHABLE?

The election of Donald Trump has profoundly altered the traditional landscape of defence in Europe, and of the policy that Europeans have tried to implement to date. We therefore need to sort out our heritage, which is not necessarily suited to the times we live in, and **preserve only the achievements that will carry us into the future.**

¹³ EUMM (*EU Monitoring Mission*). More than two hundred civilian observers have been sent by EU Member States to help stabilise the situation on the ground following the conflict in August 2008. They are monitoring compliance by all parties with the six-point agreement reached on 12 August 2008, thanks to EU mediation, and signed by Georgia and Russia, as well as the agreement on implementation measures reached on 8 September 2008. Source / EEAS.europa.eu.

In the history of European defence, many principles, experiments and concrete results have been accumulated over the last twenty years. Some of these have had no other purpose than to maintain a semblance of political consensus, without any real operational utility: for example, the “Berlin plus” agreements¹⁴ (used twice in 20 years in Bosnia), the battlegroups (never used¹⁵), the headline goals of 2001¹⁶ (revolutionary at the time but never fulfilled), the EU Military Committee (what does it do?). Other achievements, such as the creation of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)¹⁷, have resulted in complex, even convoluted, political and industrial scaffolding, no doubt useful and even conducive to concrete capability achievements, but in no way capable of making the slightest qualitative difference in terms of defence. These initiatives have often been adopted so as not to offend the primacy of NATO, and therefore to be as unambitious as possible. As for the relationship between the EU and NATO, for 20 years it has been locked in taboos and mantras that no one has ever dared to question. For example, is the stalemate in EU-NATO relations caused by the war between Cyprus and Turkey acceptable indefinitely? Is the EU’s non-duplication of NATO instruments a rule that should remain frozen in the memory of Madeleine Albright?¹⁸ Can the EU congratulate itself on the creation of a “Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC)”, for want of the right to a genuine European General Staff, which NATO and Washington do not want to hear about? Is the distribution of NATO’s major commands immutable? Does the notion of non-discrimination make sense between industrial competitors, to the extent that American industries have to be involved in funding normally reserved for the EU? In short, the strategic context around the EU is constantly changing, but the rules that have governed European defence since 1999¹⁹ remain unchanged. This conservatism is now an obstacle.

The war in Ukraine and the return of Donald Trump should provide an opportunity to sort out the indispensable and necessary European consensuses. There are scarcely more than five, and everything else is open to revision.

- The primacy of national sovereignty in any decision on defence, and therefore the maintenance of a right of veto for Member States. The debate may be about moving to qualified majority voting for certain aspects of foreign policy, but in no way about defining major strategies, particularly with regard to Russia, and even less about defining a White Paper on defence.

¹⁴ Partnership agreements between the EU and NATO, signed in 2003, which allow the EU, in the context of CSDP operations, to use NATO assets and collective capabilities, in particular with regard to command arrangements and assistance with operational planning. As NATO’s Deputy Commander-in-Chief, D-Saceur, is traditionally a European general, it is this command that the EU can use if necessary. The Berlin plus agreements will be used in Macedonia in 2002, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2004, where the EU operation replaced that of NATO. In Bosnia, the Eufor-Althea operation is still underway after more than 20 years.

¹⁵ The EU Battlegroups are 1,500-strong multinational military units that form an integral part of the European Union’s military rapid reaction capability. They have been operational since 2007.

¹⁶ The Helsinki European Council in 2001 decided to provide the then fledgling European Security and Defence Policy with concrete operational capabilities. The *Headline Goal* defined the capability ambitions of the time.

¹⁷ Permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) is an innovation of the Lisbon Treaty (article 42-6). They enable certain States that so wish to initiate concrete cooperation in the field of defence, without having to go through the unanimity rule. More than 50 capability projects have been approved since 2007.

¹⁸ In 1998, the US Secretary of State defined the three conditions that NATO set for cooperation with European defence. They are known as the “three Ds”, which in reality correspond to three prohibitions: no European decoupling (hence no strategic autonomy), no duplication of Nato assets (hence no European Headquarters), no discrimination against non-EU Europeans in Nato (hence no EU group in Nato).

¹⁹ The EU’s European Security and Defence Policy was officially launched at the Cologne European Council on 4 June 1999.

- NATO's indispensable role in the defence of Europe. There are two corollaries to this: any suspicion that France has some hidden agenda against NATO should be consigned to history. Any idea that America is not benefiting from NATO, and that only European "parasites" are benefiting, must be seriously challenged (see below).
- The necessary role of the Commission in the defence industry, provided that the traditional rules of the single market are adapted to the specific nature of the sector: abandonment of the rule of free and undistorted competition, in favour of the creation of national-European champions in particular. Definition of a rule of European preference that is realistic because it is compatible with the needs of the Atlantic Alliance (see below).
- Maintaining collective experience on the ground, in CSDP external operations, civil and/or military, is the most effective method of consolidating a common strategic culture.
- Maintaining the international legal bases for defence: individual and collective self-defence (Article 51 of the United Nations Charter) and a specific United Nations mandate for external military intervention (Chapter 6 or 7 of the UN Charter).

On the other hand, the history of the ESDP can also be a good guide for the future, as it sometimes demonstrated a much greater ambition than that of today. In the Franco-British declaration of Saint-Malo in 1998, the two countries most opposed to the legitimacy of the EU as a military actor subscribed to a strong common ambition: "the Union must have an autonomous capacity for action, backed up by credible military forces, with the means to use them and a readiness to do so in order to respond to international crises"... "To be able to take decisions and, when the Alliance as such is not engaged, to approve military action, the European Union must have appropriate structures. It must also have a capacity to assess situations, sources of intelligence, and a strategic planning capability, without unnecessary duplication etc.²⁰" We can't help but notice at how high the military objectives set the 2001 headline goal were: the aim was to equip the European Union by 2003 with a 60,000-strong European Rapid Reaction Force, with its air (around 100 aircraft) and sea (80 ships) components; this force was to be able to be deployed to a theatre of operations in less than 60 days, and it was to be capable of remaining there for a year²¹. In comparison, the "strategic compass" approved by the Council on 21 March 2022 appears very cautious in terms of capability ambitions. When a crisis occurs, "with partners if possible and alone if necessary, the EU will set up, in response to different types of crisis, a substantial EU rapid deployment capability of up to 5 000 troops. We have therefore gone from 60,000 troops to 5,000 in 20 years... There is no doubt that the strategic context of 2025 is totally different from that of 2001: it is the EU's defence that is now at stake, and no longer just its ability to project forces out of the area. But in terms of global ambitions, the Union has certainly done better.

I 4. IS DEFENCE POSSIBLE WITHOUT GROWTH?

This is a major issue. Over the next term of office, the European Union will be faced with urgent funding requirements, the priorities of which will be difficult to establish: defence, enlargement, support for and reconstruction of Ukraine, digital

²⁰ Saint Malo Declaration on European Defence, Franco-British Summit, 3 and 4 December 1998

²¹ "La défense européenne : un objet de science politique", Bastien Irondelle and Pascal Vennesson, in *Politique européenne*, 4/ 2002.

transformation, the green transition, and so on. In his report on the EU's competitiveness, Mario Draghi estimates that €800 billion a year (5% of European GDP) is needed for investment in the industries and technologies of the future. This figure is staggering, given that the EU is unlikely to grow by more than 1% a year, that the EU's annual budget is generally around €170 billion (€2,000 billion for the period 2021-2027), that total defence spending by the 27 is €326 billion²², that there is no consensus on changing the budgetary rules, on the possibility of increasing public deficits, or on launching a new common loan, as was done in response to Covid19.

The Draghi report²³ looks at defence as a possible source of innovation. It proposes an industrial analysis of the sector, advocating greater integration between companies, mergers and cooperation (there are around 2,000 defence companies in Europe, alongside major industrial groups such as Airbusgroup, Dassault, MBDA etc). This is indeed necessary, but the diagnosis is not new. The Commission itself has long been aware of the redundancies, scattered resources, unnecessary duplication and intra-European competition. The results have been disappointing: according to a recent study by Confrontations Europe, only 18% of equipment purchases by Member States' armies are made through cooperation, whereas the target set back in 2007 was 35%.

The report also seems to forget that the European arms market is also a political market, and a transatlantic one at that: the political constraints imposed by the United States are not working in favour of a single arms market. For example, since the start of the war against Ukraine, European armies have purchased 78% of their new equipment outside the European Union²⁴, with the United States alone accounting for 63% of this share. According to the leading Swedish institute on the subject, SIPRI, the United States alone will supply 55% of European states' arms imports in 2019-2023, a substantial increase on the 35% in 2014-2018. For the London-based *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (IISS), by contrast, the share of US military equipment in European armies is only 34%. Whichever way you look at it, it is clear that the Europeans are buying and will continue to buy anything that strengthens the interoperability of equipment within Nato, and above all consolidates the American defence of Europe. For example, Germany cannot buy anything other than F35s, because a Rafale cannot be used as the basis for a possible extended US deterrent.

The American constraint is also strong when it comes to future defence investments. NATO is far from lagging behind in this area. At the Alliance summit in Madrid in June 2022, the heads of state and government decided to increase the resources allocated to the organisation by 10% a year until 2030. The following year, at the Vilnius Summit in 2023, NATO leaders made two commitments in terms of defence investment: to devote, over the long term, at least 2% of their GDP per year to defence, and to allocate at least 20% of their defence budgets to major equipment and related research and development activities. In December 2023, the NATO Council approved NATO's civil and military budgets for 2024: these will be 438.1 million euros (+18.2% on 2023) and 2.03 billion euros (+12% on 2023) respectively.

There is a third NATO budget, the NSIP²⁵, dedicated to "security investments". It is used to finance major investments (construction work or the installation of command and control systems). For 2024, the NSIP ceiling has been set at €1.3 billion, representing an increase of 30% compared with 2023. The Allies have also approved the

²² Euractiv, 19 November 2024

²³ The future of European competitiveness - A competitiveness strategy for Europe, 9 September 2024

²⁴ Letta report

²⁵ *Nato Security Investment Program*

creation of a “Civil-Military Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic” (DIANA), designed to “strengthen transatlantic cooperation on critical technologies, promote interoperability and leverage civilian innovations through interaction with academia and the private sector, including start-ups”.

This competition between Nato and the EU cannot be ignored at a time when, with Donald Trump, industrial blackmail of Europeans is likely to increase. It would be reasonable to calculate a satisfactory ratio between European purchases and purchases from the United States. Either an overall ratio: 50/50, for example, for European and/or American sources of military equipment supplies. Or by distinguishing ratios by category of armaments: combat aircraft, artillery, anti-aircraft defence systems, etc.

During the war in Ukraine, the Commission reacted well by launching the industrial programme, EDIP²⁶, the aim of which is to extend European funding to all defence equipment (drones, tanks, anti-aircraft defence, etc.) as well as sophisticated programmes to protect cyberspace, underwater infrastructures and so on. The aim is to provide support to Ukraine while developing European capabilities. EDIP’s initial budget is €1.5 billion, but Thierry Breton announced that the real needs of European industry would be €100 billion. Enrico Letta’s report on the single market²⁷ also calls for a real leap forward in defence investment, supporting in particular a greater role for the European Investment Bank in this area, and the creation of Eurobonds earmarked for defence. Thierry Breton’s departure, Germany’s refusal of a new loan, and the meagre prospects for growth leave the question wide open.

I 5. IS DEFENCE COMPATIBLE WITH EU ENLARGEMENT?

Two dynamics share the EU’s political priorities: defence and enlargement. The two are closely linked: had it not been for the war in Ukraine, enlargement would have remained a distant and secondary objective. But Russia’s attack has changed the outlook: there are now 9²⁸ countries likely to join the EU by the end of the decade. For some, joining the Union is a strategic priority, insofar as they perceive it as a Western anchor likely to protect them from any future Russian aggression. Ukraine and Moldova are in this category. For others, integration into the EU is essentially for economic reasons, although political considerations also play a role.

The difficulty for the 27 members of the EU is severalfold. On the one hand, what vision of European and world order do we share? If we accept that a global conflict is inevitable between the democracies and the authoritarian Russian axis, then the whole EPC should be involved in a common defence policy. If we refuse to see this bipolarity as the future of the planet, and of the European continent to begin with, then we should first focus on consolidating the defence of the EU, before establishing partnerships with other European countries, including candidate countries, if necessary. Secondly, what should be the priorities in terms of funding, enlargement or defence, knowing in any case that the resources available are meagre?

In other words, how can we strengthen the integration of the 27 in terms of defence - particularly in industrial terms - without at the same time weakening it in order to make room for future EU candidates? If accession negotiations are conducted on the basis of gradual accessions to different EU policies, it will be necessary to reflect

²⁶ *European Defense Industry Program*. For the European Commission’s new defence industry initiatives, see the infographic by Bertrand de Cordoue on the Institut Jacques Delors website.

²⁷ Enrico Letta, “*Much more than a market, speed, security, solidarity*”, April 2024

²⁸ Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine.

on the place of CSDP in this continuum: one area among others, or the last, insofar as defence is in any case a policy separate from the single market?

Particular attention should be paid to Serbia, the largest country in the Balkans (7 million inhabitants), which has a serious defence industry. The war in Ukraine has boosted exports of arms and munitions from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Ukraine, with considerable benefits. Nevertheless, Serbia maintains its marked pro-Russian syndrome, including in the field of armaments: Russia and China are its main suppliers (Mig 29 combat aircraft, anti-drone missiles and anti-aircraft missiles for Russia, drones and missiles for China), with France in third place.

More fundamentally, Serbia is demonstrating a pro-Russian friendship that runs counter to EU policy. It is the only Balkan country that refuses to align itself with the sanctions imposed by the EU, while at the same time maintaining an application for membership²⁹. It is strange, to say the least, that the EU should ignore this ambivalence and continue to associate Serbia with its promises of enlargement. The reservations expressed about Serbia in the Council's conclusions of December 2024 suggest that nothing is going well with this country: "The Council recalls that it very much hopes that Serbia will intensify its efforts to align itself fully with EU positions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy and on restrictive measures as a matter of priority. The Council also calls on the Serbian authorities to refrain from any action or statement that would run counter to the EU's positions on foreign policy and other strategic issues."³⁰ Will it be possible to envisage a common defence policy with a country that is a friend of Russia?

Finally, how can EU membership be reconciled with relations with NATO? Three Balkan countries are already members of NATO: Albania, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia. Turkey is also a member, but its accession to the Union is not subject to the same timetable or process as the other candidate countries. Three countries, Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, are caught up in the remnants of armed conflicts that are likely to flare up again. The other countries are currently in a strategic vacuum, notably Ukraine and Moldova. A priori, there are three possible strategies with regard to the candidate countries: the first is that they should join NATO simultaneously, as was the case for the countries that joined the EU in 2004 (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta): but the decision of the United States is the only one that will count in this respect.

The second strategy is limited to membership of the EU, which implies adherence to Article 42 of the Treaty. The question then arises as to the meaning and implementation of this article for their defence. This question could comfortably remain theoretical. But the case of Ukraine is forcing Europeans to think about what they hate most: ending ambiguity. The question is simple: should a country that joins the EU but is not a member of NATO be defended by the EU? The answer should logically be yes. Politically, will it?

I 6. DEFENCE AND THE RISE OF SOVEREIGNTY: IS IT CONSISTENT?

A strange cross-fertilisation is disrupting the future of European defence: external threats are creating a real dynamic in favour of more common defence and collective solidarity; domestic political developments in many Member States and in the European Parliament, on the other hand, are boosting national egoism and sovereignist reflexes: the more populist and far-right parties gain in popularity, the

²⁹ Serbia applied for membership in 2009 and was accepted as a candidate in 2012. Negotiations have been open since 2013.

³⁰ Council conclusions on enlargement, paragraph 39, 17 December 2024.

more intra-European solidarity cracks. Every man for himself, in a Union that they perceive as illegitimate in its claims to collective governance, is not a favourable breeding ground for common defence: defend what? The representative democracy they oppose? The European institutions they detest? The countries on the far fringes that serve as a buffer? And why defend against a Russia that many far-right parties refuse to condemn outright? With the exception of Giorgia Meloni, many members of the ECR and the Patriots as a whole are reluctant to support Ukraine indefinitely and condemn Russia outright.

Conversely, in European countries that are attached to representative democracy, the values of the rule of law and international law, the sense of solidarity that underpins any common defence policy can also be blurred: do we want to die for a country led by Victor Orban? Should we sacrifice ourselves to defend a country run by a radical far right?

In other words, if we consider that defence is something other than the usual common policy - such as the joint manufacture of shoes or electric cars - we cannot separate defence issues from domestic policy issues. If the far right became the majority in the Union as a whole, would we have to defend a far-right Europe? Personally, I'd think twice.

I 7. WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OPEX?

The Common European Defence Policy became operational in 2003, with the launch of several crisis management missions, notably in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Georgia. Over the past 20 years, some forty civilian, military and civil-military external operations have been launched under the strategic direction and political control of the European Union. In April 2024, 25 operations were underway³¹, including 14 civilian missions³² and 11 military missions³³. This quantitative record is remarkable, coming from an organisation that for 50 years had never imagined that a general officer could have a voice in the corridors of Brussels.

In terms of results, however, the record is less spectacular. Without being failures, these external operations have not succeeded in making a difference in the crises in which they were deployed: in the DRC, Darfur, Kosovo, Bosnia, Mali, Niger and Rafah, CSDP operations have not provided a solution to the conflicts ravaging these countries, even if they have undeniably helped to alleviate the suffering and anguish of the inhabitants. However, since the start of the war in Ukraine, this external dimension of the CSDP has suffered from serious marginalisation: the fear of a Russian threat, the urgent need for collective mobilisation to support Kiev financially and militarily, all these developments have relegated external crisis management to a very secondary position. On 17 October 2022, the EU launched the EU Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), a mission to train Ukrainian forces on the territory of EU countries. The aim is to train 75,000 soldiers by the end of 2024. The civil mission (EUAM Ukraine), which trains civil security services, has been extended until 2027.

But should we turn a blind eye to the deterioration in regional security in southern Europe and the Caucasus? Should the Ukrainian priority wipe out the 20 years of experience and organisation gained in external operations? In Armenia if need be, in

³¹ "CSDP", *Toute l'Europe*, 4 April 2024

³² CAR, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, Moldova, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq (several missions may take place in the same country)

³³ Libya and the Arabian Peninsula for naval operations, Gulf of Guinea countries, Mozambique, Niger, Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since July 2024, following the events in Mali and Niger, the EU has ended all its operations in these two countries.

Georgia, Palestine or Africa, are Europeans giving up their role as conflict stabilisers? **It would be paradoxical if the growing number of threats surrounding the EU were to lead to a reduction in the EU's strategic availability.** The hearing of the new HR/VP before the European Parliament on 4 November 2024 focused solely on Ukraine and the role of NATO. Yet the Syrian revolution, which took effect with the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad on 8 December 2024, shows, if proof were needed, that Europe's security is also at stake in a wider theatre than just the continent of Europe.

I 8. WHICH COUNTRIES ARE THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND DEFENCE?

The war in Ukraine has not only changed the strategic context surrounding the EU. It has also led to a redistribution of roles within the Union, which has also been reinforced by domestic political events. The Franco-German partnership, Poland and the role of the United Kingdom are the new political challenges that a serious European defence will have to address in the near future.

The Franco-German relationship is at a standstill, to say the least. Since 2024, each of the two countries has been going through a specific domestic political crisis: their influence within the EU is suffering, at least for as long as a stable government has not been formed in both Berlin and Paris. However, the crisis in the Franco-German motor has older roots. The differences of opinion between the two countries have grown steadily since the start of the war in Ukraine. Paris says it is in favour of Ukraine joining NATO, while Germany is opposed. France has proposed sending ground troops, but the German Chancellor is clearly opposed. Berlin has launched a missile defence initiative in which around twenty countries are already participating, based on American and Israeli technologies. Paris, on the other hand, supports the idea of a European missile defence shield. On the financial front, Germany is opposed to any relaxation of the conditions of the eurozone stability pact, and refuses to call for collective loans to finance the European defence effort, along the lines of what was done for covid. No one knows how the next German government, in which the CDU will undoubtedly have a majority, will evolve on all these issues. But the time does not seem ripe for the resurrection of solid Franco-German leadership by the end of 2025. The strength of the Franco-German partnership lay in the complementary nature of the two players: Germany the economic champion, France the geopolitical champion. But Germany was going through a severe industrial crisis, and France was suffering numerous diplomatic setbacks, both in the East and in the South. And it is precisely in this year that Ukraine's fate will be decided, whether diplomatically or militarily.

Poland has many arguments for becoming a driving force, along with the countries of the North, in European defence: massive support for Ukraine, a considerable increase in the defence budget of up to 5% of GDP, a convinced European head of state who, as a former President of the European Council, also has extensive experience of the workings of Europe, and a democratic orientation that we hope will be solid. As President of the European Union for the first half of 2025, there is no doubt that Donald Tusk will seek to mark this period with strong initiatives. However, Poland's weight does not appear to be sufficient for it to assume political leadership of the EU on its own: the country is not a member of the euro zone, its GDP is 700 billion euros compared with 6,000 billion for the Franco-German couple, and it buys over 60% of its armaments from the United States. Along with the Baltic states, Sweden and Finland, Poland carries a lot of weight in this "Nordic" group, but their influence is limited to managing the Russian question. On the other hand, associated with France and Germany in a new strategic triangle, itself enlarged to include the EU's two other heavyweights, Italy and Spain, Poland is becoming an indispensable cog in the EU's new strategic engine: the Group of 5. To counter the Russian threat, as much as to manage the knock-on effects of the crises in the Middle East, these

5 countries have the necessary size, weight and legitimacy. They should be able to meet informally as a “Five-EU³⁴”, without immediately being accused of discrimination or insulting the other EU countries.

What about the United Kingdom? London’s support for Ukraine has been remarkable since the beginning of the conflict. It was the first country to provide military aid to Ukraine, has trained nearly 50,000 troops on its soil, and has committed £12.8 billion to Ukraine: £7.8 billion in military aid and £5 billion in non-military support³⁵. It does not reject the idea of Ukraine joining Nato and the possibility of sending ground troops, in unison with Paris. If European defence were to take the form of a European pillar of NATO, the United Kingdom would see only advantages. Seeking to lead Nato’s North East defence, it serves as the framework nation for the multinational battle group in Estonia and leads the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) created at the Nato summit in September 2014. This strong commitment to Ukraine is undoubtedly the UK’s most strategically important card. It allows it to return to the forefront of the European stage, despite Brexit, and plays an important role in London’s return to favour with European leaders. The President of the Council, Olivier Costa, has invited the British Prime Minister to take part in the informal summit of heads of state and government planned for February 2025, on geopolitical issues. However, London cannot become the leader of European defence, quite simply because the UK cannot take part in any EU decisions in this area. It can be involved in all European formats, for example the Quint plus 1 format, but could not claim command of European armed forces, even within the European pillar of Nato, since it would not be part of the EU pillar of Nato. This has long been the British paradox: the UK is an unavoidable ally when it comes to defence, but it is also a formidable opponent of the EU’s European defence.

I 9. WHAT ROLE FOR NUCLEAR DETERRENCE?

This question is on everyone’s mind, but not in any of the upcoming realities of European defence. The Europeans do not officially want to think about it, for fear of weakening the extended American deterrent within the framework of NATO. The French have been making overtures for a long time, in 1992 from President François Mitterrand³⁶, and in 2020 from President Emmanuel Macron³⁷. But the debate on an “enlarged”, “extended”, “shared” and “concerted” deterrent is not very advanced internally: the French debate oscillates between absolute defence secrecy and doctrinal nuclear conservatism, with each presidential statement on the subject³⁸. As for the British, they are both independent when it comes to defending their vital interests, but under American control without the NATO framework for the rest of the scenarios.

34 There are informal groups of this kind within NATO: quad, quint, P3, etc. See Christelle Calmels, “France and NATO: an influential ally”, Diploweb.com, December 2020.

35 UK support to Ukraine: factsheet. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

36 On this subject, see Bruno Tertrais, La dissuasion partagée, *Revue de la défense nationale*, 4/2019

37 “Furthermore, our nuclear forces play a deterrent role of their own, particularly in Europe. They strengthen Europe’s security by their very existence and in this respect have a genuinely European dimension.

On this point, our independence of decision is fully compatible with our unshakeable solidarity with our European partners. Our commitment to their security and defence is the natural expression of our ever-closer solidarity. Let us be clear: France’s vital interests now have a European dimension. In this spirit, I would like to see the development of a strategic dialogue with our European partners who are ready for it on the role of France’s nuclear deterrent in our collective security. Speech by President Emmanuel Macron on defence strategy and deterrence to the trainees of the 27th class of the Ecole de guerre, 7 February 2020

38 With particular reference to this statement by the President during his speech on Europe at the Sorbonne on 25 April 2024. “Nuclear deterrence is at the heart of France’s defence strategy. It is therefore an essential element in the defence of the European continent”.

Admittedly, the war in Ukraine and Vladimir Putin's rhetorical gesticulations have changed the debate in two ways. On the one hand, there is greater acceptance of the role of nuclear deterrence: Sweden, traditionally very hostile to military nuclear power, has decided to return to the American NATO umbrella. On the other hand, taboos have been lifted to a certain extent: on the Russian side, with a propensity for nuclear declarations unprecedented in decades; but also in Germany, with several statements by political leaders (Manfred Werner, Sigmar Gabriel in particular), think-tank experts, members of parliament and industrialists, on the option of a European nuclear capability³⁹. However, these developments remain both remarkable and marginal. One of the major difficulties lies in the fact that the nuclear decision is not shared, as shown from the outset by the operation of the extended American deterrent within the framework of NATO. The other equally crucial difficulty consists in basing the extended deterrent on a balance that is extremely difficult to maintain. Three requirements have to be met at the same time: deterring the enemy, reassuring the allies and securing the support of public opinion. The credibility of an extended deterrent is therefore measured in technological (what capabilities?), strategic (what doctrine?) and political (what consensus?) terms. There is nothing to suggest that the deterrents of France and Great Britain are prepared today to meet these challenges.

I 10. HAS DEFENCE AS A POLITICAL PROJECT BECOME OBSOLETE?

For decades, there was no consensus on promoting European defence within the framework of the EU, for at least two reasons: its justification as a response to external threats seemed strange, insofar as NATO was taking care of the Soviet threat; its justification as a political project for an autonomous Europe on the international stage seemed suspect, since no one wanted to think of a Europe without America. The United Kingdom was categorically opposed to both versions - pragmatic and political - of a project that France, on the other hand, defended with as much obstinacy as failure.

This debate on defence as a vehicle for a political Europe has disappeared with the war in Ukraine, so much so that the pragmatic, even utilitarian vision of defence now seems to take priority: faced with the Russian threat, how to defend ourselves is now the major question, and this seems perfectly justified. However, if we over-emphasise this utilitarian version of defence, are we not in danger of turning it into a purely short-term policy, and therefore reversible? Let's assume that the year 2025 is full of positive surprises: a ceasefire is signed between Ukraine and Russia, a comprehensive security agreement is also signed between the USA, Russia and the EU, Vladimir Putin renounces his territorial claims, Donald Trump's United States returns to its traditional apolitical stance towards NATO, and so on... Should defence policy be abandoned as a useless policy? Some will find this conclusion logical, while others will see it as a blessed opportunity to devote the priorities of European budgets and policies to other urgent issues, such as climate change and growth. Yet the end of the war in Ukraine and NATO's return to favour would not signal a return to a peaceful and predictable international context: the Middle East is ablaze, China remains on the watch, Africa is disintegrating to the benefit of Moscow and Beijing, not to mention the difficult equation in the Caucasus and Central Asia. If only out of utilitarian conviction, European defence efforts will have a thousand reasons to be pursued and strengthened.

But the political conception of defence is not lacking in arguments either. The three great regional balances that ensured the relative peace of the twentieth century are

39 Matheo Schwartz, "Donald Trump revives the debate on 'European deterrence'". FRS, Deterrence Observatory, Bulletin no. 118, March 2024

now being brutally challenged: the European balance (with Russian and Turkish revisionism), the Middle Eastern balance (with the new conflict triangle of Israel, Turkey and Iran), and the Asian balance with the growing uncertainties over the security of Taiwan. At the same time, the pillars of our Western equilibrium (liberalism, democracy, multilateralism) are being challenged by their three rivals (protectionism, authoritarianism, nationalism): in this global and worldwide transition, if the European Union does not become a major player in the international game, including in geopolitical and military terms, who will defend the EU's interests in the world?

• Conclusion

Europe is under more threat today than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Above and beyond the war in Ukraine, the greatest threat lies in the major uncertainty governing the policies of the two powers that will determine its future: the United States and Russia. No one knows what Donald Trump has in store for us, just as no one knows exactly what the weaknesses and strengths of Vladimir Putin's Russia are. It is this double confusion that requires European states and institutions to give priority to strategic issues. But this double uncertainty also requires Europeans to think outside the box when it comes to European defence. The following recommendations are available building blocks for the strategic reconstruction of Europe.

I TEN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Revision of the traditional “three Ds” doctrine and development of a new defence concept between NATO and the EU, based on the European pillar.
- Autonomy for the Defence Councils, following the Foreign Affairs Council, which remains the political decision-making body.
- Creation of a High Level Group Defence, reporting to the President of the European Council and chaired by the HR/VP, with responsibility for short and medium-term strategic planning.
- Strengthening the European Military Staff, with the task of analysing military threats and proposing a European doctrine on the use of force.
- Strengthening Russia's intelligence and satellite surveillance capabilities.
- Definition of an incompressible ratio of European armaments purchases (in relation to external purchases) to strengthen the European DTIB. Tougher conditions of access to European defence funding for subsidiaries of foreign companies.
- Elaboration of an EU collective defence policy, on the basis of a report on the scenarios, conditions and means for the operational implementation of Article 42-7.
- On Ukraine: drawing up a European plan for resolving the conflict, with a requirement to be at the negotiating table, insofar as Ukraine is a future EU member state.
- Possibility of informal meetings of the 5 leading defence countries: creation of an “EU Fifth
- Priority given to defence over enlargement.

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