



## Future European defence

a complement to NATO rather than a substitute - G2S File No. 24

Général (2S) Dominique TRINQUAND

Published on 11/08/2019

Relations internationales

**The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is celebrating the 70th anniversary of its creation this year. Created in 1949 after the victory over the Nazi regime and at a time when the Iron Curtain was coming down in Europe, NATO had the great merit of linking the two sides of the Atlantic. NATO had the great merit of linking the two sides of the Atlantic with a treaty that was missing at the outbreak of the two World Wars and of defeating the Soviet regime without a fight after 50 years of Cold War.**

Very early on, Europe sought another form of solidarity specific to European countries. In 1954 it was Western European Union (WEU), then in 1993 the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and finally in 2009 the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Under all these In this way, Europe wanted to show the solidarity of European countries towards each other in order to ensure a common defence.

The rivalry between the two forms of defence of the European continent is essentially based on the degree of North American (USA and Canada) involvement in European affairs. The weight of the United States is such in the Atlantic Alliance that an autonomous expression of Europeans is extremely difficult. Moreover, General DE GAULLE, in 1966, put an end to French participation in NATO's integrated command, not to mark a difference in substance, but in the form of what the Alliance was. Later, the fall of the Berlin Wall should naturally have led to the dissolution of an organisation that had defeated its Soviet enemy, but in fact, the freedom given to the Eastern European countries led them to quickly seek the protection of NATO, or more precisely of the United States<sup>25</sup>. Over the past 30 years there have been many developments, from 16 to 29 members, with NATO seeing France return to the integrated command structure ten years ago. After the operations in former Yugoslavia (Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999), NATO intervened outside Europe in Afghanistan in 2001. Today, reassurance measures are reorienting NATO towards a threat to the East against Russia.

At the same time, the European Union, through successive treaties and agreements,

sought to improve its ability to take charge of those aspects of defence that NATO could not or would not want to cover, particularly in Africa. It also welcomed the countries of Eastern Europe but, it should be stressed, only after they had joined NATO. The majority of European countries have always seen European defence only as a complement to NATO. "No duplication" was their rallying cry, with the United Kingdom as their standard bearer. However, limited European Union operations<sup>27</sup> have developed mainly in the South and particularly in Africa. Strictly European capabilities have also emerged (Military Mission Command MPCC, European Air Transport Command EATC...). Recently the European Commission itself has been devoting a budget to the acquisition of defence capabilities. In short, European defence is beginning to occupy a not inconsiderable place in the shadow of the North Atlantic Organisation.

### **So should the defence of Europe be provided by NATO or can it also be provided by the European Union?**

It seems to me that we need to explore not only the political and operational aspects, but also the capability and financial factors that are

concerned with this issue. More than an opposition, it is a complementarity that must be seen between the two organizations, which does not exclude overlaps that will have to be resolved.

Politically, it is clear that the Alliance marks the choice of a community of destiny shared by its members<sup>28</sup>. This community has been strengthened with the arrival of countries freed from the communist yoke. However, community, which does not mean unity of interest, would mean sharing, whereas inequality is the rule between the leader (USA), the good students (Germany, Poland, the Netherlands), those who benefit from the system (United Kingdom) and those who weigh little (Estonia, Slovakia...). France, which has always been a bit on the sidelines since the 1966 coup d'éclat, remained suspect because of its assertive European fibre. This singular place within NATO has evolved since its return to the integrated command and thanks to its participation in operations.

However, it is difficult to convince people that non-alignment does not mean opposition! Clientelism is an easier solution for countries that had long since lost the notion of independence. Basically, participation in a Euro-Atlantic community is not questioned by anyone. The European countries that are members of the Alliance or the Union, and often of both, know that the "new world" on the other side of the Atlantic is a product of the old Europe and that these family relations provide a common background that makes it possible to face crises together (Cuba, Euro missiles...). It is therefore not on the political level that a difference between the Alliance and the Union should be found.

At the operational level, European countries are aware that in the face of a major threat the leadership of the United States is vital. The two world wars are there to demonstrate that Europe needed the United States in order to emerge from those crises<sup>29</sup>. The cold war is a good example of how Europe was protected by the United States and then how the USSR was defeated by technological and financial pressure of which only the "hyperpower" was capable. However, this power is not always adapted to lesser threats and it has been shown that the United States is not interested in all the crises affecting Europe. The threat analysis is enlightening from this point of view. While for NATO the threat is to the East<sup>30</sup>, a good part of the European countries see a threat to the South, illustrated by the fight against jihadism, unstable states and the problems associated with massive immigration. Europe therefore needs to develop its own capabilities to respond to these threats that do not concern the vital interests of the United States. First of all, it is

necessary to develop the capabilities needed to identify these threats autonomously, and then to have the tools to manage the crisis both in terms of command and projection and use of forces. NATO and the EU can complement each other in these areas, but the EU must be able to have autonomous means at its disposal when the United States does not wish to engage.

The key capabilities are essentially linked to developments that did not exist when NATO was set up: space, satellite and cyber, but also the essential command and projection capabilities that cannot be defined by the United States. The key capabilities are essentially linked to developments that did not exist at the time of NATO's creation: space, satellite and cyber capabilities, but also essential command and projection capabilities that cannot depend solely on the goodwill of a partner whose interests have gradually moved away from a peaceful continent<sup>31</sup> and towards what it considers to be its major opponent<sup>32</sup>, China.

France's recent intervention in Mali has sufficiently demonstrated both the combat capability of the French army and its dependence in terms of projection and intelligence resources. This operation at the gates of Europe has gradually led new European partners to become involved. The presence of British, Germans, Danes, Swedes, Estonians... shows that the awareness of a common threat is finally there and that complementary means can become a reality.

On the basis of such an operation the European countries discover both their shortcomings and the need to pool certain capabilities. Gradually, working together gives rise both to mutual trust and the search for common solutions. Indeed, since the Yugoslav crisis, operations have always been a factor in bringing European armies closer together.

Many of these capabilities require financial resources that are beyond the means of the majority of countries. In order to be able to take autonomous decisions, Europeans have no choice but to equip themselves with these capabilities and find common funding. The European ARIANE programme, GALILEO, the fight in cyberspace, can only find solutions by pooling funding.

Admittedly the standards can be those defined by NATO<sup>33</sup> in order to allow interoperability within the Alliance<sup>34</sup>, but the means must be developed autonomously and therefore funded as such. In order to pool funding, the capabilities to be funded must be defined and in order to define the capabilities needed, a common analysis is needed. Thirty years ago satellite imagery was the subject of a struggle between the United States, which had it at its disposal, and France, which wanted autonomy of appreciation. The SPOT programme has made it possible to achieve that autonomy, since then many programmes<sup>35</sup> have put European or multinational satellites into orbit and the European Union Satellite Centre in Torrejon manages images for the whole of the Union.

However, the financial resources allocated to defence are part of a general strategy that must remain specific to each country. The analysis of needs must be part of a more general analysis including political and social factors which must prioritise the financial resources to be allocated according to eminently political choices. Thus the famous figure of 2% of GDP devoted to defence spending does not have the same meaning in Germany as in Poland or France.

While the common destiny of NATO and EU members is not in doubt, it appears that operational needs and therefore the necessary capabilities and funding are not entirely homothetic. In a world that is changing and where the interests of states are evolving, the European community has more in common than any other multinational community. The

history of Europe over the last seventy years shows that the countries that make up Europe are no longer threats to each other, but that while transatlantic solidarity remains a necessity, it is no longer sufficient.

The European Union must analyse the evolution of the world and develop its capacity to take account of new threats in order to continue to carry weight in tomorrow's world. As an island of stable development in a changing world, Europe cannot take for granted a linear and risk-free economic and social development in this already highly unstable 21st century. While the link with the United States remains vital, it cannot be the only response to the changes taking place.

**The United States has its own interests; European countries cannot believe that theirs are the same. Geography, history and economics show that within the European Community there are more points of convergence than divergence. France's role in this development is essential not only because of its capabilities but also because of the independence it has always shown. However, taking into account the differences in the approaches of European countries must not be overlooked as a moderating factor.**

-----  
25 Fifty years of Soviet occupation and the imposition of communist ideology do not fade quickly!

26 This is the only time that Article 5 (mutual defence) is used.

27 Many training missions.

28 Even if today questions can be asked about Turkey.

29 Even if they were intra-European wars then.

30 Back to old patterns that have been tried and tested for 50 years!

31 Not to say domesticated...

32 Not to say enemy!

33 So by the 29 members, provided they were active.

34 Even if it must be stressed that the Americans make very little use of NATO standards.

35 In particular HELIOS.

---

**Title :** Général (2S) Dominique TRINQUAND

**Author (s) :** Général (2S) Dominique TRINQUAND

**Release date** 10/08/2019

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

[DOWNLOAD DOCUMENT](#)

---