European Defense Integration: Public Opinion and Instinct

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Since 1945 public opinion polls across Europe show a consistent reluctance towards European defense integration. This is a reflex to the penumbra of violence caused by two world wars and the result of a robust transatlantic security umbrella. European publics are wary of hard power dynamics and prefer to buttress the European Union's normative projection as a superpower that avoids violence as a means of influence. The European public portrays little confidence in their military capacities, are unwilling to increase defense expenditures and generally do not treat military prowess as a measure of national greatness.[1] Still, they resolutely refuse to abdicate authority over their national forces to establish a common European defense. Emboldened by an unstable atmosphere and a series of internal and external catalysts, EU and national leaders believe the stars have never been better aligned to finally achieve a seventy-year ambition of a single European army.[2] Previous attempts have moved defense integration progressively closer to that goal, but outcomes consistently fall short of the strategic autonomy that national leaders and EU politicians desire. Public willingness is a pre-condition for developing an EU army, but after examining perceived threats, strategic drivers, and public instinct, Eurobarometer demonstrates that while European are supportive of cooperation, they are still reluctant towards defense integration. Eurobarometer is a standard instrument for measuring public opinion on EU policies, but it should be noted that the sample size is 28,000 (roughly, 1,000 per nation) which does not indicate overwhelming

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[1] Judt, Tony. *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe*. New York: New York University Press, 2011. 26.

[2] Taylor, Paul. *Jumping over its shadow. Germany and The Future of European Defense.* Friends of Europe. 2017.
https://www.friendsofeurope.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/GermanReport_v7_web_0.pdf

support or opposition in a population of nearly 513 million. However, its continuity across 28-member states provide general assumptions as to where the diverse publics may collectively align.

Perceived Threats:

In 2000, the threats Europeans feared the most were non-military related. Eurobarometer records that the public considered organized crime, accident at a nuclear plant, and terrorism to be the top three threats facing Europe.[3] Threats that had to do with conventional military concerns were eighth and ninth on the list. The 2000 results are insightful because despite significant events since 9/11—The US-led Iraq invasion, European Enlargement, the 2008 financial crisis, Russian annexation of Crimea, and the US Trump Administration—there appears to be little change in public opinion towards military related threats. In a recent special Eurobarometer survey conducted in November 2018, when asked "what are the main risks/threats for the European Union in the coming years?" the top three ranked by Europeans are terrorist attacks, poor management of immigration, and pollution.[4] These are still non-military threats. "Conflicts with Countries outside the EU" received 22 percent of responses which was only seven percent of above responders who considered "Armed Conflict within the EU" to be a threat. Why then has there been a significant increase in dialog from the European Leaders urging the development of military capacity? In 2017, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, announced that "by 2025 we need a fully-fledged European Defense Union."[5] That same year Eurobarometer asked European publics if they are in favor of an EU army for the future: only 16 percent were "in favor" and 39 percent were "somewhat in favor," the rest opposed or undecided.[6] Notwithstanding the context of the years

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[3] Manigart, Phillipe. "Public Opinion and European Defense." Royal Military Academy (2001). 4. URL: http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_146_en.pdf

[4] Special Eurobarometer 479, 13.

[5] Juncker, Jean-Claude. European Commission Speech, State of the Union Address (2017). ULR: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-3165_en.htm

[6] Special Eurobarometer 461, 14.

between, support for an EU army was higher in 2000 with 19 percent "in favor," although there were thirteen fewer member states at that period.[7] pPublic opinion does not match the enthusiasm expressed by EU leaders.

In 2017, President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, sent an open letter to EU member states outlining the three major threats Europe faces: an assertive China, an aggressive Russia, and terror and anarchy in the Middle East.[8] While these threats cause a general sense of worry, there are many reasons why they do not serve to convince the public that an EU army is essential to solving them. China's posture projects in the South China Sea do not presently act as sufficient provocation for an EU army. However, incursions into Europe's economy, transport and rail systems, ports, and companies pose the threat of unmitigated Chinese investments and influence in the continent.[9] This situation would be best controlled by synchronized regulatory efforts rather than inciting an arms race with China in which justifying the expenditure to the public would be difficult without perpetuating the threat itself, mainly because less than two out of ten Europeans consider competition from emerging countries to be the primary challenge.[10] China's expansionist policies are perceived as an effort to upend the existing international architecture, but Europe would be unable to confront or control major conflict unilaterally for quite some time if at all.

Although Russian aggression did spark public alarm after annexing Crimea in 2014, the concern of a conventional military threat from Russia is more a matter of geographic proximity. Eurobarometer indicates a "Common Security and Defense Policy" for countries bordering Russia to have 71-87 percent approval within those states.[11] Interestingly, Eastern European states also indicate approval for an "EU Army" from 50-71 percent approval, except for Estonia who is less enthusiastic at 48 percent. All the same, Rand reports that most NATO members bordering Russia perceive an existential threat that they feel can be addressed only through the presence

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[7] Manigart, 16.

[8] Tusk, Donald. "United we stand, divided we fall": letter by President Donald Tusk to the 27 EU heads of state or government on the future of the EU before the Malta summit.*"* European Council website, URL: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/01/31/tusk-letter-future-europe/

[9] Ewing, Jack and Milan Schreuer. "Europe and the U.S. Agree on Chinese Threat, but Are Too Busy Feuding to Fit It." *The New York Times.* December 7, 2018. ULR: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/07/business/european-union-trump-china-trade.html

[10] Standard Eurobarometer 89, 14.

[11] Special Barometer 461, 13-20.

of U.S. and NATO troops on their territory. Eastern states are hedging their bets by advocating for all the available options that make their risk a collective matter. However, more Europeans are concerned about hybrid warfare and political propaganda from Russia than of it carrying out an attack.[12]

Not only is terrorism traditionally seen as a security threat for intelligence and law enforcement to manage, but Europe has consistently criticized the United States for using military means for counterterrorism. Terrorism in Europe is an undeniably transnational threat that does require increased cooperation among the EU states, but according to the public opinion in June 2017, the majority (63 percent) of Europeans surveyed believe that law enforcement is doing enough to combat terrorism.[13] Europe argues that emerging threats are better dealt with through development strategies, diplomacy, and by paying attention to the deep-seated causes, but this widespread sentiment could change with an increased number of attacks. EU member states are also deeply fissured over interventionism after the 2003 Iraq invasion, so mitigating anarchy in the Middle East is unlikely to win public censuses for a common defense. Any of the aforementioned threats could escalate, and Europe's leaders could, in one sense, be preparing for the worst-case scenario. As the necessity is not readily apparent, how much is the call for increased integration attributed to a vintage fear?

Fear that the US will withdraw security from the region is historical anxiety for Europe. Tusk outlines that the Trump Administration is putting into question the last seventy years of American foreign policy after the president declared NATO obsolete and evidence of American isolationist policies continue to emerge.[14] This dynamic is deeply interwoven into the legacy of European defense integration and, just as it did after WWII and at the end of Cold War, it acts as a strong vehicle for European leaders and political elites to inch integration forward. Along with withdrawing from a number of international agreements, in November 2018, the Trump Administration decided to withdraw from the 1987 nuclear treaty banning medium rage ground-launching missiles. This compelled French President Emmanuel Macron to announce that Europeans can no longer rely on

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[12] Pezard, Stephanie, Andrew Radin, Thomas S. Szayna, F. Stephen Larrabee. "European Relations with Russia. Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis." *RAND Corporation.* 2017. 14.

[13] Special Eurobarometer 464b, December 2017.

[14] Parker, Ashley. "Donald Trump Says NATO is 'Obsolete,' UN is 'Political Game.'" *The New York Times. April 1, 2016.* https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/04/02/donald-trump-tells-crowd-hed-be-fine-if-nato-broke-up/

the US to defend them and that they could not be protected without a "true, European army."[15] German Chancellor Angela Merkel promptly supported such sentiments before the European Parliament stating, "We should, and I'm saying this also because of developments in recent years, work on a vision of one day establishing a real European army."[16] But where these politicians are normative, the public is lukewarm. When asked what should be the priorities for the European Union to make life safer for its citizens, "more cooperation between countries in defense policy" received 37 percent approval compared to the top priorates such as immigration policy and combating terrorism.[17] If anything, effort to achieve strategic autonomy could act as a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it would encourage the kind of withdrawal from Europe advocated by American policy hawks.[18] Europe may also lose its champion of US relations if the United Kingdom does leave the EU. The perceived threats and those announced by political leaders lack the urgency to convince the public that a European army is necessary, why then is there so much desire to create one even without public consensus?

Strategic Drivers

One strategic driver is the effort to mitigate complications and limitations caused by cooperation. In a continuum of the European Union's core integration project, defense cooperation is to the left of where EU politicians need it to be to drive European unity forward. Defense integration moves Europe progressively right in the direction of greater cohesion with the potential to expand its global role. The EU's use of civilian power has attained extraordinary economic power and influence but is there a cap on the global role the EU could play without military capacity? Some argue it is an 'undeniable attribute' of full power status were Europe to achieve a common army.[19] Andrew Moravcsik exposes the seductiveness of attaining military power as something the

[15] Meichtry, Stacy and Laurence Norman. ''France's Macron Calls for Creating a 'European Army'.'' *The Wall Stree Journal. November 6, 2018 URL: https://www.wsj.com/articles/frances-macron-calls-for-creating-a-european-army-1541528803.*

[16] Bennhold, Katerina and Steven Erlanger. ''Merkel Joins Macron in Call for a European Army 'One Day'. *The New York Times. Nov. 13, 2018. URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/13/world/europe/merkel-macron-european-army.html*

[17] Special Eurobarometer 479, 2018. 11 & Standard Eurobarometer 89. 11.

[18] McCormick, John. *The European Superpower.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2007. 80.

[19] Van Staden, Aldred. "The Case for Complementarity," Speech to a conference organized by the German Council on Foreign Relations, Berlin, June 2003, reproduced on Tech Central Station website, www.techcentral.be.

US respects, but he states that European defense is a dangerous pipe dream due to the historical inability to force coordination among various state policy preferences.[20] EU members are divided along a variety of lines regarding their preferred foreign policy and defense philosophies such as Atlanticists, Europeanists, neutral states, interventionists, and non-interventionists. Leaders at the EU level have long desired to emancipate itself from the intergovernmental model which reinforces the individuality of member states that causes unnavigable political impediments as a result. In 2018, 75 percent agreed that a "Common Security and Defense Policy is a good thing" but only 55percent support the creation of an EU army with the sum of "in favor" and "somewhat in favor" responses.[21] This difference in public opinion is evidence of the perpetual contest between the intergovernmental policy that requires unanimity from member states and the supranational track that would consolidate decision-making under the single authority of an EU institution. Member states are willing to cooperate, coordinate, and participate so long as it remains voluntary, a coalition of the willing. For example, in 2000 in the case of military intervention, 47 percent believed it should remain the choice of state governments ready to send troops, 17 percent by majority voting though keeping the right not to send troops and only 11 percent for unanimous voting where all countries have to agree.[22] Very little in public opinion and state preferences have changed since. Under the current Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), the European External Action Service is comprised of 18 EU Battlegroups made up of 1,500 men from twelve participating member states. Participants make a political commitment to train their Battlegroups, serve in peacekeeping operations, and respond to conflicts and crises around the world on a six-month rotation scheme. Deployment requires a unanimous decision, and each member state retains the right to refuse the deployment of its Battlegroup.[23] Permanent Structure and Cooperation (PESCO), signed in 2016, has demonstrated a practical expression of the EU's will to build an integrated

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[20] Moravcsik, Andrew. "How Europe can win without an army." *The Financial Times.* 2003.
https://www.princeton.edu/~amoravcs/library/FT_4-3-03.pdf

[21] Special Eurobarometer 461, 17.

[22] Manigart, 13.

[23] Reykers, Yf. (2017) "EU Battlegroups: High costs, no benefits" *Contemporary Security Policy*, 38:3, 457-470, DOI: 10.1080/13523260.2017.1348568

European Defense.[24] But, similar to its predecessors, its realization relies heavily on willing compliance from signees and decision-making remains in the hands of member states. Although PESCO has a more sophisticated expenditure plan, it does not necessarily mean the public will support increased spending as they are more concerned with the EU's financial situation than anything else presently. If most EU member states are unwilling to contribute two percent of their GDPs to NATO over the past eighteen years, there is little evidence to suggest an increase in motivation to spend on defense just because it is not NATO. Besides, doing so would only exacerbate the historic resource duplication conflict. Nevertheless, the joint-cooperation lead by Germany and France is significant because it is an unprecedented relationship and may provide a legitimate shift in the history of defense integration. That is if they are able to navigate their distinctive strategic cultures successfully.

Even though defense integration has progressed in such a way that member states no longer have exclusive autonomy over their national forces, the notion of cooperation, not integration, in matters of defense is an essential factor in public opinion. Among the many theories explaining European integration is Lindberg and Scheingold's concept of "permissive consensus" which suggests that political elites have been able to pursue their policy interests because of public disinterest.[25] Underemphasizing public participation can be found in the EU's post-WWII blueprints, not only because the architects considered a major danger in the restive politics of the masses but also because after two internecine European's public was ready to return to their daily lives unencumbered by political discord.[26] It was believed experts and technocrats would better serve the people, a philosophy that underlies the "democratic deficit" within the EU and why there are certain areas of integration that brush beyond the acceptable zone. While "Permissive consensus" may have occurred in other policy areas, public opinion towards defense integration cannot be summarized as disinterest, but rather as unremitting opposition to losing sovereignty and control over national security. Systematic defense cooperation has contributed to the preservation

[24] European Council, Council of the European Union. *Reinforcing European Defence: remarks by President Donald Tusk at the event on PESCO*. December 2017. ULR: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/12/14/reinforcing-european-defence-remarks-by-president-donald-tusk-at-the-pesco-event/

[25] Lindberg, Leon N., and Stuart A. Scheingold. Europe's would-be polity: patterns of change in the European community. Prentice Hall, 1970. 41-42

[26] Forlenza, Rosario. "The Politics of the Abendland: Christian Democracy and the Idea of Europe after the Second World War." *Contemporary European History* 26, no. 2 (2017): 261-86. doi:10.1017/S0960777317000091.

of national sovereignty such that EU states do not war with one another anymore but fully renouncing their national armies has historically lacked support. If necessity and willingness are not clearly evident, the call for a European army may be more so the politicization of an even more sensitive issue.

The second core driver concerns using militarization to solidify European identity at a time where anti-EU, nationalist, and isolationist sentiments are precipitously rising in European states. Stephanie Anderson notes that theorists of nation-building put great emphasis on foreign and security policy as a tool for rallying the people because it makes people masters over their own territory.[27] Such is true for a traditional state, but can it work for the EU? Europe is much less a territory than it is an idea, and militaries are fundamentally disposed to the physicality of borders, statehood, and identity. But a European army is not novel in the scheme of European unity in that by joining national militaries together as one would guarantee the decoupling of nationalism and violence.[28] Most Europeans today do not identify with the militarism of their past, but their national identities and sovereignties are preserved and protected by the knowledge that some instruments of Westphalian statehood remain to resist undesirable elements in the EU agenda.[29] Despite the EU's efforts to encourage a homogeneity that will potentially solidify the European project, most Europeans still prefer to define themselves according to their nations as a reaction to the unattractive sides of integration and globalization. In the 2018 Eurobarometer report, 55percent of Europeans define themselves first by their nationality and then by their European citizenship, 6percent see themselves firstly as European citizens then as nationals of their country, and only two percent see themselves as European only.[30] Most suspect this is a generational matter in that Europe's youth will develop a different perspective about their identities that transcend state association, especially in the emergence of identity politics. The demographic that responded to fears of conventional threats were 55 and older which could mean that in time, traditional concepts of defense and state security may eventually resemble something like a "post-

[27] Stephanie Anderson, *Crafting EU Security Policy: In Pursuit of a European Identity (*London: Lynne Rienner. 2008), 177.

[28] Spinelli, Altiero and Ernesto Rossi. *Ventotene Manifesto, For a Free and United Europe. A Draft Manifesto.* 1944. Section II.

[29] Posen, Barry R. "ESDP and the Structure of World Power." *The International Spectator* 39, no. 1 (2004): 5-17.

[30] Standard Eurobarometer 89, Spring 2018, 35.

modern army" or a kind of security infrastructure that matches the systems and sentiments to come.[31] Much effort has gone into breaking down the barriers of traditional statehood that necessitate a national defense, such as the Schengen Treaty where the free movement of people means security is not compartmentalized or nationally exclusive anymore. External and internal lines are diminishing or dissolving, but still, the public is reluctant to translate such change as a reason to dismantle their national armies. Still, many Europeans do believe that the time of national armies is coming to an end, but rather than building a new one in the shape of a European army, perhaps more attention should be paid to how the public instinct is leading the EU towards an approach more consistent with its image, capacities, and advantages.

Public Instinct & Niche Capabilities

A 1996 article in *The Observer* wrote that the instincts of the European public were at odds with the ambitions of the political elites.[32] The public's historic instincts to rebuff the creation of a conventional European army can be interpreted as a warning device. While Europe may want to be equal to the US, if leaders spend the money to compete militarily, they risk losing public support and a particular normative image of itself that has thus far gained Euro-activists, both within Europe and internationally. Europe has a comparative advantage as a soft power. Rather than exert political and budgetary capital building conventional military capacity, investing in the platforms and psyche that already exist within Europe would likely gain greater public support. Knowledge-based networks and epistemic communities are redefining formal decision-making and public influence which is reshaping how to handle crises collectively.[33] Rather than selling the idea of a common army which has proven historically unpopular, systematically complex, and in conflict with its normative framework, horizontal integration with civilian and quasi-military power such as development aid, EU accession pressure, intelligence, and new technologies may provide a more feasible strategy. Rather than vie for strategic autonomy via military,

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[31] Manigart, 5.

[32] As quoted by Clifford J. Carrubba in "The Electoral Connection in European Union Politics. *The Journal of Politics, Vol. 63, No. 1. 2001. 141-158.*

[33] Cross, Mai'a Davis. *Security Integration in Europe: How Knowledge-based Networks Are Transforming the European Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 214.

developing niche capabilities would allow Europe to complement the transatlantic partnership and compete without encouraging the rearming of the world, plus, it would undoubtedly be cheaper. Furthermore, Europeans may be more inclined to integrate in some areas where the US is less comfortable, such as a European Intelligence Service. Intelligence activities lie at the heart of state sovereignty similarly to defense, but it makes more sense politically and practically as Europeans do not couple privacy and liberty as inflexibly as Americans, which is why intelligence—rather than defense—integration may appear less threating to member states' sovereignty.[34] For sure, this approach has the potential to act as the backdoor to supranationalism. Public opinion on a European intelligence service is vague, but it should be noted that resistance would likely come from a public distrust of the lack of transparency in which epistemic communities, intelligence services, and knowledge-based networks tend to operate. All the same, by focusing on niche capabilities and integration of existing systems, the EU could exploit its broader soft power toolbox while effectively relying on its transatlantic partner and NATO's military capabilities currently at its disposal.[35]

CONCLUSION

European defense integration is a combustible mix of political ambition and public reluctance. Political elites, national and EU leaders are emphasizing the necessity of a European army when the public's threat perception appears to fall short of urgent or essential. The public support defense cooperation but are lukewarm about advanced integration that would jeopardize voluntary participation, sovereignty, and national security. The strategic driver to emancipate from the intergovernmental model requires a consensus beyond what public opinion are willing to achieve and politicians capable of building. This challenge could change as lines that once demarked territory and boundaries are dissolving with each generation and technological wave. A single, united army may aid in solidifying a European identity, but it is unlikely to be the direct catalyst as European public sentiment is increasingly non-martial. Moravcsik offers that while EU is navigating its global role now and for the future, "the

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[34] Whitman, James Q. "The Two Western Cultures of Privacy: Dignity versus Liberty. *The Yale Law Journal,* Vol. 113, No. 6. 2004. 1151-1221.

[35] European Commission. *Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defense. 2017, 12.*

real problem is that European defense schemes distract Europe from its true comparative advantage in world politics; Europe is the quiet superpower."[36] By leaning into public instinct, the EU could strategically choose to demilitarize and allow knowledge-based communities and networks to assist in achieving a type of autonomy that respects public opinion towards defense integration and reinforces its normative pursuits. European publics are unlikely to reverse their historical reluctance and dialog by political elites and EU leaders could be just that, another expectant phase in the quixotic legacy of European defense integration.

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[36] Moravcsik, *How Europe Could win without an Army.* 2003.

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