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Why the European Union should join the Atlantic Pact

Domenico Moro

Doing European defence requires the power to do it, or a power situation that enables it. This 'power situation' arises from a shift in the balance of power among European States, placing the issue on the political agenda. Such shifts in the balance of power can be triggered by extraordinary events – like the fall of the Berlin Wall, which spurred monetary union – or by initiatives from European institutions, such as the Commission, or actions taken by a group of willing Member States, supported by the European Parliament. A fragile truce in Ukraine and the foreign policy of the new Trump administration could be the trigger for a European defence initiative.

As European States and institutions still lack enthusiasm to move towards an autonomous European defense, the EU's entry into the North Atlantic Treaty (henceforth 'Atlantic Pact') is an initiative worth considering. This step would serve as a stepping stone to what would become necessary in any case, once the EU has its own defence. The EU's entry into the Atlantic Pact can happen without altering existing treaties, although the formal steps required, such as ratification by the members of the Pact and, probably, the EU countries themselves, will not be

easy¹. Opposition from countries that are not part of the EU, such as Turkey, the United Kingdom, or the United States is a possibility. Additionally, some EU countries, such as Hungary, might also be opposed.

Altiero Spinelli had already pointed out the particularity of the Atlantic Pact when he stated that “this defence organisation is institutionalised, what we have before us is not, in reality, a classical alliance, but a real military confederation, an association of States that have decided to provide jointly for the defence of certain territories”². Indeed, the Pact is endowed with the North Atlantic Council, where the governments are represented, a Secretariat, a Military Committee to which two strategic commands report, and a Parliamentary Assembly. Since it is, as Spinelli pointed out, a “confederation”, there is nothing automatic in its functioning: it functions only because of the presence of a *primus inter pares*, the United States, whose will has almost always been imposed on the allies. Following the heightened threat situation after 24 February 2022, the commitment to raise military expenditure to 2% of GDP began to be respected.

Until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the issue of European defence – although having made significant progress – was predominantly a topic of interest for European think tanks. Since then and particularly after the recent European elections, European defence and the EU’s entry into the Atlantic Pact have become a viable political option.

1. Introduction: post-World War II to the present

Since the end of the Second World War, the idea of an autonomous European defence has always been present,

not only as a response to the threat, first of German rearmament and then of the USSR, but also as a means of ending wars between European countries³. In the same period, the European and American sides developed the conviction that it was necessary to proceed with an alliance between the two sides of the Atlantic, which then resulted in the North Atlantic Treaty, which merged the European military command and control structures of the Western European Union (WEU)⁴. The integration of the latter into NATO, the military arm of the Atlantic Pact, meant that European security was dependent on the American ally.

With the exception of the unsuccessful attempt in 1954 to establish the European Defence Community (EDC), there have been several instances in which the issue of European defence has been addressed, such as the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the St-Malo Summit (1998), European Councils of Cologne and Helsinki (1999)⁵ and, above all, the Lisbon Treaty (2007). The latter introduced the mechanism of permanent structured cooperation, which allows a vanguard of countries to decide by qualified majority on the establishment of a European multinational force.

From the American point of view, however, the type of relationship between the Atlantic Pact and European defence has always been, in fact, what the then US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, once stated when she was asked at a press conference at the Atlantic Pact headquarters on 8 December 1998 what she thought of the ‘European Security and Defence Identity’ promoted in the context of the WEU two years earlier. Albright said she

viewed the initiative positively, as it could be the European pillar of NATO and a way of sharing its burdens, but she also pointed out that “it is important to do that under what we would say the three “D”s which is no diminution of NATO, no discrimination and no duplication because I think that we don’t need any of those three “D”s to happen”⁶. This sentence sums up what has always been the position of the United States. More recently, the first Trump administration challenged Macron’s idea of a European armed force, arguing that Europeans should instead contribute more to the financing of NATO⁸, even though, in light of recent work on the American side, Europeans now pay more for their own defence than the United States⁹.

2. The reasons why the EU should be part of the Atlantic Pact

2.1. The principle of equal partnership with the US is asserted and that it is the EU that must provide for its own defence

Since 1945, and especially since 1949, when the US had a monopoly on nuclear weapons, the defence of Europe against a possible aggression by the former USSR was based on the doctrine of ‘*massive retaliation*’, approved by Eisenhower at the end of 1953 and enunciated at the beginning of 1954 by Foster Dulles, then US Secretary of State. The doctrine specified a nuclear response to a conventional war unleashed in Europe by the USSR. When the US lost its monopoly on nuclear weapons and the USSR equipped itself with ballistic missiles capable of striking US territory, the US government adopted McNamara’s policy

of ‘*flexible response*’, according to which the American response to Soviet aggression would be proportional to the latter.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of China led the then Obama Administration to change the US’s military strategy again, further reducing its interest in the European continent. Obama, in fact, abandoned the American strategy aimed at supporting, simultaneously, two high-intensity conflicts in two different parts of the world: Europe and Asia. A decision was made to concentrate the military effort on a single front, on Asia.

The goal of Europe taking charge of its own defence and bearing the cost is certainly not a call only of the most recent American presidents¹⁰. These exhortations date back at least to the presidency of J. F. Kennedy who, still in a spirit of benevolent friendship, during a speech at St. Paul’s Church in Frankfurt¹¹, expressed the hope that the Europeans would move quickly towards their political unification. In that same speech, Kennedy appeared to foresee that the United States ‘*will revert in a narrow nationalism*’ should Europe fail to assume responsibility for its own security. The first Trump Administration and expectations for the second have begun to realise Kennedy’s fears.

2.2. The Atlantic Pact, a foreign policy instrument only if shared by the EU¹²

For the Atlantic Pact, 1991 was a watershed. Previously, it functioned solely as a *military* alliance focused on the defence of the European continent, but from that year it became a foreign *policy* instrument. With the Strategic *Strategic Concept* of 1991¹³, the military arm of the Pact,

NATO, obtained a new role. Alongside the traditional role of European defence, the objective of maintaining stability in countries bordering NATO was added. The latter's mission was thus extended to new roles, variously motivated, which can be summarised as '*crisis response operations as a part of its crisis management efforts*'. The new strategic concept served as the formal basis for the first military intervention other than "*self-defense*" (Art. 5), but for "non-Art. 5" interventions and, therefore, for interventions outside the borders of the Atlantic Pact: at that time, for the intervention against the Bosnian Serbs (1994-1995).

In 1999, a new *Strategic Concept* was approved, which further extended the tasks of the Atlantic Pact, since the missions of prevention and management of crises, and peacekeeping, were no longer limited to countries neighbouring NATO, but extended to new geographical areas, allowing the possibility of conducting military missions far beyond the defence of European territory. If before this new phase, the defence of the values of freedom, democracy and human rights coincided with the defence of European territory, following the Strategic Concepts of 1991 and 1999, the defence (or affirmation) of those values extends to the rest of the world in general. The new Strategic Concept provided the basis for the intervention in Afghanistan through the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF).

The 2022 Strategic Concept goes a step further, referring not only to Russia, but also to China, as it states that their strategic partnership undermines '*the rules-based international order*', and is contrary to the '*values and interests*' of the Atlantic Pact¹⁴. The intention of the United

States is to increasingly involve NATO (and the EU) in the policy of confrontation that the US has been pursuing with China since the Obama Administration. Contrary to this hypothesis, France's 2022 military strategy rejects the Atlantic Pact's remit, it states that "*any extension to other geographical areas, in particular the Indo-Pacific, should be excluded*".

2.3. US military bases in the EU require a shared foreign policy

Military bases in Europe enable the US to perform several tasks: to act as a deterrent against Russia; to support Ukraine's war effort; to support US policy in Africa; and, until 2021, to defend Israel¹⁶. While there are apparently no differences between the EU and the US, regarding the policy towards Ukraine, it is not certain that the positions will continue to coincide with regards to Russia, at least in the medium and long term. The same applies to the policy pertaining to Africa¹⁷ and the Middle East¹⁸. A weak European foreign policy has, to date, prevented the emergence of potentially deep differences of opinion between the two sides of the Atlantic (and among European Member States). Moreover, a first manifestation of these divisions within the Pact already occurred in 2003, when Belgium, France and Germany opposed the second intervention in Iraq.

The US has military bases in many EU countries. In order of importance, defined by annual US expenditure, there are bases in Germany (\$8.6 billion in 2025), Italy (\$2.3), Belgium (\$0.5). Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain follow with smaller

amounts¹⁹. As for Italy, the use of these bases has been, and still is, a matter of debate, especially when it comes to, on the one hand, distinguishing between NATO military bases and American bases in the strict sense and, on the other, to their use. After the closure of the base on La Maddalena Island, there are seven American bases in Italy: Capodichino, Aviano, Camp Darby, Gaeta, Sigonella, San Vito dei Normanni and Camp Ederle. Decimomannu is both a NATO base and, in fact, an American base, and the Camp Ederle base, near Vicenza, is an American base that can also be used by the US for NATO missions²⁰.

As mentioned earlier, the problem is not so much the number of bases as their deployment and, above all, their compatibility with Article 11 of the Italian Constitution, which does not allow wars of aggression, a condition that existed prior to the approval of the Strategic Concepts in 1991 and 1999. As already stated, the latter, and in particular the second Strategic Concept, not only provide for out-of-area missions under the Atlantic Pact, but also provide for the possibility of undertaking 'non-Art. 5' and thus other than collective self-defence pursuant to Art. 5. This also applies to non-NATO American bases. However, as noted in a study by the Istituto Affari Internazionali on behalf of the Senate, the actual use of the bases "*disavows this assumption [self-defence: ed]. The concept of security has expanded and NATO has now undertaken a range of missions, which go far beyond the notion of legitimate defence against an armed attack*"²¹.

The situation is not very different in Germany, the country with the largest number of American and NATO bases and the largest number of American military personnel.

Stuttgart is home to the headquarters of the European Command (EuCom, according to the American acronym) and Africa Command (AfriCom), which, until 2007, was a sub-command of EuCom, whose head is also the Supreme Allied Command Europe (SACEUR- on this see 2.6)²². Since 2008, AfriCom²³ has been responsible for military operations in Africa (except Egypt) as demonstrated by the fact that, in some cases, it takes over from France in countries where the latter has withdrawn²⁴.

2.4. NATO's New Force Model: an embryonic European army

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine might have been expected to restore the Atlantic Pact to its original focus – with the US leading European defence – the proposed "New NATO Force Model" (NFM)²⁵, approved at the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid, suggests the opposite: America's disengagement from Europe. The NFM proposes the establishment of an intervention force of 100,000 troops deployable within 10 days, followed by an additional 200,000 in 10-30 days, both provided by European countries²⁶. In the subsequent 30-180 days, another 500,000 men mainly provided by the US are to be added. But, if a conflict were to break out in Asia at the same time, it is likely that the US would give priority to this (unlike in World War II)²⁷. This confirms the fact that Europe will initially have to deal with any external aggression alone.

The NFM's originality lies in the organisation of these troops: multinational forces pre-assigned to specific European regions for defence, with established military training plans. As has been noted, what is being estab-

lished under the NATO umbrella is an embryonic European army, which requires the EU to be part of the *North Atlantic Council*²⁸. For the NFM to be credible, two measures will have to be initiated. First, the EU must close the gap with the US regarding the ‘*strategic enablers*’, as U.S. provision of these can no longer be assumed. Second, command of these troops must shift from an American to a European general.

The establishment of the New Force Model comes in a context in which war has returned to Europe and has called into question the adequacy of the NATO command and control structure and the available forces of the Atlantic Pact, as they no longer operate in the framework of stability that characterised the twenty years following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, if NATO itself is right, current European armed forces do not meet the necessary requirements²⁹. In addition, these multinational forces, to avoid the negative experience of ‘battle groups’, will have to be permanent and, to establish them quickly, they will have to be constituted by exploiting existing multinational initiatives: the Eurocorps; bilateral German-Dutch cooperation; the Franco-Belgian project of interoperable motorised brigades, etc³⁰.

2.5. The EU’s entry into the Atlantic Pact will allow for a European general to be in charge

With Britain’s exit from the EU, previously the primary obstacle to European defence, it was assumed that the main impediment to the initiation of this common policy had been removed. However, French support for an intergovernmental approach to European defense has now emerged as a key structural challenge.

This problem dates back at least to De Gaulle’s presidency, when he justified the ‘*force de frappe*’ with doubts about the extension of American nuclear cover to the European continent³¹. J. F. Kennedy responded harshly to De Gaulle in his Frankfurt speech, stating that if Europe continued on the path to political unity, American support would not cease³². Kennedy’s speech highlighted the alternative the Europeans would face. They would have to choose between French and American nuclear protection or emancipate themselves from both only with the political unity of the European continent. Since then, France has contemplated military supremacy over the European continent and this line remained unchanged until Macron’s presidency. In his first speech at the Sorbonne, when he proposed the European Intervention Initiative, or when he proposed extending French nuclear coverage to the European continent, the perspective was always intergovernmental³³. It is precisely to take into account French sensitivity to national autonomy that the federalists proposed a dual system of European defence, based on minimal European armed forces alongside predominantly national armed forces, as was the case for much of the history of the American federation where, for a long time, State militias prevailed over federal armed forces³⁴.

Britain’s exit from the EU highlighted French reluctance to a European defense force managed by European institutions³⁵. However, the balance of power in Europe is shifting. Poland is emerging as one of the states with significant military capabilities, and France is grappling with severe political and economic crises, unparalleled since the crisis of the Fourth Republic. At the same time, following the last European elections, the European Commission took a major step forward with the establishment of a Commissioner for

Defense. With the EU in the *North Atlantic Council*, it would be in France's best interest to accept shared control of the NATO military structure.

2.6. The EU would have access to the NATO Planning, Command and Control system enabling it to react quickly to an external threat

NATO's command and control structure is organised into three levels: strategic, operational and tactical. At the strategic level, there are two commands: *Allied Command Operations* (formerly *Allied Command Europe*) whose function is to plan, conduct and execute military operations. The Command's headquarters is in Mons (Belgium) and is traditionally entrusted to an American general, the *Supreme Allied Commander Europe* (SACEUR), who is also the commander of the *US European Command* (EuCom) based in Stuttgart. The second strategic command, since 2003, is the *Allied Command Transformation* (ACT) based in Norfolk (USA)³⁶. The ACT's role is to update the strategic thinking, develop military capabilities and train NATO forces, *i.e.* the functions envisaged by the European Intervention Initiative proposed by Macron at the Sorbonne. Currently, a French admiral heads the ACT³⁷.

At the operational level, there are three *Joint Force Commands* based in Brunssum (Netherlands), Naples (Italy) and Norfolk (USA). Finally, at the tactical level, there are the commands of the individual components of the armed forces that should, in turn, plan, conduct and support air, land and naval operations: in Ramstein (Germany) there is the *Allied Air Command*; in Izmir (Turkey) the *Allied Land Command*; in Northwood (UK) the *Allied*

Maritime Command. It should be noted that the EU does not have a similar military structure³⁸. Overall, the number of personnel working in the NATO structure, including the headquarters in Mons, Brunssum, Naples, Northwood and Norfolk, amounts to about 8,900. Of these, only 10% are American personnel³⁹ and this should facilitate the transfer of command of this structure to a European general.

Until June 2011, when the last re-organisation of the Atlantic Pact took place, the total number of personnel was around 13,000⁴⁰. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there are plans to bring the NATO structure to the same level as in 2011. With just over 200 personnel, the European Military Staff – envisioned as the equivalent of the NATO command and control structure – is far too small to fulfil a similar role as the latter. Replicating that structure (apart from the duplication of costs), would be a lengthy process.

The Strategic Compass, approved by the Council on March 21, 2022, recognises this weakness when it states that “for command and control [of the Rapid Deployment Force] we will use our national default operational level command headquarters or the EU's military planning and conduct capability once full operational capability is achieved”⁴¹. That is to say, the EU will rely on national command and control structures and, in any case, for a rapid deployment force of 5,000 personnel, the eventual European structure will be of a low level, that of a brigade, thus far from a structure that, according to the Helsinki European Council decision of December 1999, should manage a military force of 50,000-60,000 men⁴².

One of the most sensitive issues in this hypothesis is the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) that presides over the management of the nuclear weapons that the US has made available to some European countries – Belgium, Germany, Italy and Netherlands - and the British nuclear arsenal that is integrated into the US nuclear system. As is known, France is part of NATO, but not of the NPG. EU membership in the Atlantic Pact would allow France, albeit indirectly, access to the NPG, while other member states of the Pact would not have access to the French nuclear arsenal. The EU's presence should therefore open a constructive discussion on the American and French nuclear strategies, since these are of interest not only to European countries that are members of the Pact, but also to those that are not.

EU membership in the Pact would provide Europe with the necessary capacity to conduct large-scale military operations immediately. It will then be a question of whether, as the political conditions mature, the NATO command and control structure (apart from the NPG) can be integrated into EU institutions. Failing this, the EU would have the opportunity to equip itself with an autonomous command and control structure.

2.7. Interoperability between American and European weapon systems would be on an equal footing

The problem of interoperability between the weapon systems used by members of the Atlantic Pact has become urgent again since Ukraine was provided with the requested military aid. The Ukrainians realised that they had received from the Americans and Europeans, for the same

use, different weapon systems and related ammunition and, it goes without saying, different from the Soviet-origin weapon systems still in use by the Ukrainians, posing significant logistical problems. The problem was addressed by the Atlantic Pact at the summits in Vilnius (July 2023) and Washington (July 2024), whose final communiqués emphasised the importance of the NATO-EU partnership: “The European Union remains a unique and essential partner for NATO. NATO-EU cooperation has reached unprecedented levels. Practical cooperation has been strengthened and expanded on space, cyber, climate and defence, as well as emerging and disruptive technologies. In the context of Ukraine, NATO-EU cooperation has become more significant. NATO recognises the value of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to, and interoperable with NATO. The development of coherent, complementary and interoperable defence capabilities, avoiding unnecessary duplication, is key in our joint efforts to make the Euro-Atlantic area safer”⁴³.

In Washington, the importance of the decision taken in Vilnius to initiate the *Defence Production Action Plan* was reiterated, one of the objectives of which is to “reinforce the commitment to comply with NATO standards and to improve interoperability and interchangeability, regularly reviewing progress with Defence Ministers”. The difference between the terms ‘interoperable’ and ‘interchangeable’ is not only semantic but has technical-industrial implications. Interoperable means two weapon systems can communicate with each other, interchangeable, on the other hand, means weapon systems can be substitutes for each

other as their standard is the same⁴⁴. Currently, the standard is set by the American F-16 and F-35 aircrafts, dominant in Europe, or the European Leopard tanks.

As the Europeans lack the capacity to equip themselves with weapons systems and, crucially, common military infrastructure (e.g. intelligence systems, surveillance and reconnaissance systems, transport capacity, anti-ballistic missile defence system⁴⁵, etc.), the Atlantic Pact assumes the role of security provider. This dependence on NATO favours American military equipment, which thus becomes the standard. Examples include those already mentioned, as well as the fleet of E-3 *Airborne Warning and Control System* (E-3 AWACS) and the fleet of RQ-4D *Global Hawk* drones that are part of the *Alliance Ground Surveillance* programme and which provides the Atlantic Pact with intelligence, reconnaissance and surveillance⁴⁶. Since 2024, NATO also has a fleet of Airbus A330 *Multirole Tanker Transport* (MRTT)⁴⁷.

The EU's presence in the Atlantic Pact is necessary not only to avoid duplication of defence production, but, crucially, to ensure reciprocal interchangeability of weapon systems, preventing it from flowing solely from east to west with bilateral negotiations between the US and individual European countries.

2.8. Without a direct EU presence, the Atlantic Pact risks becoming a divisive instrument between EU countries

The Strategic Compass states that “A stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of

collective defence for its members”⁴⁸. Moreover, Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states that “Commitments and cooperation in this area [that of foreign and security policy; Ed] shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation”⁴⁹. This implies that for a core group of countries the Atlantic Pact is indispensable to their security, even with the development of an autonomous European defense.

However, a look at the military strategies of the main European countries reveals some differences. The German federal government's *National Security Strategy* states that “Our commitment to NATO and the EU is unshakeable. We stand resolutely by the mutual defence pledge under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty” and that “NATO is the primary guarantor of protection against military threats. It links Europe and North America politically”. “The Federal Government strives to strengthen Europe's defence capabilities and ability to act in complementarity with NATO”⁵⁰. In the Strategic Concept of Italy's Chief of Defence Staff, it is stated that “NATO is the Alliance of reference for defence and deterrence” and that “We must favour the consolidation of the so-called ‘European pillar’ of NATO”⁵¹. In neither military strategy is there any reference to the need for an autonomous European defence.

French military strategy, emphasising the importance of an autonomous European strategy, deviates from this exclusive focus on NATO. In the *Revue nationale stratégique*

2022, on the one hand, it is stated that “*La France oeuvre au renforcement du pilier européen de l’Alliance [...]*” and that “*La garantie apportée par la mission de défense collective de l’OTAN reste le pilier central de la sécurité dans l’espace euro-atlantique*”⁵², it is also argued that France intends to “*favoriser l’émergence d’une conception commune et partagée de la défense européenne, comme de son autonomie stratégique*”⁵³. France thus confirms itself as the country most sensitive to European autonomy from the United States.

When European defence and strategic autonomy are discussed, Poland and the Baltic countries, the largest buyers of American weapon systems, are quick to point out that NATO should not be questioned or that European defence should be conceived in terms of a ‘European pillar’ of NATO. The German political class shares this view. In 2020, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, when she was defence minister in Angela Merkel’s last government, argued that “Illusions of European strategic autonomy must come to an end: Europeans will not be able to replace America’s crucial role as a security provider”⁵⁴. Meanwhile, Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that “NATO remains Germany’s principal framework for the defence of Europe”⁵⁵, attesting to a position that, at least so far, is not challenged by the main political parties in the German government or the opposition.

To argue that European defence should be conceived within the framework of the Atlantic Pact, moreover, is pleonastic. This conclusion is obvious if one takes into account the distinction, common in the military sphere, between the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington in April 1949, and NATO, established as autonomous legal

entity at the Ottawa Convention in September 1951⁵⁶. France left NATO, but not the Atlantic Pact, in 1966. To argue that European defence should be conceived within the framework of the Pact is to say that while the alliance between the two political communities, the US and the EU, is not called into question, the management of NATO must be oriented towards fulfilling its original role: the defence of the European continent. This is why the command-and-control structure must be placed under a European general. These are the only ways in which division between European countries can be avoided.

2.9. An autonomous European defence in the framework of the Atlantic Pact is necessary for the EU to be a factor of stability both in Europe and globally

It has recently been pointed out that the (peaceful) strategy of European enlargement has probably reached its limit⁵⁷. Until 2007, with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, the enlargement policy had never been obstructed. However, Russia began to militarily oppose the planned enlargement to countries that were part of the former USSR – Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – either by occupying territories within some of these countries or, as in the case of Ukraine, by invading it.

There is no doubt that the EU, with its democratic system, its high standard of living and social benefits, and its effective cohesion policy that provides substantial transfers of public funds to low-income countries, is a powerful pull factor. The fact is that, without an effective deterrent power, it would not be able to protect those countries that wanted to join it.

The EU, with exclusive competencies in important areas of economic life, such as competition policy, trade and monetary policy, is able to conduct active policies in these areas that have strong external spillovers and is, therefore, capable of limiting the power of other world powers, but is unable to act credibly when engaging as an equal. In a world of independent states, where the language of force still prevails, the EU's lack of independent military power undermines its credibility. This security deficit is a destabilising factor, prompting other powers to attempt to curb, if not scuttle, the European project. This is a policy pursued, for different reasons, by both Russia and the US⁵⁸.

Russia sees the enlargement of the EU and NATO as a threat both to its socio-economic model and its security, since the progressive eastward enlargement of the EU is perceived as a policy of encirclement driven (in the case of NATO) by the US, and also as a policy of absorption of countries that were formerly part of the USSR and which Russia still considers part of its area of influence. The US sees the euro as a competitor to the dollar, particularly given its massive and growing public debt, and views the European competition policy as a constraint on the overwhelming dominance of American high-tech companies. Finally, the US views European trade policy as a means of attracting strategically important geographical regions into the European orbit, as in the case of agreements with Canada and Mercosur.

It is often said that the EU has an interest in establishing a peaceful world order and some argue that it alone can work towards this goal⁵⁹. However, the crisis of the current world order raises questions about the long-term viability

of this EU policy. The future of this policy hinges on the evolving foreign policies of China and the US and, in particular, on the position they take towards current multilateral institutions.

As for China, it can be argued that it will be possible for Europe to promote a policy in favour of a stable and secure world order as long as Chinese power pursues a policy of de-escalating international tensions before they get out of control. If recent statements by the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, have any basis, this seems to have been the case, for example, in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. According to Blinken, China intervened with Russia to prevent the latter from resorting to nuclear weapons in the conflict with Ukraine⁶⁰. Furthermore, China and BRICS, of which it is a member, do not question multilateral institutions so far, but the rationale for this alliance is to strengthen its decision-making weight.

A European policy aimed at preserving a stable world order based on shared rules will be relevant as long as none of the world's major powers seriously question or abandon multilateral institutions.

2.10. To promote “good world governance” and prevent nationalist drift worldwide, the EU must also be a credible actor militarily

After the collapse of the USSR and in the early years of US unipolarity, there was a debate in the US about the effectiveness of multilateral institutions in maintaining a peaceful and cooperative world order⁶¹. This debate has

resurfaced, with the US currently challenging these institutions: it wants to sanction the International Criminal Court, cut funding to the World Health Organisation, and most importantly, even with the Biden Administration, continue to refuse to appoint a judge to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), thus preventing its proper functioning⁶².

Article 21.2 (letter h) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states that “The Union shall define and pursue common policies and actions, and shall work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations, in order to: [...] promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance”. One of the aims of European foreign policy is thus to strengthen multilateral institutions in order to ensure good global governance. Historically, this was the original aim of the US in the last years of World War II, when in 1944 it brought together the world’s major powers at Bretton Woods to establish multilateral institutions designed to provide public goods and thus prevent the conditions that could lead to new world conflicts. The International Monetary Fund, the GATT (now the WTO) and the World Bank were set up precisely to prevent the resurgence of the protectionist measures in the monetary and trade sectors that had caused the outbreak of war and to support the economic growth of underdeveloped countries.

Growing economic and industrial interdependence on a global scale now also requires the provision of public goods in the area of security. The Atlantic Pact was a partial response to the need that John Maynard Keynes had already raised at Bretton Woods, stating that the institutions that were being created would also require an inter-

national police force. The Atlantic Pact could have fulfilled this function. During the discussion that took place at the time of its establishment, the US considered proceeding on the basis of Article 53 of the UN Charter, that is, making it an instrument at the service of the Security Council. The Cold War and the fear of the USSR’s right of veto pushed the US instead to establish it under Article 51 (regional collective defence). If the conditions are right, it might be possible to consider gradually resuming that orientation, starting with partial measures this increasingly evident global problem: the security of maritime routes. Around 90% of world trade passes through these and, as demonstrated by the episodes of piracy in the Indian Ocean or terrorism in the Red Sea, it is a question of defending a global public good. The EU could therefore propose that maritime routes are protected by a global UN Agency and invite the US, India and China, and other willing countries, to provide the necessary fleet to defend these routes, thus eliminating a possible factor of global tension.

Note

- 1 The participation of the EU in the North Atlantic Council was discussed at the NATO summit in Washington in 1999. (See: Peter Schmidt, *ESDI: "Separable but not separate?"*, in: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2000/07/01/esdi-separable-but-not-separate/index.html>. More recently, there were contributions by Sven Biscop (*The New Force Model: NATO's European Army?*, Egmont Policy Brief n. 285, Settembre 2022, in: https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2022/09/Sven-Biscop_PolicyBrief285_vFinal.pdf.) and Alessandro Marrone (*A Europe-led NATO to guarantee European security: the time has come*, *Aspeniaonline*, 16 giugno 2024, in: <https://aspeniaonline.it/a-europe-led-nato-to-guarantee-european-security-the-time-has-come/#>). The formal problems of the EU's participation in the Atlantic Pact will not be discussed here, though we will focus on the politico-industrial reasons that could justify this step, which can be considered as a political prospect and not as a simple collaboration, only more intense and structured, between the EU and NATO.
- 2 Altiero Spinelli, *Patto Atlantico o unità europea?*, in: A. Spinelli, *L'Europa tra Ovest e Est*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990, p. 157.
- 3 From the Brussels Treaty of 1948 (extension of the 1947 Treaty of Dunkirk to the Benelux countries), which established the Western Union, later to become the Western European Union in 1954, following the failure of the European Defence Community.
- 4 Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The United States and NATO (The Formative Years)*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984.
- 5 At the Helsinki European Council, where the establishment of a rapid intervention force of 50-60,000 men was proposed, Italy was represented by Gen. Vincenzo Camporini, who recounted his experience and the hopes raised by that

Council in a text, awaiting publication, entitled: *La dimensione militare dell'Unione europea: origini, entusiasmi e speranze*.

- 6 For Madeleine Albright's press conference, see: <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1998/s981208x.htm>.
- 7 The question of its overcoming has recently been raised Mathieu Droin, Sean Monaghan, Jim Townsend, NATO's Missing Pillar (The Alliance Needs a More Powerful Europe), Foreign Affairs, 14 June 2024, in: *NATO's Missing Pillar (The Alliance Needs a More Powerful Europe)*, Foreign Affairs, 14 June 2024, in: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/natos-missing-pillar>.
- 8 Rebecca Morin, *Trump calls Macron's comments on building a European army to defend against US 'insulting'*, Politico, 9 November 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-calls-macrons-comments-on-building-a-european-army-to-defend-against-u-s-insulting/>.
- 9 Frank G. Hoffman, Molly Dinneen, *Examining NATO's Progress: Common Goals, Shared Burdens*, in: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/07/examining-natos-progress-common-goals-shared-burdens/>.
- 10 Barak Obama, at the time, had referred to the Europeans as 'freeloaders'. See: Jeffrey Goldberg, *Obama Unhappy with Allies, Upset at Free Riders*, Atlantic Council, 10 marzo 2016, in: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/obama-unhappy-with-allies-upset-at-free-riders/>.
- 11 *JFK Address in the Assembly Hall at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt*. June 25, 1963 <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-assembly-hall-the-paulskirche-frankfurt>
- 12 Rebecca R. Moore, *NATO's New Mission (Projecting stability in a Post-Cold War World)*, Praeger Security International, Westport, 2007.
- 13 *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)*, in: <https://>

- www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm?selectedLocale=en.
- 14 NATO, <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/290622-strategic-concept.pdf>.
 - 15 Revue nationale stratégique 2022, in: <https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/Revue%20nationale%20strat%C3%A9gique%20-%20Fran%C3%A7ais.pdf>
 - 16 Congressional Research Service, *United States Central Command*, 16 dicembre 2022, in: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11428>. The responsibility for the defence of Israel passed from EUCOM (European Command) to the United States Central Command following the improvement of relations between Israel and the Arab states after the Abraham Agreements.
 - 17 United States Africa Command, *U.S. Forces Conduct Strike Targeting al-Shabaab*, 26 December 2024, in: <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/35679/us-forces-conduct-strike-targeting-al-shabaab>.
 - 18 *US troops need to stay in Syria to counter the Islamic State group, Austin says*, 8 January 2025, in: https://apnews.com/article/austin-biden-syria-trump-troops-3ba5679d2b88fb1458ecdd1bf871efc5?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru.
 - 19 Department of Defense, Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request (Defense Operations and Maintenance Overview), in: https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/def-budget/FY2025/FY2025_OM_Overview.pdf.
 - 20 Natalino Ronzitti, *Le basi americane in Italia - problemi aperti*, Senato della Repubblica, June 2007, in: https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/pi_a_c_070.pdf. According to other sources, there are about thirty American installations, to which 26 minor sites should be added (see: Alfonso Desid-

erio, *Viaggio nelle basi americane in Italia*, Limes, no. 3, 2007, in: <https://www.limesonline.com/rivista/viaggio-nelle-basi-americane-in-italia-14615759/>). Other sources even claim that there are about 120 American bases (see: Maurizio Stefanini, *Arrivano in Italia 70 soldati americani. Here is the map of NATO and US military bases*, Il Foglio, 29 June 2022, in: <https://www.ilfoglio.it/cronaca/2022/06/29/news/arrivano-in-italia-70-soldati-americani-ecco-la-mappa-delle-basi-militari-nato-e-usa-4170197/>).

- 21 Natalino Ronzitti, op. cit., p. 7.
- 22 Richard G. Catoire, *A CINC for Sub-Saharan Africa? Rethinking the Unified Command Plan, Parameters*, Winter 2000-01, in: <https://web.archive.org/web/20171109134629/http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/articles/00winter/catoire.htm>
- 23 AfriCom's command and control structure consists of approximately 2,000 people, 1,400 of whom are based in Stuttgart and the rest distributed between offices in the UK and the USA at: <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command>.
- 24 *US doubles down in Côte d'Ivoire as France pulls out*, 9 gennaio 2025, in: https://www.theafricareport.com/373297/us-doubles-down-in-cote-divoire-as-france-pulls-out/?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru.
- 25 John R. Deni, *The new NATO Force Model: ready for launch?*, NATO Defense College, War Series, n. 4, May 2024, in: <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1937>.
- 26 *These forces are also joined by the Allied Reaction Force, which replaces the NATO Response Force*.
- 27 Sven Biscop, *The New Force Model: NATO's European Army?*, Egmont Policy Brief n. 285, September 2022, in: https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2022/09/Sven-Biscop_PolicyBrief285_vFinal.pdf.

- 28 Sven Biscop, *The New Force Model: NATO's European Army?*, op. cit.
- 29 John R. Deni, op. cit., p. 3, European military forces, currently certified as rapid intervention forces, are in fact not at all. Gabriel Rinaldi, *Germany Can't fulfill NATO Obligations, Says Army Chief in Leaked Memo*, Politico, 11 April 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-nato-leaked-memo-defense-budget-boris-pistorius/>; Elise Vincent, *French Military Confronts Challenge of Personnel Quitting*, Le Monde, 10 May 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/05/10/french-military-confronts-challenge-of-personnel-quitting_6026178_7.html.
- 30 Vd.: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/5-choses-savoir/5-choses-savoir-partenariat-camo>.
- 31 De Gaulle's doubts were not entirely unfounded. They took shape following the shift from Foster Dulles' American strategy of 'massive retaliation' to Robert McNamara's 'flexible response'. French concerns, moreover, were also shared by American military analysts themselves (see: Carl H. Amme, *NATO Strategy and Flexible Response*, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1967/may/nato-strategy-and-flexible-response>, maggio 1967).
- 32 Kennedy urges "cohesive Europe" in equal partnership with U.S.; mixed atomic force is deferred, *The New York Times*, 26 June 1963.
- 33 See Macron's second speech at the Sorbonne on April 25, 2024 (<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/04/24/discours-sur-leurope>), when he emphatically argued that "l'Europe peut mourir", forgetting that this can happen because France is still unable to make, militarily, the choice made by Germany on the monetary level.
- 34 Vincenzo Camporini, Domenico Moro, *Towards the European 'dual army': the SPD proposal for the 28th army*,

Centro Studi sul Federalismo, Commentary no. 201, 30 November 2020. In particular, for the American experience, the reference is Federalist Paper No. 46 (James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, London, Penguin Books, 1987, pp. 297-302).

- 35 France opposed the strengthening of the European Military Staff when it came to strengthening the latter with the input of part of the command-and-control structure of the Euro-corps (interview with Gen. Graziano's staff when the latter was in charge of the European Military Staff).
- 36 Gregory W. Pedlow, *The Evolution of NATO's Command Structure*, 1951-2009.
- 37 Richard D. Hooker Jr., *A new NATO command structure*, Atlantic Council, 5 giugno 2024, in: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/a-new-nato-command-structure/>; *Initiative pour l'Europe - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique*, 26 September 2017, in: <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique>.
- 38 It should be recalled that EuCom, as just mentioned, is headed by the American armed forces stationed in Europe: *US Army* based in Wiesbaden, the *US Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa* based in Ramstein, and the *US Naval Forces Command Europe-Africa* based in Naples. Therefore, NATO's command and control structures mirror the same command and control structure of the US armed forces stationed in Europe and Turkey and, often, the command at the operational level of the two parallel structures is entrusted to an American officer. Moreover, as can be deduced from the command designations, the same American structure presides over the African continent.

- 39 *FACT SHEET: U.S. Contributions to NATO Capabilities*, 8 luglio 2016, in: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/08/fact-sheet-us-contributions-nato-capabilities>.
- 40 NATO, *Allied Command Operations (ACO)*, in: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52091.htm.
- 41 In: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/it/pdf>, p. 14.
- 42 Helsinki European Council of 10 December 1999.
- 43 NATO, *Washington Summit Declaration*, https://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm?selectedLocale=en.
- 44 *Interopérabilité ou interchangeabilité. Une bataille de mots qui en cache une autre*, July 2023, in: club.bruxelles2.eu/2023/07/decryptage-interoperabilite-ou-interchangeabilite-une-bataille-de-mots-qui-en-cache-une-autre/.
- 45 NATO, *Ballistic missile defence*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49635.htm.
- 46 NATO, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2021/nato-assets>.
- 47 NATO, *Multinational tanker unit air-to-air refuelling capability grows as eighth aircraft arrives*, 20 June 2024, in: https://ac.nato.int/archive/2024/MMU_8th_aircraft.
- 48 Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, in: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/it/pdf>, p. 5.
- 49 Paragraph 2 of Art. 42 TEU already states that ‘*The policy of the Union in accordance with this Section shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States, shall respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised through the North Atlantic Treaty Organ-*

isation (NATO), under the North Atlantic Treaty, and shall be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework’.

- 50 Federal Foreign Office, *Integrated Security for Germany (National Security Strategy)*, June 2023, in: <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/National-Security-Strategy-EN.pdf>. The German Federal Government’s strategy also states that ‘Furthermore, the Federal Government will strive to strengthen European air-defence capabilities within the NATO framework’, p. 32.
- 51 Defence Staff, *The Strategic Concept of Chief of Defence Staff*, September 2022, in: https://www.difesa.it/assets/allegati/28000/concetto_strategico_del_casmd_2022.pdf, p. 3.
- 52 *Revue nationale stratégique* 2022, op. cit, p. 39.
- 53 *Revue nationale stratégique* 2022, op. cit, p. 9.
- 54 Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, *Europe still needs America*, Politico, 2 November 2020, in: <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-still-needs-america/>.
- 55 Jana Puglierin, *Germany’s perception of the EU defence industrial “toolbox”*, ARES, January 2024, in: <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ARES-91-Comment.pdf>, p. 3. The article also points out that only a small part of the EUR 100 billion earmarked for defence has been made available for the two main European military projects: the new-generation aircraft, FCAS, jointly promoted with France and Spain, and the Franco-German new-generation Main Ground Battle System tank.
- 56 We must also add the convention held in London a few months before the Ottawa convention.
- 57 Sven Biscop, *This Is Not a New World Order*, Ghent: Owl Press, 2024.

- 58 Sylvie Kauffmann, « *L'année Trump s'ouvre sur une offensive antidémocratique et anti-européenne menée par Elon Musk* », *Le Monde*, 3 January 2025, in: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2025/01/03/l-annee-trump-s-ouvre-sur-une-offensive-antidemocratique-et-anti-europeenne-menee-par-elon-musk_6479088_3232.html.
- 59 Sven Biscop, *This Is Not a New World Order*, op. cit., pp. 117-118.
- 60 Antony Blinken: '*China has been trying to have it both ways*', *Financial Times*, 3 January 2025, in: <https://www.ft.com/content/25798b9f-1ad9-4f7f-ab9e-d6f36bbe3edf>.
- 61 John J. Mearsheimer, *The False Promise of International Institutions*, *International Security*, Vol. 19, n. 3, Winter, 1994-1995; Charles A. Kupchan, Clifford A. Kupchan, *The Promise of Collective Security*, *International Security*, Vol. 20, n. 1 (Summer, 1995).
- 62 House Passes Bill to Impose Sanctions on I.C.C. Officials for Israeli Prosecutions, *The New York Times*, 9 January 2025, in: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/09/us/politics/icc-sanctions-house-israel.html>; *Trump's Return May Worsen Financial Woes for Global Health Institutions*, *The New York Times*, 19 December 2024, in: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/19/health/global-health-funding-us-trump.html?searchResultPosition=3>; *U.S. blocks WTO judge reappointment as dispute settlement crisis looms*, *Reuters*, 27 agosto 2018, in: <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us-blocks-wto-judge-reappointment-as-dispute-settlement-crisis-looms-idUSKCN1LC19N/>.

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