The European Army and the PESCO: NATO or nothing

Abstract:

The long-lasting question of the European Union's integration in security and defence is reappearing now due to the multiple external threats and internal tensions that the Union is facing. On this context, the recent creation of PESCO has been a significant effort at providing the EU with the strategic autonomy it needs to tackle these challenges.

The implementation of the cooperative PESCO framework, along with the already functioning EU Battlegroups, might set the basis for another long-lasting project: the European Army. However, any endeavour towards the creation of this hypothetical army must be carefully framed because of its geopolitical consequences. Its foundation, while theoretically possible, might not be convenient due to the potential conflicts that may arise with NATO and with the United States of America.

Keywords:

Common Foreign and Security Policy, European Army, EU Battlegroups, European Union, NATO, PESCO, strategic autonomy, USA.

How to quote:

JIMÉNEZ GARCÍA, Edgar. *The European Army and the PESCO: NATO or nothing*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 97/2019. enlace web IEEE y/o enlace bie[3] (consultado día/mes/año)

*NOTE: The ideas contained in the Opinion Papers shall be responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense
.

Introduction: Does the European Union need an army?

The European Union has constituted itself as an international player with global interests[1], excelling in the fields of economy, trade and cooperation, yet, it has always shown weakness when facing menaces concerning its own security and defense. External threats, like the Ukrainian Crisis, the war against ISIS or the growing assertiveness of Russia have demonstrated that the EU needs a fast-response force that could tackle unexpected challenges on its borders[2] and that may allow the Union to play a more prominent role in a world characterized by a scenario of unbalanced multipolarity and great power competition.

Furthermore, Donald Trump's recent statements about the uncertain future of the NATO[3] and the growing unilateralism that the USA is showing have forced the EU to rethink how its defense should be configured in the decades to come. Since no EU country by itself has the capacity to address the multiple challenges that they face[4], the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is providing the Union with the protection that it needs for its own collective defense, and assisting the comparatively small European national armies on sustaining large or long-lasting military operations[5]. This traditional reliance on NATO, however, is being challenged by the perspective of a more autonomous Europe, able to

---

[1] DÍAZ, Joel. "La Política Común de Seguridad y Defensa de la UE: una renovada estrategia para un nuevo escenario europeo y global". Opinion document 65/2018, IEEE, 2018, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2018/DIEEEO65-2018_PCSD_JoelDiaz.pdf consulted on: 18/04/2019, p. 3-6.

[2] "Present and Future of the Common Security & Defense Policy". Working paper of the Spanish CESEDEN/IEEE, 2018, available at: available at: http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_trabajo/2018/DIEEET01-2018_Futuro_PCSD_VisionDesdeSur_ENGLISH.pdf consulted on: 12/03/2019, p. 44-45.

[3] Vid: HERSZENHORN, David & BAYER, Lili. "Trump's whiplash NATO summit." Politico, 7/12/18. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-threatens-to-pull-out-of-nato/ consulted on: 10/03/2019, or, STRACQUALURSI, Verónica. & ACOSTA, Jim. "New York Times: Trump raised withdrawing the US from NATO several times in 2018". *CNN*, 16/01/2019. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/15/politics/trump-nato-us-withdraw/index.html consulted on:14/03/2019.

[4] Federica Mogherini's foreword for the "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". European Union, 2016, available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf%20 consulted on: 07/03/2019, p. 3-4.

[5] TRYBUS, Martin. "The Legal Foundations of a European Army". Institute of European Law, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham, 2016, available at: http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/2105/1/IELWorkingPaper2016No1The_Legal_Foundations_of_a_European_Army.pdf consulted on: 29/03/2019, p. 10.

assume its own defense without relying on external help, a goal that is not shared by all Member States. And these concerns arrive in a moment in which internal problems, brought by the *brexit*, have placed the Union and its model in a compromised situation.

Thus, the EU is facing a proliferation of internal and external threats (classical and hybrid threats, cyberwarfare, new rising powers, a changing international scenario, etc.) with increasingly reduced defensive capacities[6]. Nevertheless, this context has also paved the ground for a push towards a common European defense framework with the recent creation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Along with it, an old debate has appeared again: the possible creation of a European Army. French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have already stated their support to this idea[7] and the project has found a warm reception in the European Commission.

While some experts and high-ranking military personnel[8] label this endeavor as 'unwise' or 'not necessary', it seems like Europe is walking towards a closer cooperation in defense affairs. Yet, the European Army is still a blurry and controversial reality. Abundant literature can be found on this topic, but the present paper particularly builds on the military and legal contributions of Trybus, the PESCO analysis carried out by DÍAZ and the geostrategic considerations of Pontijas, Raik, Järvenpää and Howorth.

Following these authors, this study aims to answer one question: will a European Army exist? The potential existence of said army constitutes the dependent variable of this

---

[6] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "Las iniciativas británica y alemana de cooperación en defensa". Opinion document 57/2018, IEEE, 2018, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2018/DIEEEO57-2018_Defensa_EU_Alemania-UK_JLPontijas.pdf consulted on: 25/04/2019, p. 3-4.

[7] KAPPLER, Michael. "Bruselas celebra el apoyo de Macron y Merkel a un Ejército europeo*." Europa Press,* 14/11/2018. Available at: https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-bruselas-celebra-apoyo-macron-merkel-ejercito-europeo-20181114173041.html consulted:14/03/2019 & *"*Debate on the Future of Europe: opening statement by Angela Merkel, German Federal Chancellor (15:08 - 15:35)" Multimedia Center. European Parliament. Available at: https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/debate-on-the-future-of-europe-opening-statement-by-angela-merkel-german-federal-chancellor-_I162933-V_rv consulted: 04/05/2019.

[8] GOULD, Joe. "NATO official warns EU force would be 'unwise'*". Defense News,* 17/11/2018, consulted on: 14/03/2019. Available at: https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2018/11/17/nato-official-warns-eu-force-would-be-unwise/ consulted on:14/03/2019 & TIGNER, B. "A 'European' Army? Eminently Defensible But Not Probable for a Long Time to Come". The Atlantic Council, 2018. Available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/a-european-army-eminently-defensible-but-not-probable-for-a-long-time-to-come consulted on:04/05/2019.

study, while the independent variables are: the possibility, namely related with the concept of 'strategic autonomy'; and the geopolitical convenience of that army, that must be studied regarding the possible reactions and perceptions of the NATO and the USA. So, the main hypothesis defended by this study is that the creation of the European Army is possible if the EU builds its own strategic autonomy but, due to potential geopolitical tensions with NATO and with the USA, its creation might not be convenient if detached from the Alliance. Thus, this army's existence is not to be expected in the short-medium term, until these questions are solved[9].

The present paper offers a bibliographical review of specialized papers and articles in order to answer the aforementioned question. It starts by introducing the concept and models of the European Army and continues by analyzing the geopolitical debates generated around its two main independent variables. Is this holistic, interdisciplinary but geopolitically centered approach what I consider the innovative contribution of the present study to this topic. Furthermore, the definition of a European Army, an assessment of the EU Battlegroups as a possible blueprint and different considerations for both the USA and NATO as geopolitical actors are not often found, so this study could be complementary to the previous works that are cited here on those aspects.

Definition and models of the European Army: integration vs. cooperation. The EU battlegroups

The European Army[10] can be broadly defined as an organization of European, regular and professional military personnel and equipment that are partially or totally dependent on the European Union[11]. Without dwelling on technical details, it must be noted that

---

[9] The condition of possibility for the European Army, namely framed around the concept (indicator) of "strategic autonomy", is directly proportional to the existence of the European Army. The more strategic autonomy the EU gains, the more likely the European Army is to exist. On the other hand, its geopolitical convenience, measured trough the perceived tensions and blockades with NATO and with the USA (indicators), presents an inversely proportional relation with the existence of said army, as the bigger these tensions and blockades are perceived to be, the less likely the European Army is to exist.

[10] Please, notice that when the word "Europe" (or "European") is being used in the present work, it refers to the European Union, not to the geographical area of Europe. On that regard, the European Army can be more accurately called "European Union army".

[11] TRYBUS, Martin. *Op. Cit.,* p. 1-2.

different benchmarks for the creation of said army[12] have been proposed through years, generating a debate between integrative and cooperative models:

On one hand, the fully integrated models, like the European Defense Force, are the "purest" form of a European Army that should totally replace the armed forces of the Member States[13]. This implies that the EU members should willingly confer their sovereignty[14] on foreign policy and defense matters to the European Union itself. On the short-medium term this is unlikely to happen[15] mainly because it would entail extensive administrative, institutional, logistic and internal challenges. Moreover, it would face the reticence of some Member States towards deeper integration (Poland, Sweden, Greece, etc.). Other issues further complicate this option, like the generalized lack of trust on the European Union as a reliable security provider, the absence of a unitarian conception of Europe, the different strategic culture of each state, etc.

The only feasible option, thus, are the cooperative, *ad hoc* models, that focus on NATO-like structures, relying on voluntary contributions from the Member States, as the "European Rapid Reaction Force" or "Joint Expeditionary Force"[16]. On that regard, the article 42 of the TEU[17] recognizes the possibility of the Member States to sign more binding commitments to one another and to establish a CFSP-oriented permanent structured cooperation within the Union's framework without losing sovereignty[18].

---

[12] Vid. Annex Table 1: Some possible models and blueprints for a European Army.

[13] TRYBUS, Martin. *Op. Cit.,* p. 7-8.

[14] Vid. Art. 5 TEU, Protocol Nº2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, & Arts. 2-6 and 218.3 of the TFEU.

[15] CÓZAR, Beatriz. "La cooperación estructurada permanente ¿El impulso definitivo que necesita la Política Común de Seguridad y Defensa?" Research document 12/2017, IEEE, 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_investig/2017/DIEEEINV12-2017_PCSD_CooperacionPermanente_BeatrizCozar.pdf consulted on: 20/04/2019 p. 6-8 & PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la Unión Europea". Analysis document 08/2019, IEEE, 2019, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2019/DIEEEA08_2019JOSPON-EjercitoEuropeo.pdf consulted on: 02/04/2019 p. 7, 13.

[16] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "Las iniciativas británica y alemana de cooperación en defensa".*Op. Cit.*, p. 4-7. & TRYBUS, Martin. *Op. Cit.*, p. 7-8.

[17] From a legal point of view, this article also limits the scope of a hypothetical European Army to "missions outside the Union" (Art. 42.1 TEU) and even has a sketch for a "European mutual defense" clause (Art, 42.7 TEU). For more information about the legal framework, vid. DÍAZ, Joel. *Op. Cit.*

[18] *Ibíd.* p. 7-9.

Following this logic, a potential blueprint[19] for a future cooperative European Army could be the EU Battlegroups. Operational since 2007, the Battlegroups were designed as a multinational[20], battalion-size, credible, high-readiness force, composed and funded by voluntary contributions from Member States[21] and under the political control of the Council of the European Union[22]. They were created following standards and procedures already defined by the NATO Response Force (NRF)[23], relying on existing infrastructure of the Alliance and looking for synergy and interoperability between both organizations[24]. Yet, the EU Battlegroups are mostly prepared for Petersberg operations[25] (peacekeeping, humanitarian aid outside EU territory, etc.) and not for defense itself.

While cooperation models may help on the creation of common doctrines, knowledge, techniques and procedures, they are always limited. But, discarding integration possibilities, only cooperation remains as a feasible option, as it does not imply sovereignty loss, keeping the states as protagonists[26]. And that is precisely what the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is fostering.

---

[19] *Ibíd.*, p. 14.

[20] Potentially including countries that do not belong to the European Union itself.

[21] "Letter from Rt. Hon Geoffrey Hoon MP, Secretary of State, Ministry of Defense to the Chairman". Select Committee on European Union, Fourth Report. U.K. Parliament, 2005. Available at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldselect/ldeucom/16/16100.htm consulted on: 17/04/2019.

[22] "European Battlegroup". European Union Factsheets, 2017, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/factsheet_battlegroups.pdf consulted on: 27/03/2019, p. 1-3.

[23] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. "A New Era of EU-NATO Cooperation How to Make the Best of a Marriage of Necessity". International Centre for Defense and Security, Estonia, 2017, available at: https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/ICDS_Report_A_New_Era_of_EU-NATO.pdf consulted on: 27/03/2019, p. 5.

[24] "Letter from Rt. Hon Geoffrey Hoon MP, Secretary of State". *Op. Cit.*

[25] CÓZAR, Beatriz. *Op. Cit.,* p. 9-10.

[26] "Reflection paper on the future of European defense. European Commission", 2017, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-defence_es.pdf consulted on: 07/04/2019, p, 6-7.

Paving the way for strategic autonomy: PESCO

PESCO: a leap forward?

The historical experience[27] of the CFSP shows that the EU has traditionally focused more on 'security' than on 'defense' itself. Therefore, in case of an external aggression against the Union's territory, NATO[28] would remain as the main collective defense framework for the countries that are members of said alliance[29].

Despite this reliance on NATO, the Union has launched multiple attempts[30] on trying to upgrade cooperation in matters of defense throughout its history. But, while most of them have yielded no remarkable results[31], the EU is overall progressing[32] towards a closer cooperation in those grounds. A proof to this statement is the creation of the figure of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, along with institutions like the European External Action Service, the European Defense Agency or the European Union Military Staff[33]. On top of this comes the publication of the detailed and ambitious European Union Global Strategy of 2016[34] (EUGS).

But it was on December 2017 when the European defense cooperation experienced a boost through the formation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) by the Council[35], with the participation of 25 Member States[36]. The disappearance of the United

---

[27] Some important milestones for those interested in the topic might be: The Treaty on European Union (1993), the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the Franco-British summit of Saint-Malo (1998), the Helsinki Headline Goal (1999) or the Treaty of Nice (2000) or the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) among others.

[28] CÓZAR, Beatriz. *Op. Cit.,* p. 17-18 & PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la Unión Europea". *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

[29] Vid. Art. 42.2 TEU

[30] Being the most prominent example the "European Defense Community" of 1950. Vid, PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la Unión Europea". *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

[31] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "Las iniciativas británica y alemana de cooperación en defensa". *Op. Cit.,* p. 3.

[32] LÓPEZ, Diego. "La defensa europea después del Brexit". Fundación Alternativas and Spanish Ministry of Defence, 2017, available at: https://www.fundacionalternativas.org/observatorio-de-politica-exterior-opex/documentos/documentos-de-trabajo/la-defensa-europea-despues-del-brexit consulted on: 12/03/2019, p. 44-45.

[33] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

[34] LÓPEZ, Diego. *Op. Cit,* p. 11-12.

[35] Vid. European Council Decision 14866/17, art. 1, available at: http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14866-2017-INIT/en/pdf consulted on: 18/04/2019

[36] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. Only Malta, the United Kingdom and Denmark are not

Kingdom's traditional veto on further deepening in CFSP and especially opposing the European Army, due to the *brexit* process[37] and the multiple external threats that the Union is facing seem to have finally given the EU the political impulse that was needed[38].

PESCO is a Treaty-based, intergovernmental framework in which, while the decision to participate is voluntarily made by each member state, the nature of the undertaken commitments is legally binding[39]. However, it is not a transference of competences, as the decision-making processes remain on the hands of the states[40]. Currently, 74 state-managed and state-funded collaborative projects[41] are being developed within PESCO in a two-phase roadmap[42].

Defense-oriented policymaking and spending will remain as national prerogatives, but PESCO aims to coordinate these efforts in order to achieve increasing degrees of efficiency[43] by optimizing national expenditures and avoiding unnecessary redundancies[44]; and to deepen in cooperation, allowing the joint development of defense and military capabilities[45]. The European Defense Fund (EDF)[46] and the Collaborative

---

included in PESCO. Vid. European Council Decision 14866/17, *Op. Cit.,* art. 2.

[37] LÓPEZ, Diego. *Op. Cit.,* p. 24-25.

[38] DÍAZ, Joel. *Op. Cit.,* p. 3.

[39] "PESCO Factsheet". European Union, 2018, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pesco_factsheet_may_2019.pdf consulted on: 18/04/2019, p. 1. Vid. European Council Decision 14866/17, *Op. Cit.,* art. 3.

[40] "PESCO Factsheet". *Op. Cit.,* p. 2. Vid. European Council Decision 14866/17, *Op. Cit.*, art. 4-6.

[41] "PESCO Factsheet". *Op. Cit.,* p, 2. Vid. European Council Recommendation 6393/18, available at: https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6393-2018-INIT/en/pdf consulted on: 18/04/2019 & European Council Decision 14866/17, *Op. Cit*, art. 3.

[42] Vid. European Council Recommendation 6588/1/18, available at: http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6588-2018-REV-1/en/pdf consulted on: 18/04/2019, arts. 2, 4-11.

[43] CÓZAR, Beatriz. *Op. Cit.,* p. 19, 23.

[44] Vid. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy"*. Op. Cit.,* p. 20. & CÓZAR, Beatriz. *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

[45] "PESCO Factsheet". Op. Cit, 2018, p. 2-3.

[46] "European Defense Fund Factsheet". European Union, 2018 & Vid. "European Defense Fund." *European Commission News.* 19/03/2019. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/european-defense-fund-2019-mar-19_en, consulted on: 15/04/2019.

Annual Review on Defense (CARD)[47] complement PESCO itself and contribute to the European strategic autonomy, a concept that now shall be explained.

Strategic autonomy: the debate

Even if PESCO, CARD and EDF themselves are not aiming towards the creation of a European Army *per se*[48], they can set the basis for further integration in defense[49] through the achievement of "strategic autonomy", a key point within the 2016 EUGS[50]. The EUGS, however, does not give a definition of strategic autonomy, but it can be framed as the capacity of the EU to plan, decide and act by itself and to field a credible civil or military presence in order to defend its own interests without external help[51].

Strategic autonomy has three main dimensions[52]: operational (civilian and military), economic (defense industry) and political (diplomacy). These elements configure the hard power and soft power capacities of an actor and allows it to freely establish its interests and to implement them. Thus, for the EU to achieve strategic autonomy, it must be able to create and sustain a solid and independent military tool, with its own administrative and industrial/research backbone, to back up its political and economic interests[53]. A previous *sine qua non* condition, however, is to have a common view and a common set of political objectives.

---

[47] "Coordinated Annual Review on Defense Factsheet". European Union, 2017, available at: https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-factsheets/2018-11-26-factsheet_card consulted on: 18/04/2019, p. 1-2.

[48] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la UE". *Op. Cit.,* p. 6.

[49] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.,* p.19.

[50] Vid. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy"*. Op. Cit.*, p. 4, 9, 19, 45-46.

[51] While this definition can be controversial, it seems that there is somehow a consensus among scholars. Vid.: RAIK Kristi. & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.,* p. 17; "Present and Future of the Common Security & Defense Policy"*. Op. Cit.,* p. 32-33 & HOWORTH, Jolyon. "EU-NATO Cooperation and Strategic Autonomy: Logical Contradiction or Ariadne's Thread?". KFG Working Paper, Freie Universitat Berlin, 2018, available at: https://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/en/v/transformeurope/publications/working_paper/wp/WP_90_Howorth/WP_90_Howorth_WEB.pdf consulted on: 17/04/2019, p. 7-8.

[52] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la UE". *Op. Cit.,* p. 9.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

The civil and military capacities can be potentially provided by cooperative systems[54] (like the Battlegroups) to some extent, and autonomous production and research can be boosted through initiatives like the EDF[55], but political consensus will still remain as the greatest problem. This is the main geopolitical debate on that regard, as the EU has a complex institutional framework, no visible, centralized political head and it must consider the perceptions and interests of its many and different Member States. Each one of these countries has a different strategic culture[56], policies, budgets and priorities, creating an environment in which compatibility and legitimacy problems abound[57].

Traditionally, it was assumed that the EU's contribution to preventing and resolving conflicts had to be made primarily via dialogue and partnership[58], but it is a fact that not every situation can be resolved just with the use of soft power[59]. On that regard, the EUGS recognizes that "soft and hard power, for Europe, must go together"[60] and highlights the need for further commitments of the Member States on implementing cooperation in defense, while still remaining sovereign in their decision making.

Yet, division exists between countries on the question of strategic autonomy development[61]. While some states, like France or Italy, would support the implementation of a more assertive military tool, others favor a more neutral approach, like Germany. For other countries, the EU should stick to its soft power role and avoid further integration in defense, for instance, Great Britain or the Eastern Europe and Baltic states. The latter ones, due to their proximity with the perceived Russian threat[62], vastly prefer the protection of NATO over that of the EU. Hence, the debate on the role of the Union in the

---

[54] Vid. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy" *Op. Cit.*, p. 47.

[55] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la Unión Europea". *Op. Cit.,* p. 11-12.

[56] CÓZAR, Beatriz *Op. Cit.,* p. 34.

[57] *Ibid.,* p. 11-14.

[58] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

[59] "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". *Op. Cit.,* p. 44-47.

[60] Federica Mogherini's foreword for the *"*Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". *Op. Cit.,* p. 4.

[61] GUILANI, Jean-Dominique et al. "Defense: Europe's Awakening". *Foundation Robert Schuman. European issues* n°474, 22nd May 2018, p. 7-9.

[62] DÍAZ, Joel. *Op. Cit.*, p. 5-6. & CÓZAR, Beatriz. "*Op. Cit.,* p. 31.

world is still present and, until a common view and political objectives are set, strategic autonomy will be severely limited due to the lack of political autonomy and integration[63] that it requires.

Assuming that strategic autonomy is a prerequisite for the creation of a European Army[64], as long as political consensus is not reached, this army would not transcend cooperative models. Therefore, while theoretically possible, full integration in defense and the creation of a European Army are not to be expected soon[65]. While PESCO can be seen as a step towards strategic autonomy[66] and a positive milestone for the future foundation of a European Army[67] based on cooperative models, neither would be possible without the political autonomy that debates and discordances between EU Member States are hampering.

Finally, further developments on strategic autonomy should also consider the possible reaction of NATO and of the USA, which can make inconvenient these advancements due to potential geopolitical tensions.

NATO and the EU: between cooperation and competition

Cooperation as the norm

While NATO remains as the primary framework on collective defense for most EU Member States[68], it is also recognized that the Union needs to develop enough capacity to act autonomously[69] on its own. This, however, does not imply forfeiting NATO, as both

---

[63] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la Unión Europea". *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

[64] HOWORTH, Jolyon. *Op. Cit.,* p. 7.

[65] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.,* p. 19.

[66] "From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1". European Union, 2017, available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/37869/Implementing%20the%20EU%20Global%20Strategy%20Year%201 consulted on: 05/04/2019, p. 23.

[67] LÓPEZ, Diego. *Op. Cit.,* p. 31, 36-37 & HOWORTH, Jolyon *Op. Cit.*, p. 7, 15-16.

[68] CAMAÑO, Luis. "Retos y futuro de la PCSD". Framework document 16/2011, IEEE, 2011, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_marco/2011/DIEEEM16-2011_RetosyFuturo_PSCD_LCaamano.pdf consulted on: 10/04/2019, p.3p. 3. This principle is also recognized on the TEU itself, art. 42.2. Notice not every country of the EU belongs to NATO and vice-versa.

[69] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.,* p. 16.

realities can be seen as mutually reinforcing. PESCO, in fact, was not created with the intention of supplanting NATO, but as a recognition of the security challenges that Europe must face[70].

Cooperation and coexistence through mutually reinforcing actions[71], thus, is an integral pillar of the EUGS[72] and the most likely future for NATO-UE relations[73]. The Joint Declaration of Brussels (2018) states that EU-NATO cooperation currently is "unprecedented in its quality, scope and vigor"[74] and it is claimed that their security needs are interconnected and that there is a mutual benefit on their actions. Therefore, as the norm, this partnership is likely to continue in the future[75].

This declaration, however, also recognizes compliance with the decision-making autonomy of both organizations. On that regard, it is also stated that EU efforts on fostering European security are well received and encouraged by NATO[76], as they are perceived as strengthening the Alliance and creating a more equitable burden-sharing situation. Considering that NATO lacks an army[77], any increasement in the power of the national armies of its Member States is overall positive for the Alliance as a whole, as long as it "remains coherent, complementary and interoperable"[78].

---

[70] *Ibíd.*, p. 3-4.

[71] Vid. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". *Op. Cit.*, p. 37.

[72] "EU-NATO Cooperation Factsheet". European Union Factsheets, 2018, available at: http://club.bruxelles2.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/cooperationotanuefich@se171019.pdf consulted on: 05/04/2019, p. 1. & Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". *Op. Cit.*, p. 4, 20-21.

[73] CÓZAR, Beatriz. *Op. Cit.*, p. 35-37.

[74] "Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation". NATO. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm consulted on: 15/04/2019, points 1-2.

[75] LÓPEZ, Diego. *Op. Cit.*, p. 34-36.

[76] "Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation". *Op. Cit.*, points 7, 9. & "Relations with the European Union". North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2019. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49217.htm, consulted on: 15/04/2019.

[77] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.

[78] "Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation". *Op. Cit*, point 10 & "Relations with the European Union". *Op. Cit.*,

Indeed, both NATO and the EU are seen as interdependent and synergetic[79] realities and it can be assumed that neither organization is able to guarantee security on its own[80], especially taking into account the changing nature of the international threats[81] on the present multipolar scenario. On that regard, some experts consider that a cohesive and fully integrated European force could be potentially more efficient[82] than the *ad hoc*, voluntary[83], cooperative model created by PESCO, that may suffer from problems[84] of different training standards, equipment, language, etc. However, others disagree, stating that there is no evidence on the fact that a European Army will be more efficient than traditional stand-alone or joint operations[85].

The Union, in any case, does not aim for a confrontation with NATO, but strives for gaining strategic autonomy so it could face any emerging crisis with no need for the Alliance, but sustaining that cooperation[86]. It is expectable and advisable thus, for the EU's strategic autonomy, to be compatible with the Alliance[87] and to be conducted mainly where NATO is not engaged[88].

Hence, the hypothetical creation of a European Army (just like PESCO) is likely to count with NATO's blessings as long as it helps on fostering the power of the Alliance, making the European capabilities more cohesive and stronger, provided that it remains an

---

[79] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.*, p, 1-2, 6.

[80] *Ibid.,* 19-20, 22.

[81] KOENING, Nicole. "The EU and NATO: A Partnership with a Glass Ceiling". EU Global Strategy Watch/Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2018, available at: https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/eugs_watch_8.pdf consulted on: 12/04/2019, p. 2.

[82] TRYBUS, Martin. *Op. Cit.*, p. 10-11.

[83] The lack of binding links can create incentives for countries to adopt a *free-riding* or *buck-passing* strategy. *Free riding* involves the will of benefitting for an endeavor without proportionally contributing or without contributing at all, while *buck-passing* implies trying to get another state to bear the burden of deterring or fighting an aggressor directly *(buck catcher)*, while the *buck-passer* remains aside.

[84] TRYBUS, Martin. *Op. Cit.*, p. 10-11.

[85] PONTIJAS, José Luis. "El ejército europeo y la autonomía estratégica de la Unión Europea". *Op. Cit.*, p. 6-7.

[86] RAIK Kristi & JÄRVENPÄÄ, Pauli. *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

[87] LÓPEZ, Diego. *Op. Cit.*, p. 10, 31.

[88] Vid. "European Council, Presidency Conclusions". European Council Meeting in Helsinki, December 1999, disponible en: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20922/72639.pdf consulted on: 28/04/2019, p. 10-11.

interoperable[89] framework with NATO and its doctrine[90]. Any movement on that direction, thus, must be framed as complementary with NATO, showing the EU as a reliable security provider and deepening on the transatlantic relationship[91].

EU against NATO: political blockades and duplication

While cooperation emerges as a vital role, NATO and the EU are different realities with varying interests and nature[92] and the relationship between them is not as close as it seems. The EU and NATO actions often are more 'parallel' than 'joint', and they must face problems like classified information sharing or the Greek-Turkish tensions[93] along with other political transatlantic issues (trade, etc.). These blockades and grievances limit cooperation between NATO and the EU and keep their strategies correlated but differentiated.

Considering that both organizations are not perfectly aligned, duplication[94] emerges as the main problem to tackle when addressing strategic autonomy, as the EU could be potentially building from zero structures and capacities that NATO already has[95]. Any endeavor not respecting this line will be perceived as a waste[96], as hampering NATO decision making structures, as reducing interoperability and as drawing from its resources without providing any efficient outcome.

---

[89] From a military perspective, interoperability can be defined as the capacities of several armies to work together and coordinated in order to achieve the same end state. Vid. "Relations with the European Union". *Op. Cit.*

[90] KOENING, Nicole. *Op. Cit., p.* 2, 6. Note that "transatlantic relationship" is a wider concept that does not only involve military questions.

[91] Vid. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". *Op. Cit.,* p. 4, 37 & "From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy. Year 1". *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

[92] CÓZAR, Beatriz. *Op. Cit.*, p. 31.

[93] KOENING, Nicole *Op. Cit.* p. 4-5. & LACHMANN, Niels. "Rivalry, community, or strained partnership? Relations between the European Union and the United States". *Politique européenne* 2013/1 n° 39, 136-156, 2013, p. 142-143.

[94] LÓPEZ, Diego. *Op. Cit.*, p. 22; & "Relations with the European Union". *Op. Cit.*

[95] HOWORTH, Jolyon. *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.

[96] BRATTBERG, Erik. "Beyond European versus Transatlantic Defense". The German Marshall Fund of the United States. Security and Defense Policy, 2018, p. 2

There is, in fact, an old geopolitical debate on this transatlantic-vs-European defense issue[97] in which some countries (mainly those close to Russia)[98] believe that the creation of an European pillar in NATO, let alone a European Army, would only weaken the Alliance[99] in both political and military terms. As it was stated before, there is a generalized lack of trust on the European Union as a credible military player[100], so it is understandable that many countries would prefer to rely on NATO for their defense.

While developments towards strategic autonomy, or towards a European Army. will give the Union more credible defense capacities, it can also strain the transatlantic relations. This is especially likely to happen if the EU defends interests that diverges from NATO's or if the Union tries to become the main security provider on the European area and its surroundings[101]. Competition itself, however, is much more probable in the case of the United States.

The United States: burden-sharing and competition

During the 2018 NATO Summit, US President Donald Trump called for a more equitable burden-sharing among NATO members, under the threat of withdrawing from the Alliance[102]. Far from being just an outlier declaration, Trump echoed previous asseverations of USA leaders and international relations experts about the cost of sustaining the Alliance[103]. With nearly 70% of the overall NATO's military expenditure[104]

---

[97] DÍAZ, Joel. *Op. Cit.*, p. 15-16.

[98] *Ibíd.*, p. 5-6.

[99] LÓPEZ, Diego *Op. Cit.*, p. 34-36.

[100] "Present and Future of the Common Security & Defense Policy". *Op. Cit.*, p, 26.

[101] "EU and NATO: Co-operation or Competition?" Briefing Paper. European Parliament, Security and Defense, 2005, available at:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/eunatorelations_/eunatorelations_en.pdf consulted: 15/04/2019, p. 6.

[102] Vid. HERSZENHORN, David & BAYER, Lili Op. Cit., & STRACQUALURSI, Verónica & ACOSTA, Jim *Op. Cit.*,

[103] HOWORTH, J. *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

[104] POZZEBON, Stefano. "This is how much NATO Member States spend on their military." The Business Insider. Available at: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-much-every-nato-member-spends-on-military-in-2014-2015-2?IR=T, consulted on:16/04/2019; "Funding NATO". NATO, 2018. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_67655.htm consulted on:16/04/2019 & Vid. Annex Table 2: NATO members' military expenditure in 2014.

being provided by the USA, its possible withdrawal casted doubt about the Alliance's future[105]. Considering its huge weight on the NATO, it is also understandable that many studies merge 'NATO' with the 'USA', but they have slightly different visions.

While both NATO and the United States desire a stronger EU within the Alliance, able to defend itself and willing to take a bigger share of the defense burden[106], this wish is framed in different terms. While NATO would accept any endeavor that contributes to its overall military power, the USA is mainly worried about money[107], being keenly aware of the fact that anything that is invested on the Alliance would have a revenue for the USA itself. Thus, Washington would only positively perceive EU's autonomy plans as long as they are deemed to be aligned with NATO reinforcement by increasing European defense expenditures[108].

Overcoming its traditional skepticism, the USA seems willing to accept PESCO if its leads to more investment from the EU countries[109], otherwise, the USA will deem it as an unnecessary duplication and a waste of resources. So far, considering that PESCO is still a voluntary intergovernmental platform, Washington does not seem to be taking it as a strategically relevant instrument[110]. Yet, the possibility of a European Union's strategic autonomy (preface of a European Army) is not being perceived positively[111] by the USA, being deemed as both a waste and as a sign that their presence is no longer needed in Europe.

Paradoxically, while the USA is always pushing the Europeans towards new advancements on their self-defense capacities, when those are undertaken, the USA tries to mold them inside NATO or, otherwise, to block them. This is because the USA perceives that anything within the Alliance is, somehow, under its control[112]. Therefore, if

---

[105] GUILANI Jean-Dominique, et al. *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

[106] BRATTBERG, Erik. *Op. Cit.*, p. 5. & LACHMANN, Niels. *Op. Cit.*, p. 152.

[107] SAPHIRO, Jeremy. "America the Mercenary: Trump's plan to bill NATO". European Council on Foreign Relations. Available at:
https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_america_the_mercenary_trump_plan_to_bill_nato consulted on:01/05/2019.

[108] KOENING, Nicole. *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

[109] HOWORTH, Jolyon. *Op. Cit.*, p. 10-11.

[110] BRATTBERG, Erik. *Op. Cit.*, p. 5-6.

[111] *Ibid.*, p, 6.

[112] LACHMANN, Niels. *Op. Cit.*, p. 138-139, 141-142 & BRATTBERG, Erik. *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

the EU develops its strategic autonomy and Washington perceives it as non-aligned with NATO, the Union could be considered as an "external player" and, thus, a geopolitical rival of the United States, leading to an undesirable scenario of competition.

Conclusions

The European Union, as a player with global interests, is forced to deal with both external and internal threats that have sparked again the debate on the creation of a European Army, defined as a cohesive group of military assets at disposal of the European Union. The potential existence of this army has been framed according to two variables: its possibility and its convenience.

This paper has shown that the creation of said army is not to be expected in the short and medium term, but it is possible. Likewise, if it were formed, it should follow cooperative models such as the EU Battlegroups and would only be possible if the Union achieves its strategic autonomy, which is a prerequisite for that army's existence.

PESCO has been framed in that context of cooperation and, while not directly aiming towards the creation of a European Army, it opens a path for obtaining strategic autonomy. However, the European lack of political unity and internal debates and disagreements among the Member States prevent further advancements.

Nevertheless, while theoretically possible, the geopolitical consequences of the creation of that army could make it not convenient, as it can potentially damage the transatlantic relations if perceived as a duplication that could weaken the NATO or as a competitor of the USA. The arguments exposed here have shown that any successful attempt on building the European Army must be compatible with the Alliance.

For everything that has been stated before, it can be concluded that the European Army may exist, especially if it follows cooperative models, but only if the Union manages to overcome its internal divisions and achieves strategic autonomy, which is not expected in the short-medium term. But the creation of said army will only be convenient if it is framed within NATO.

Type	Model	Brief description	Status
Fully integrated	European Defense Force	A fully integrated, common, European force that would replace national armies. Its creation would require a massive rearrangement of the European Union's competences and structures.	Not implemented and unlikely.
Collaborative, partially integrated, *ad hoc*	European Rapid Reaction Force	A limited, common force created through the voluntary contributions of the Member States and counting with common command structures and budgetary arrangements. It would coexist with national armies and it would carry out peacekeeping missions.	Implemented as and operative as the EUROFOR and the EUROMAFOR.
Collaborative, *ad hoc*	EU Battlegroups	In this model, Member States voluntarily design battle-ready packages of forces and puts them at disposal of the Union, forming international battalion-sized units that would rotate after a certain time.	Implemented and operative.
Collaborative, *ad hoc*. Linked with the NATO	Framework Nations Concept	Following this model, smaller countries should cluster together around bigger countries (Framework Nation), working together to detect and cover potential weaknesses. It is a more structural and long-term project.	Long-term project.
Collaborative, ad hoc	Joint Expeditionary Force	A United Kingdom-led, rapidly deployable force able to cover the whole operational spectrum of operations, including high-intensity scenarios. It would be an interoperable, closed group of forces.	Expected to be fully operative by 2018.

Table 1: Some possible models and blueprints for a European Army.

Source: PONTIJAS, José Luis. "Las iniciativas británica y alemana de cooperación en defensa". Opinion document 57/2018, IEEE, 2018, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2018/DIEEEO57-2018_Defensa_EU_Alemania-UK_JLPontijas.pdf consulted on: 25/04/2019 p. 5-8. & TRYBUS, Martin. "The Legal Foundations of a European Army". Institute of European Law, Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham, 2016, available at: http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/2105/1/IELWorkingPaper2016No1The_Legal_Foundations_of_a_European_Army.pdf consulted on: 29/03/2019 p. 7-8.

Country	Expenditure (billions of USD)	Visualization
United States	582.40	
United Kingdom (UK)	55.00	
Germany (DE)	44.30	
France	40.90	
Italy	17.30	
Canada	14.30	
Poland	10.40	
Netherlands	8.70	
Norway	5.80	
Romania	2.00	
Hungary	1.08	
Bulgaria	0.60	
Estonia	0.43	
Lithuania	0.38	
Latvia	0.25	
Total selected	**784.09**	

US ■ UK ■ Germany ■ Italy ■ Rest ■

Table 2: NATO members' military expenditure in 2014.
Source: Elaborated by the author with data from POZZEBON, Stefano. "This is how much NATO Member States spend on their military". The Business Insider. Available at: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-much-every-nato-member -spends-on-military-in-2014-2015-2?IR=T consulted:16/04/2019 & "Funding NATO". North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2018. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_67655.htm consulted:16/04/2019.

Edgar Jiménez García*
Master on Geopolitics and Strategic Studies
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid