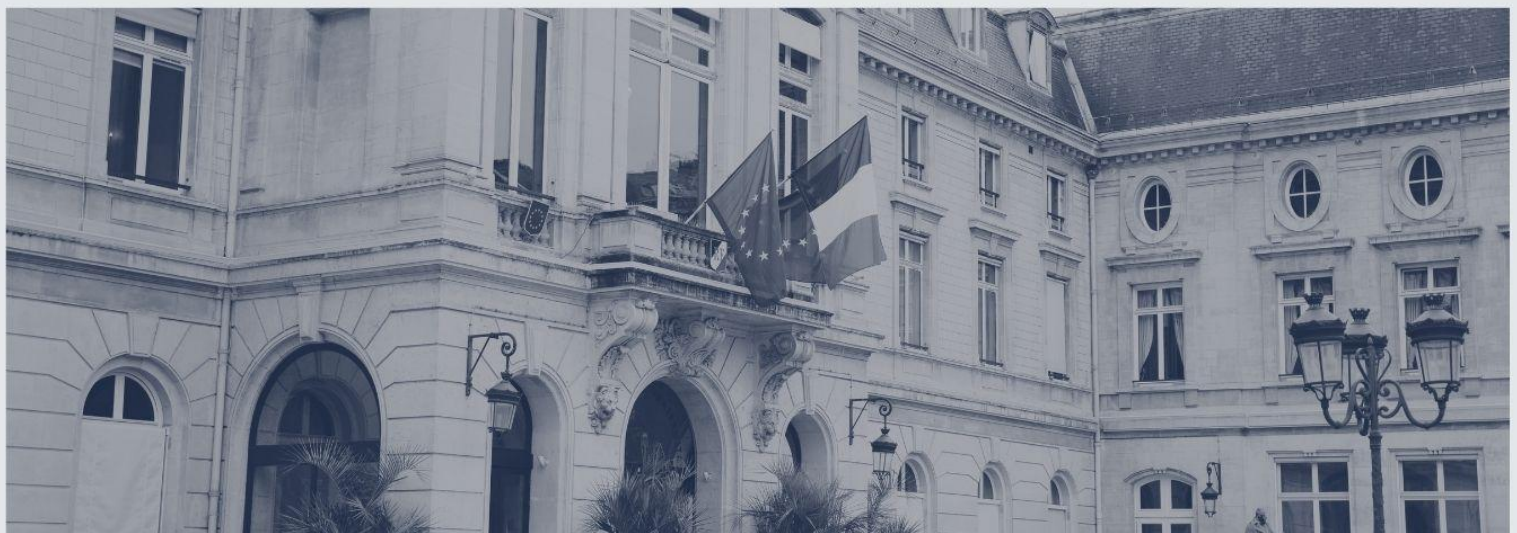




Agenda - Evaluating the Legitimacy of European Strategic Autonomy Following the Decline of American Reliability in NATO

# EUROPEAN UNION



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## LETTER FROM THE BUREAU

Dear Delegates,

It is with immense excitement and perhaps just a little geopolitical anxiety that we, the bureau, welcome you to the 11th Shishukunj Model United Nations Conference!

As your Bureau for the European Union, we are incredibly honoured to guide you. Whether you are a seasoned MUNer or stepping into committee for the very first time, prepare yourself for fiery speeches that may very well leave NATO questioning its entire existence.

This year's agenda is: **"Evaluating the Legitimacy of European Strategic Autonomy Following the Decline of American Reliability in NATO."**

In simpler terms:

Can Europe truly stand on its own in matters of defense and security?

Is NATO still the unshakable alliance it once was?

And most importantly, what happens when Europe starts asking, "Do we still need America as much as we once did? From defense integration and military dependence to transatlantic tensions and shifting global power dynamics, this agenda opens the door to discussions that are not only relevant but also incredibly consequential in today's world. Now, before some of you ask ChatGPT to write your entire position paper at 2 a.m., the Bureau would like to make one thing crystal clear: **Plagiarism and AI-generated work will NOT be tolerated.**

Your research, arguments, and submissions must be entirely your own. We expect originality, and proper citation of all sources used. Think of this guide as your launchpad, not your final destination. Read it thoroughly, question it, challenge it, and then dive deeper into independent research. Strong diplomacy comes from strong preparation. Most importantly, enjoy the experience. Some of your best conference memories will come from the moments you least expect: the intense moderated caucuses, the unhinged crisis updates, and the friendships formed between foreign policy debates and lobbying sessions.

We are excited to meet all of you. Until then, research hard, think critically, and prepare to defend your policies as if the future of Europe depends on it. Warm regards,

Aachman Mishra - **President**

Samriddhi Bansal - **Vice - President**

Vidur Gupta - **Rapporteur**

## INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The EU is an unprecedented supranational union, made up of 27 European states, which work together within the fields of providing peace, stability, economic unification, and political cooperation. Founded in the wake of the Second World War, the establishment of the European Union was based on the premise that through economic and political cooperation, there would be no more conflicts and there would be peace in Europe. Over time, the European Union became an influential organization that has a profound impact on international relations, human rights policy, economics, and security.

In modern times, the European Union plays a crucial part in tackling some global and regional issues, such as economic issues, cybersecurity, environmental changes, defense collaboration, migration, etc. The EU uses the resources of such institutions as the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission in order to form joint strategies and policies despite differences among its members.

Issues related to security and defense in Europe have become a matter of particular concern during the past few years. Geopolitical conflicts, changes in alliances, and uncertainty about the dependability of the US within NATO have once again raised issues pertaining to European Strategic Autonomy. This involves the capacity of the EU to provide for its own security politically, militarily, and economically, without having to depend excessively on other nations.

While the EU is constantly becoming more involved in areas of military cooperation and security measures, the issue of whether this process is legitimate or not is being discussed among the member states.

Through its institutions and members, the EU is keen on maintaining stability in the region, protecting its democratic values, ensuring collective security, and enhancing cooperation in Europe. In this light, delegates attending this committee will address the issue of the future of European defense, the credibility of NATO, the pros and cons of strategic autonomy, as well as the implications that this might entail.

Delegates attending the said committee will be called upon to evaluate these concerns, advocate for the interests of their portfolios, and deliberate on the way forward towards European security and cooperation.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

### **What is NATO?**

NATO, known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a defense pact, having over 30 countries from around the world. It first started out as a temporary alliance in 1948 which further became a permanent pact which obligated members to each other's defense under Article 5. The USA as of now, has contributed the majority of military might to NATO; however, under the recent news released by National Defence Strategy, the U.S.A. expects Europe will make conventional defense its primary responsibility. NATO discourages its members against aggression through collective defense (Article 5), but until recently, the United States has contributed roughly 70% of NATO's defense budget. As a result of that, Europe aims to increase its defense and military budgeting.

### **What is the European Union?**

The European Union is a political and economic union of 27 European countries that work together to promote peace, prosperity, and stability <sup>1</sup>. Not a single country or federation. It is a supranational organization in which member states have ceded some of their sovereignty to handle issues such as trade, security and social policy together. The EU is responsible for common economic, social and security policies and has grown from 6 to 27 member states, making it now the world's largest single market area.

### **Mandate of the EU**

The mandate of the European Union is defined by its aims and values in Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty. The EU is founded on values that many states want to uphold: freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and respect for human rights. The EU's mandate also includes controlling immigration, asylum, and criminal issues; creating an internal market ; to ensure the free movement of goods, services, people, and capital; working towards sustainable development by achieving balanced economic growth, stability of prices, competitive market economy, employment, and social progress; and establishing an economic and monetary union using the euro as currency.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://libguides.uncw.edu/europeanunion>

## KEY WORDS

1. **Strategic Autonomy of the EU:** It is the capacity of the EU to define its own security interests, and strategic objectives.
2. **Article 5:** NATO's collective defense provision that declares that an assault on one member is considered an assault on all.
3. **Collective defense:** A security alliance of states that treats an armed attack against one member as an attack against all thus requiring a coordinated response.
4. **Transatlantic Alliance:** The partnership connecting Europe and the USA across political, economic, and military provinces.
5. **Strategic Credibility:** The reliance on established defense and security guarantees.
6. **Deterrence:** Discouragement of hostile acts by the use of power.
7. **Europeanization of NATO:** The ability of relying on defense assurance and commitments.
8. **Eastern Flank:** NATO states or members bordering or even located close to possible safety threats (Russia).
9. **Strategic Enablers:** Intelligence, logistics, surveillance, and command and control capabilities of a country or group of countries.
10. **Open Strategic Autonomy:** Policy of the EU promoting independence, but at the same time strengthening cooperation.
11. **Hybrid Warfare:** Use of military, online, economic, political, and information means of war.
12. **Nuclear Deterrence:** Prevention of any aggressive acts thanks to the ownership of nuclear weapons or of their threat.
13. **Nuclear Sharing:** A NATO arrangement allowing allied states to engage in nuclear deterrence planning.
14. **Extended Nuclear Umbrella:** Safety provided by a state having nuclear power to its allied members.
15. **Minilateralism:** Collaboration of a small number of countries in chasing common security goals.
16. **Multilateralism:** Worldwide cooperation between many different countries through international associations.
17. **Strategic Ambiguity:** The difficulty for any state to expect the future situations that may rise up concerning its safety and defense.

# EVALUATING THE VIABILITY AND STRATEGIC CREDIBILITY OF NATO UNDER THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

NATO was first established as a temporary treaty after WWII in 1949. It serves many purposes, including, first, preventing and stopping Soviet expansion; second, protecting Western Europe; and third, ensuring and promising a collective identity. This introduced a principle stating, 'Even if one NATO member is attacked, all the NATO members fight back.' This principle was basically the base of European security even after the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

As expected, Europe became heavily dependent on NATO security; to be specific, Europe highly depended on the United States, as America not only provided military and intelligence but also advanced weapons, nuclear protection and military logistics. Europe started to assume that America would support all NATO members, no matter what the cost.

During Trump's presidency, a core problem was NATO's defense spending target. In 2014, every NATO member agreed that each and every country should spend at least 2% or more of its Gross Domestic Product on defense by the year 2024. However, when Trump became president, he found out that only 5 out of the 28 countries were able to meet the target. He stated how the US is spending 3.5-3.7% on defense, while many European countries barely spend 1-1.5% on defense.

Even Germany spent only 1.2% on defense, which resulted in Trump making a tall claim that Germany was "taking advantage" of US protection.<sup>3</sup>

## Addressing The Credibility Of Article 5 Collective defense Guarantees

Now, what is Article 5? Article 5 states the principle that holds all NATO members together, the principle being 'Even if one NATO member is attacked, all the NATO members fight back.' Why do you think Russia hesitates to attack NATO states? Exactly, it doesn't fear the state it's attacking, but it actually fears this principle, which means that all NATO members, including the United States of America, will be siding with that NATO state that got attacked.

Now, President Trump had some bold claims regarding this alliance. He started to demand more pay from the NATO states to America, and if not paid more, then there may be a risk of America not supporting that NATO state that did not pay more. This made Europeans worried, thinking that Article 5 was starting to become conditional, which clashed with Article 5 itself, as the article was supposed to be unwavering.<sup>4</sup> As studied, Article 5 was created on April 4, 1949 as the foundational collective defense clause of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, so now in the current years, some new modern problems have arisen. These new problems mainly circle around cyber and infrastructure attacks, along with more such as sabotage, election interference, and, importantly, energy coercion.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nato.int/en>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defense-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment->

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyz4nq91wpo>

Not only modern problems, but also new questions, such as whether countries really risk nuclear wars over small NATO members or not. Trump also realised and stated that many NATO members, especially in Europe, have spent too little on defense due to their reliance on America and Article 5. Trump thought it was unfair that the burden shared was unequal.

## **Evaluating The Implications Of U.S.A.-Russia Diplomatic Rapprochement On European Security**

Now, the US and Russia are the most powerful when it comes to military power and defense. Russia and the US have improved relations between them, which created fear among Europe. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Europe viewed Russia as a big threat, and with US - Russia relations getting better, it fears that America won't provide military defense anymore, weakening the NATO alliance.

Another fear it creates is the concerns over great power negotiations. Many European States fear that negotiations of great power states and countries can leave out smaller, less impactful states by not giving their views equal importance. They fear Eastern European security concerns might become secondary to meet US-Russian diplomatic goals.

NATO's security posture on its eastern flank is generally characterized by small regular forces, limited reserves, an absence of large armored formations, and weak artillery. The Baltic states presently field no tanks or combat aircraft and only coastal patrol craft. Poland, much larger than its neighbors to the north, is an exception. It has much stronger active and reserve forces and formidable tank, artillery, and fighter holdings. NATO forward forces in the form of multinational battalion battlegroups are present in each of the eastern flank countries. Lacking strategic depth, the Baltic states are unlikely to successfully defend against Russian aggression without substantial augmentation from allies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/putins-next-move-five-russian-attack-scenarios-europe-must-prepare-for/#risk-nato>

## PREVENTING THE STRATEGIC ABANDONMENT OF EASTERN EUROPEAN MEMBER STATES IN A FRAGMENTED NATO ORDER

The major threat of Russia, along with the lack of defense by NATO, has created numerous tensions in Eastern European countries. Europe has made many claims, revolving around the same reason: stronger partners sacrifice security for broader strategic interests.

“We are going to cut ... a lot further than 5,000”, soldiers from Germany, where the US has roughly 40,000 troops, said the US president. Germany accused the US of treating such a close partner like this. Not only this, only around 13,000 troops are deployed in NATO’s frontline, including the fact that Russia has multinational battalions and air defense bases in the Baltic states, Poland, and Romania.<sup>6</sup>

“Imagine a scenario in which an emboldened Putin fired a nuclear weapon on European territory to gain a battlefield advantage in what had, up till then, been a conventional conflict. What would Trump and the US do then? No one knows. Not even Trump knows what he’d do until it happens, and history is full of great wars that started in this way,” said Edgar Buckley, NATO’s former assistant secretary general for defense planning and operations.<sup>7</sup>

What happens to the Eastern European members if Trump supports Russia? Wouldn't that be against Article 5’s principle? How will the other NATO members defend Europe if Russia and America are both together?

The Suwalki Gap is considered one of the most vulnerable locations for EU and NATO stability. The Baltic states would be cut off from the rest of the alliance if the area were controlled by Russia.



### Addressing Fears Of Russian Military Aggression Along NATO’s Eastern Flank

<sup>6</sup> <https://euobserver.com/214457/us-troop-cuts-in-europe-risk-inspiring-russian-aggression/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://euobserver.com/214457/us-troop-cuts-in-europe-risk-inspiring-russian-aggression/>

Today, Europe is at risk of further Russian threats. Whether this fate comes to pass depends primarily on the results of the war in Ukraine. From this point of view, three basic realities can be distilled. The first and worst for Europe is a Russian victory, either military or political. In this case, it is generally estimated that after a few years, Moscow could regain the capabilities to take the next step on its neo-imperial path by committing aggression, especially limited aggression, on NATO territory.

Today, some think the Trump administration's policy undermines and even negates the security guarantees by adopting a completely different policy toward Russia than Europe. The policy shift encompasses Washington's perspective on Moscow's aggression against Ukraine is possibly going to an economic war with Europe, declaring that the U.S.A. can only defend those allies who spend certain amounts of money on defense specified by the Trump administration and planning to withdraw or draw down troops from Europe.

From the point of view of defense, the most important feature of the new American policy toward Europe is the expectation that European countries will take on greater defense burdens and responsibility for their security. This is a political tendency initiated by the U.S.A. years earlier, and therefore, it should be considered permanent. What is new from the current administration is its diligence in these regards.<sup>8</sup>

The goal would be to compromise the credibility of the alliance and create conditions for strategic pressure on Central and Eastern Europe. One of the "attractive" options for Russia could be to improve its strategic position in the Baltic Sea by building a land bridge to the Kaliningrad Oblast and controlling the area of the Suwalki Gap between Lithuania and Poland.<sup>9</sup>

Currently, NATO is trying to improve the defense situation of Eastern European states. Roughly between 40,000 and 60,000 troops are stationed at the border stretching from the Baltic states to Romania.<sup>10</sup>

Europe's security is at a critical juncture, and its future is highly uncertain and difficult to predict. Hence, it is necessary to consider various concepts of European security organization, planning, and requirements to implement the most effective strategies.<sup>11</sup>

The most likely scenario to happen, considering all possibilities, is that the Russian threat persists, and the Europeanization of NATO begins.

The most likely outcome today is the continuation of the war in Ukraine, or Russia largely prevailing in holding onto Ukrainian territory. In such conditions, there will be an initiative to save NATO's strategic credibility, with the launch of contingency plans for the Europeanization of the alliance's current

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/european-security-forged/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/european-security-forged/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://kyivindependent.com/nato-strengthens-eastern-flank-with-new-command-structure/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/european-security-forged/#toc-pos-conclusion>

operational structures. This could serve both the needs of a renewed NATO and the preparations for the alternative options of the European Defense Union or the European Treaty Organization.

Some other possible scenarios which seem a bit less likely are -

- 1) European security on EU foundations**
- 2) A new European security treaty organization**

These were less likely because either they resulted in facing huge political risk or a truce and agreement. By "truce and agreements" it means that to make the second scenario work, it will include a truce between Russia and Ukraine, and even if Europe makes a new treaty organization, it will be primarily composed of NATO's current structure. This would basically be a clone of NATO if and when America hands it over to the Europeans.

### **Examining Unequal Security Priorities Between Western And Eastern Europe**

The Western and Eastern parts of Europe both have different concerns and fears regarding military and defense due to their different histories, different economies, different geographies, and different political experiences.

In Eastern Europe, we infer from these views of states like Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania, which usually see Russia as their biggest threat and concern. They request better and stronger defense, military, missile defense, troop deployments, border security, and intelligence.

On the other hand, in Western Europe, we infer from the views of states like France, Germany, Spain, and Italy.

These states are more concerned with issues related to migration, economic stability, terrorism, diplomacy and strategy.

## **EXAMINING THE RISKS OF GERMAN REARMAMENT AND SHIFTING MILITARY LEADERSHIP WITHIN EUROPE**

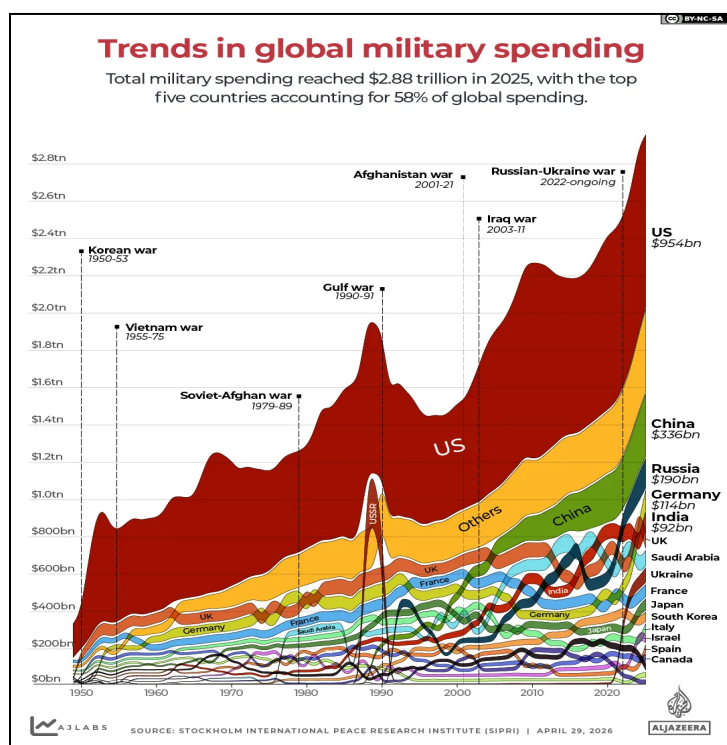
In light of the increasing transactional character of America's security pledges to Europe, the Europeans realize that there is now a need to boost their defensive capabilities, instead of depending only on America's conventional and nuclear shield <sup>12</sup>. The new reality marks a complete change from "European Strategic Autonomy" being a long-term political objective to becoming a pressing strategic need <sup>13</sup>. In the altered security landscape, Germany becomes the key player in Europe's military renaissance. As a result of the shift in German security policy through the *Zeitenwende*, and later under the Chancellorship of Friedrich Merz, Germany has become a dominant figure in pursuing Europe's strategic goals. Germany has put an end to the decades of military passivity to project its conventional strength and become the continent's leading military force by raising its yearly defense budget up to €162 billion until 2029 <sup>14</sup>.

Nevertheless, Germany's fast rearming and its leadership raise serious issues politically and strategically for Europe <sup>15</sup>. Despite the fact that most European countries find the rearming of Germany necessary, given Russia's aggressive stance, Germany's history of militarism cannot be forgotten when it comes to the issue of rearming <sup>16</sup>. Meanwhile, the rearming of Germany raises questions about whether its leadership would unite Europe or create more divisions. Thus, one should not only evaluate historical concerns in relation to the growth of Germany's army but also analyze its new role as the military leader of Europe.

## Assessing Historical Concerns Regarding German Military Expansion

German military power cannot be discussed without considering the traumatic experience of the 20th century. For many years, the entire security structure of Europe was constructed in such a way as to keep German military power under control by making sure that German power could only be exerted together with that of other nations.

## The Legacy Of Restraint



Following the devastation of the two World Wars, post-war Germany adopted an identity built upon pacifism, restraint, and the preference for "soft power" over "hard power". Key historical concerns regarding German expansion center on <sup>17</sup>:

- **The Shadow of Militarism:** German militarism, a social and cultural phenomenon spanning from 1815 to 1945, deeply influenced civilian life and institutionalized a hierarchical,

[ad-europes-hesitant-superpower-waiting](#)  
[European\\_Strategic\\_Autonomy\\_December\\_2020.pdf](#)  
[ing-germanys-role-as-a-baltic-sea-power/](#)  
[s-of-franco-german-leadership/](#)  
[-03/nato-needs-poland-and-germany-be-better-comrades-armsm](#)  
[pzhaghk6w/](#)

nationalist society. The memory of the "School of the Nation," where the army was seen as the primary symbol of national identity, remains a sensitive touchstone in European political discourse.

- **Breaches of International Law:** This is exacerbated by the fact that the leaders of Germany have, in the past, breached the international laws, including the Hague and Geneva conventions, to wage genocidal wars <sup>18</sup>.
- **Institutional Inertia vs. Ambition:** With regard to the period after 1945, Germany developed the Bundeswehr to defend itself. However, in doing so, the military was made to remain within the ambit of NATO command in order to avoid any German initiative to wage war. The historical fears arise when Germany seems to be straying from its position of being a "junior partner." <sup>19</sup>

## Contemporary Risks And Shifting Dynamics

The current *Zeitenwende* (historic turning point) signals a departure from post-war pacifism, raising new questions about the balance of power within Europe.

### Summary Of Strategic Tension

Even though the present-day rearmament of Germany is motivated by the threat posed by Russia, it represents a "strategic Rubicon." In historical terms, the danger does not only lie in the numerical strength of the German armed forces, but rather in the possibility that Germany might decide to distance itself from the multilateral system that has preserved peace in Europe since 1945. With Germany trying to leverage its economic weight to secure strategic dominance, questions linger about how well it will be able to meet its multilateral commitments to NATO and the EU <sup>20</sup>.

## Evaluating Germany's Role As The De-Facto Military Leader of Europe

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the weakening of American credibility during the second term of President Trump, Germany is now considered Europe's preeminent conventional military power. The vow by Chancellor Friedrich Merz in 2025 that Germany will have "Europe's strongest army" is indeed a complete departure from Germany's traditional post-war caution in military affairs. This essay considers whether Germany has become Europe's preeminent military power, together with its many dangers <sup>21</sup>.

### Quantification for Military Power

Germany is bound to become the leading military power in Europe because of its huge commitment to military power. It has pledged an annual expenditure of €153 billion from 2014 to 2029, which is 3.5% of its total GDP and a remaining contract of €83 billion that has yet to be signed by 2026. The government of Germany set up a special €100 billion fund for the Bundeswehr, and defense expenditure is growing

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/German-military-context-sheets.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ifri.org/en/media-external-article/germany-re-arms-what-does-it-mean-europe>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-strategic-reawakening-of-germany-and-japan>

<sup>21</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/11/23/europe/germany-europe-army-reform-intl>

gradually above 2 percent of GDP. In 2024, the country managed to attain its defense budget target of 2% of GDP, with defense expenditure estimated at over €69 billion (\$75.4 billion)<sup>22</sup>.

### **Personnel and Capability Growth**

The Merz coalition government is seeking enactment of a new conscription law to raise the strength of the German military to 260,000 soldiers by 2035 from the current 180,000, plus 200,000 reserves.

### **The Shift from France to Germany: France's Relative Decline**

France, long Europe's military leader, is increasingly uneasy about Germany's rise. France's own €80 billion defense target by 2030 pales in comparison to Germany's commitments. Disputes over the €100 billion Future Combat Air System risk fracturing Franco-German cooperation. French officials and defense experts warn that Berlin is pursuing a national approach to rebuilding its defense sector while also putting in big orders for US systems, despite pledges to favor European procurement and "strategic autonomy"<sup>23</sup>.

### **Structural Advantages**

Germany holds a critical structural advantage: unlike Britain and France, Germany does not have a costly nuclear deterrent to maintain, meaning more money is available for conventional armaments. An influx of so much money will change the face of the European defense industry by increasing the size and reach of German companies. German industry is positioned as the EU's new military engine, with nearly all defense contracts going to European, mainly German, suppliers.

### **Risks of German Military Leadership: Strategic Incoherence Without Doctrine**

Germany's rearmament risks outpacing strategy. Berlin has yet to articulate a coherent military strategy that matches its financial commitments. The Federal Ministry of defense has developed a military strategy for the armed forces, but these documents remain a framework rather than a doctrine. They signal political intent but do not resolve trade-offs between territorial defense, expeditionary commitments, and industrial mobilization<sup>24</sup>.

### **The Bundeswehr: Readiness Gap**

Despite new funding, serious deficiencies persist in equipment availability, ammunition stocks, and procurement speed. The Bundeswehr is 21,826 heads short of its 203,000 active personnel target. Nearly 20% of non-enlisted and 28% of enlisted positions remained vacant as of 2024. While recruitment increased by 8%, bringing in more than 20,000 new people in 2024, over a quarter chose to leave after their six-month probationary period<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/05/germany-rearms-can-it-lead-europes-hesitant-superpower-waiting>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ifri.org/en/media-external-article/germany-re-arms-what-does-it-mean-europe>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/05/germany-rearms-can-it-lead-europes-hesitant-superpower-waiting>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2025/03/11/germanys-military-build-up-continues-but-personnel-shortages-remain/>

## **Domestic Political Fragmentation**

German coalition politics has rarely appeared more brittle. Merz's popularity has eroded at an unusually rapid pace for a new chancellor. His government struggles to maintain cohesion, while the AfD (Alternative for Germany), a far-right, Russia-friendly party, is surging to historic polling highs. Defense is increasingly drawn into ideological debate <sup>26</sup>.

## **Franco-German Industrial Competition**

Mistrust cuts both ways between Paris and Berlin, leading to industrial competition. There is always skepticism in Germany of French calls for European sovereignty because it is seen as France just promoting its industry. However, the fears lie in Germany's industrial power and dependence on supplies from America and non-European countries. Scholar Liana Fix identified how the rearmament plans of Germany could lead to failure, from industrial rivalry with nations such as France to a situation where the AfD would threaten its neighbors with military strength. Germany needed to contain its hegemonic inclinations and find a way to reassure its EU neighbors.

## **Economic Constraints**

Beneath the political challenges sits a deeper constraint: the condition of Germany's economic model. The industrial system that underpinned its post-war success, export-driven, energy-intensive, and anchored in incremental excellence, now faces pressures it was not designed to absorb. The end of cheap Russian gas has forced an abrupt and costly recalibration of energy supply. German car manufacturers face intensifying Chinese competition domestically, while vital exports to China are in decline. Germany has also failed to seize the digital turning point, with SAP as its only truly globally leading tech firm. To rejuvenate its economy and compete on increasingly contested global markets, Germany needs not only efficiency but also adaptability, scale, and speed.

## **Resistance to German Power Revival**

As Germany grows into its role, it will inevitably reshape the European balance by sheer gravity. Partners will look to Berlin for direction while simultaneously resisting its predominance. Power, in Europe, rarely consolidates without generating counter-currents: Germany will not escape that pattern. Emmanuel Macron has sought to anchor Germany within a more explicitly European strategic framework while ensuring that French capabilities remain indispensable. Central and Eastern European states will continue to welcome Berlin's resources while hedging against German hesitation. Already spending 4.7 percent of GDP on defense, Poland welcomes Germany's rearmament as long overdue despite mistrust between the two countries.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ifri.org/en/media-external-article/germany-re-a-where-therms-what-does-it-mean-europe>

## **ADDRESSING THE COLLAPSE OF TRANSATLANTIC TRUST FOLLOWING THE DECLINE OF AMERICAN RELIABILITY IN NATO**

For seventy-five years, the United States has served as the central guarantor of European security through NATO, anchoring the transatlantic alliance with its nuclear umbrella, strategic enablers, and unambiguous commitment to Article 5. That foundation has recently fractured. According to the “America First” policy under the presidency of Trump, who was reelected in November 2024 and sworn in as the president in January 2025, there have been serious concerns about the resilience of America’s security assurances, strategic shift towards the Indo-Pacific region, and transactional language. European leaders now confront a stark reality: U.S.A. political volatility has become a structural strategic variable, and Europe can no longer assume continuity or benevolence in American policy <sup>27</sup>.

This erosion of transatlantic trust has catalyzed an urgent debate over European strategic autonomy not as an ideological preference but as a survival imperative. The central question is whether Europe can reduce its vulnerabilities to American domestic political swings without undermining the alliance structures that still deter and defend. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has warned that anyone believing Europe can defend itself without the United States is “dreaming,” emphasizing that full-spectrum collective defense without U.S.A. nuclear deterrence and strategic enablers would be ruinously expensive and strategically self-defeating <sup>28</sup>.

### **Evaluating The Possibility Of A Post-American European Security Order**

#### **The Genesis Of Transatlantic Trust Decay**

Although the return of a transactionalist U.S.A. administration in 2025 made tensions more pronounced, the U.S.A.–EU divide had begun long before. Debates on withdrawal from Afghanistan, AUKUS, and protectionism, for instance, the U.S.A. The Inflation Reduction Act showed that the U.S.A. was following a strategic change towards the Indo-Pacific region.

#### **Quantitative Aspects Of The Trust Deficit**

The decline of diplomatic ties is evident in public opinion across Europe. In the 2025 global leadership poll conducted by Gallup, the median approval of U.S.A. leadership among NATO member states fell to a historic low of 21%, while the European Union maintained a 60% approval rating. The sharpest declines were recorded in Germany, Portugal, and several Nordic countries <sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://behorizon.org/europe-nato-and-the-limits-of-independence/>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/TT2023\\_digital-3.pdf](https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/TT2023_digital-3.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2025/03/europes-air-of-dependence/>

## **The Transatlantic Security Dilemma**

The most serious consequence of declining trust concerns NATO's deterrence credibility. Repeated questions about the credibility of Article 5 assurances have cast doubt on the reliability of the alliance's mutual defense assurance.

This challenge is compounded by Europe's long-standing dependence on U.S.A. security guarantees<sup>30</sup>. The withdrawal of U.S.A. troops from Germany and statements emphasising that American priorities now lie outside Europe have intensified concerns about the future of extended nuclear deterrence.

## **Open Strategic Autonomy and Defense Preparedness**

To this effect, the EU has stepped up its pace toward Open Strategic Autonomy (OSA), which will be useful in boosting technological sovereignty and supply chain security. Guided by the Letta and Draghi reports, the European Commission launched initiatives such as the Competitiveness Compass and the Clean Industrial Deal to improve economic resilience and industrial competitiveness<sup>31</sup>.

To strengthen security capabilities, the EU adopted the defense Readiness Omnibus and the Readiness 2030 framework. Together, these measures seek to mobilise up to EUR 800 billion in defense investment over four years<sup>32</sup>. The centerpiece of this effort is the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) facility, a EUR 150 billion loan mechanism designed to support joint defense procurement and industrial expansion.

## **European Strategic Autonomy And The Independence Doctrine**

The combination of geopolitical instability and waning faith in American leadership has made the EU evolve from an exclusively economic entity to one that is also geopolitical. In her 2026 speech at the Munich Security Conference, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasized the need for Europe to be independent in a number of areas, including defense, energy, trade, technology, and vital materials.

Nevertheless, opinions differ on this matter because although some political figures want an approach to European independence, others aim at consolidating Europe in NATO.

## **Capability Shortcomings**

Even with its unique political will and substantial funding, there continue to be capability shortcomings in several key sectors in Europe, including space capabilities, air and missile defense, cyber warfare capabilities, military mobility, artillery, drones, and strategic intelligence. The fragmentation in the military

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<sup>30</sup>

<https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2026/02/27/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-inside-europes-race-to-supplant-us-defense-enable-rs/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://icds.ee/en/eu-defense-series-strengthening-the-industry/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.iai.it/en/publications/c41/european-defense-industry-programme-last-piece-eu-defense-puzzle>

makes things complicated because the capability for defense in each nation is more advanced than that of Europe.

## **Addressing Diplomatic Fractures Between Washington And Brussels**

### **Systemic Rupture: The Fall of Transatlantic Trust**

The security of Europe has, for nearly nine decades, been based on the US security commitment to Europe. Yet under the second Trump administration, transatlantic differences have become more severe and have escalated to a crisis of trust. The relationship is increasingly characterized by transactional politics and growing uncertainty regarding long-term American commitments <sup>33</sup>.

In the period between 2025 and 2026, America assumed a more assertive approach towards its partners in Europe. Differences were seen in terms of trade, digital regulations, and military strategies, whereas doubts were raised by statements casting uncertainty over the commitments of the U.S.A., thus increasing European skepticism towards American commitment. At the same time, opinions in America on the subject of NATO have grown increasingly split.

European public confidence in the United States has also declined sharply. A 2026 poll found that more respondents in major NATO countries viewed the U.S.A. as an unreliable ally than a reliable one. In Germany, 50% described the U.S.A. as unreliable, while similar trends were visible in France, Canada, and the United Kingdom <sup>34</sup>. This erosion of trust has transformed European Strategic Autonomy from a long-term aspiration into an urgent security priority <sup>35</sup>.

### **Europe's Capability Gap And The "Enabler Trap"**

Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy faces a major obstacle: dependence on American military enablers. For decades, European NATO members specialized in limited capabilities while relying on the United States for critical functions such as intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR), missile warning, strategic airlift, and command-and-control systems <sup>36</sup>.

The imbalance is especially visible in intelligence and airpower. Excluding U.S.A. assets, Europe operates only three RC-135 strategic signals intelligence aircraft, all belonging to the United Kingdom, while the United States operates seventeen. Europe also lacks stealth ISR platforms capable of operating in highly contested environments <sup>37</sup>.

Past operations have repeatedly exposed these shortcomings. During the 2011 Libya intervention, European forces depended heavily on the U.S.A. ISR capabilities, airborne refueling, and suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD).

According to IISS, "Replacing U.S.A. conventional capabilities and strategic enablers with indigenous

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/chaillot-papers/low-trust>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/poll-eu-countries-us-bigger-threat-than-china/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://liberalforum.eu/publication/decoding-eu-digital-strategic-autonomy-sectors-issues-and-partners/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03393477v1/document>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2025/03../europes-air-of-dependence/>

assets is likely to cost Europe's allies some \$1 trillion and take most of a decade.<sup>38</sup>

### **Defense Industrial Growth And Rearmament**

NATO allies, concerned about their security, agreed in 2025 to set a goal of reaching long-term defense spending equivalent to 5% of GDP by 2035. In consequence, defense investments have been growing rapidly in Europe, especially in frontline countries like Poland and the Baltic states.

To enhance the EDTIB, the European Union is implementing several large-scale projects. They include ASAP, designed to increase ammunition manufacturing; EDIRPA, which provides support for joint procurement projects and EDIS, a project aimed at boosting collaborative procurements and the proportion of spending allocated to European industries.

Their goals include reducing dependency on external sources as well as expanding Europe's capabilities of conducting large-scale military campaigns.<sup>39</sup>

### **Multilateralism And The Evolution Of The European Security Architecture**

As there is increasing uncertainty about US commitments, European nations have been seeking out smaller regional security alliances, which are known as "minilateral" alliances.

France plays a prominent part by broadening the discussions about its nuclear deterrent and making the French interests in security linked to European defense. At the same time, examples of new alliances, such as that between the UK and Poland, reveal that there is more focus on regional security, military cooperation, cyber warfare, and infrastructure protection.

## **EVALUATING THE LEGITIMACY OF A EUROPEAN NUCLEAR DETERRENCE FRAMEWORK**

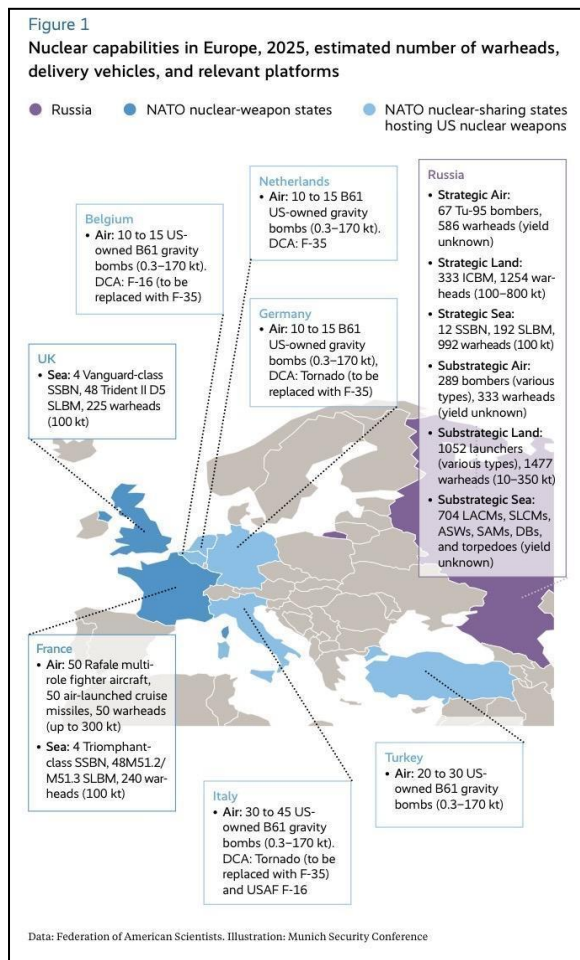
Europe has mostly relied on the U.S.A.A. and NATO for security and protection purposes. But recently due to less reliability of the U.S.A. and increasing threats from Russia. Europe is looking forward to creating its own nuclear defense strategy.

The reelection of Donald Trump has heightened uncertainty about the long-term reliability of US security guarantees. His administration's confrontational relationship with European allies and its stated preferences for conditioning alliance obligations have raised doubts about whether Washington will continue to anchor Europe's nuclear and conventional deterrence posture. This uncertainty has been amplified by developments in the Indo-Pacific, where China's rapid nuclear expansion is forcing the United States to reassess elements of its deterrence posture and provoking deep concern among regional allies. Facing the possibility of simultaneous crises involving Russia, China, and North Korea, as well as increasing

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/progress-and-shortfalls-in-europes-defense-an-assessment/introduction/>

<sup>39</sup> [https://defense-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defense-industry/white-paper-european-defense-readiness-2030\\_en](https://defense-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defense-industry/white-paper-european-defense-readiness-2030_en)



coordination among these nuclear-armed revisionist powers, Washington fears, may become overstretched and is recalibrating its strategic focus.

This shock is giving rise to paramount risks. The United States could abandon its security commitments to Europe, forcing Europeans to provide conventional and nuclear deterrence on their own. Second, in the long term, even if the United States remains committed to Europe's security, it may be unwilling to shoulder the responsibility of extended nuclear deterrence. So this basically raises a question, which is whether Europe should strengthen its nuclear defense rather than relying completely on the U.S.A.A. through NATO.

Additionally, some worry that in the future U.S.A.A. presidents might reduce or stop helping NATO with financial aid. This forces countries to take care of their own security and defense needs.

## Assessing The Feasibility Of Extending France's Nuclear Umbrella To The European Union

NATO mainly is dependent on the U.S for its nuclear deterrence. France and the U.K. are currently the only EU countries that have nuclear weapons, but they keep full control over their own arsenals. Macron now thinks that the EU needs its own nuclear deterrent. But extending France's nuclear umbrella to other EU countries might be a challenge. France has to decide whether to keep full control over its nuclear weapons or to share it.

Macron's demands. France is now the sole nation in the EU with nuclear weapons following the United Kingdom's 2020 exit, also referred to as "Brexit." France has about 290 nuclear weapons, making it the fourth-largest arsenal in the world after China, the United States, and Russia in terms of warhead stores. France has always viewed itself as an autonomous force that balances the US in Europe, ever since French President Charles de Gaulle famously questioned US nuclear assurances in 1961, prompting France to build its own nuclear deterrence force. This attitude is still present today: France continues to be one of the Western allies most supportive of nuclear deterrence and does not take part in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. Because it makes adversaries' calculations more difficult, France's autonomous deterrent benefits NATO as a whole. NATO's deterrence posture has been based on nuclear deterrence, but this is not the case

for the European Union, where many member states are still unsure about the role of nuclear weapons in defense planning.

For several reasons, including its viability, legitimacy, and effect on NATO unity, some European leaders are in favor of extending France's nuclear role in Europe, while others are dubious.

### Evaluating the Role of Germany and Poland in Future Nuclear-Sharing Mechanism

A. **Germany:-** Germany, at the time, West Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany, joined NATO on 6 May 1955. Given its central location, its political weight, and its economic and military potential, Germany is regarded as a crucial European ally by the U.S as well as by other E.U. countries. The nuclear sharing (NS) agreements, to which Germany also makes a substantial contribution, which is beneficial to Germany's security and NATO's deterrence and defense posture. Germany is seen as the future potential nuclear sharing mechanism because of the following reasons:

1. Germany already participates in NATO nuclear sharing, and it knows nuclear coordination, deterrence planning, etc.
2. Germany is Europe's largest economy and political power
3. After Russia invaded Ukraine, Germany has become more security-focused.

B. **Poland:** The bloody war in Ukraine and Russian nuclear saber rattling are driving Europe to re-examine its nuclear options. Poland, poignantly aware of its position on NATO's eastern flank, is a leading advocate for expanded nuclear assurances and capabilities that could deter Russian aggression. Polish Ministry of Defense representatives view escalation to full confrontation as nearly inevitable and believe they are currently involved in hybrid warfare with the Russians. Moscow has alarmingly placed nuclear warheads in Kaliningrad and neighboring Belarus, putting all of Poland's major military installations at short notice. The Poles have asked their allies, especially the U.S.A., for additional military support and capabilities that might constrain Russian military options and deter further aggressiveness. Due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Poland being really close to Russia, for protection purposes and security, Poland is seen as the future nuclear-sharing mechanism.

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MILITARIZATION ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS, CIVIL LIBERTIES AND DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS

Militarization<sup>40</sup> often precipitates violent armed conflict but may also continue well after a conflict has ended. Heightened militarized processes in response to internal and external perceived threats entrench gender roles and enhance gender hierarchies.

FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

Militarization often shifts resources away from policy areas such as education and health that are especially important to girls and women. Therefore, when culture and politics concentrate on a militaristic path, female empowerment is hindered or diminishes. Some post-conflict countries see improved female empowerment after the end of the conflict.

However, emerging threats might lead to militarization, which could undermine the initial gender empowerment gains post-conflict.

The base theoretical argument is summarized in Figures 1 & 2: Figure 1 illustrates the expectation that civil wars lead to higher levels of militarization that reduce female empowerment during the active conflict and several years after the conflict has ended. Figure 2 depicts the expectations that the UNPKO (Department of Peacekeeping Operations ) presence has a direct positive impact on improving female empowerment. It is also anticipated that peacekeeping will reduce militarization and indirectly improve levels of female empowerment in a post-conflict country.

Empirical Hypothesis 1: During and after civil war, increased militarization is associated with lower female empowerment.

Empirical Hypothesis 2: During and after civil war, UN PKOs mitigate levels of militarization, leading to improved female empowerment <sup>41</sup>.

### **Evaluating The Effects Of Mandatory Conscription Policies On Gender Equality: A Comparative Study On Sweden And Finland**

Finland and Sweden are well known for being egalitarian states. Despite this, their military conscription policies differ based on gender. In contrast to Sweden, which conscripts people regardless of gender, Finland only conscripts men into the military. It questions why the two states of Sweden and Finland adopted different conscription policies despite both being highly gender-equal societies and whether notions of gender equality impact state conscription policy. A critical frame analysis is used to find that Sweden has chosen to recruit on a gender-neutral basis to transform the military from a bastion of masculinity. This is based on the notion of the transformative effect of female representation in masculine spaces when paired with other gender mainstreaming policies. Finland has chosen not to conscript women due to its equality of sameness agenda within the military, which does not challenge masculine norms. It does not interpret gender equality as the conscription of women into such a masculine institution, as it would force them to conform to larger patriarchal power structures. The different policy choices made by the states are explained and justified by these divergent meanings of gender equality. The two countries have many similarities, such as democracies, similar levels of wealth, a military conscription policy in peacetime, and development alongside a commitment to gender mainstreaming throughout governance (Anette Borchorst et al. 2012). Despite this, there remains a gender divide between the states' military conscription policies. Finland only conscripts men into the military compared to Sweden, which conscripts

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Militarization-and-womens-empowerment-in-post-conflict-societies-en.pdf>

on a gender-neutral basis (Strand 2023; Kosonen, Alisa, and Teemu, 2019). Despite both states' highly egalitarian structures, the differing conscription policies present an empirical puzzle. Why have the two states of Sweden and Finland adopted different approaches to the gendered nature of the military despite both being highly gender-equal societies? Do notions of gender equality impact state conscription policy? Whether including women in military systems actually brings quality.

## CONCLUSION

This is an important period for Europe in terms of security and politics. For about 70 years, the transatlantic partnership and collective defense principle of NATO have been the bedrock of European security. The emerging insecurity with regard to the dependability of the United States in guaranteeing security and the changing dynamics in world politics have forced Europe to reflect on the future of its defense policy.

European Strategic Autonomy is not simply a question of military capacities, but it involves questions of sovereignty, economic resilience, technological independence, and the capability of the European Union to protect its interests independently without relying too much on other parties. Although gaining more autonomy might allow Europe to deal with new threats effectively, there are still numerous challenges associated with this, such as capability deficits, divergent security needs of the individual member states, dependency on U.S.A. strategic enablers, and fears about militarization.

Apart from these, challenges like the rearmament of Germany, the guarantees of NATO's Article 5 for the future, the possibility of a European nuclear umbrella, and the protection of democratic freedoms demonstrate how hard it is to build a credible yet unified system of European security. Apparently, any effort aimed at achieving strategic autonomy should combine deterrence and cooperation, as well as security and civil liberties.

In the end, the very concept of European strategic autonomy will prove to be legitimate if it strengthens the security, stability, and unity of Europe without violating the principles of democracy, multilateralism, human rights, and international law. In other words, the delegates will have to assess not only the capabilities of Europe in terms of independence but also its security architecture.

## QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. What measures should be taken for the EU to improve its defense and security capabilities, and also to guarantee that EU Strategic Autonomy is a complement but not a threat to NATO?
2. What measures should be implemented to resolve the problems of credibility and reliability regarding NATO's collective Article 5 assurances?
3. How can the EU decrease its dependency on U.S.A. military enablers such as intelligence, strategic airlift, ballistic missile defense, and C&C?
4. What steps must be taken to secure the Eastern European countries and prevent any possible threats from Russia regarding NATO's eastern border?
5. How can divergent security goals between Western and Eastern Europe be overcome to develop a common security policy for Europe?
6. In light of changes in Europe's security architecture, what is the best way for Germany to contribute to Europe's security environment? Also, how can issues of military leadership and rearmament be addressed?
7. Is the development of a nuclear deterrence strategy in Europe feasible and appropriate, and how could French nuclear assets contribute in this case?
8. What steps can be taken by the EU to foster defense cooperation, defense procurement, and military industrial capabilities within the union, while at the same time protecting the sovereignty of its members?
9. How can Europe deal with increasing defense preparedness without compromising its citizens' civil liberties, democratic rights and gender equality?
10. What institutional reforms or security arrangements would be necessary to establish a credible post-American European security order, should American commitments to Europe continue to decline?
11. How will the European Union be able to guarantee that any attempt at Strategic Autonomy does not violate international law, the principles of multilateralism, democracy, and the values of the EU?

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