

A Comparative Historical Study of the Development of a European Army

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SNEZHANA STADNIK, MAY 12 2016

Has the Time Come? – A Comparative Historical Study of the Obstacles Facing the Development of a European Army

Almost 70 years ago, a polity was created which instituted a legacy of peace among incessantly warring states. This remarkable feat, a collection of nation-states called the European Union (EU), has been the object of much research and observation. Starting off as an economic community, then growing into a new kind of federalist supranationalism, 28 countries today have come together to participate in the blurring of national borders, achieving more success in market integration than foreign and security policy. This hybrid system of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism is incrementally evolving as decision-makers create and refine institutions and mechanisms to respond to needs, ultimately moving the Union forward. One such decision-maker, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, recently re-surfaced an important issue: the need for a European army.[1]

This has not been the first time that an influential European official has called for such a development. Every decade, the issue is revisited, with German Chancellor Angel Merkel recently wishing for a European army on her birthday.[2] Despite many developments in defense and security policy in the last several decades, one thing remains certain: the same underlying reasons that historically precluded the development of a supranational European army remain relevant today. For a long time, politicians and scholars have cited political will as the missing ingredient. In this paper, I argue that the historical context, political landscape and security environment in which defense policy developments have been advanced, constrained policy options differently depending on the decade. In essence, political will is only one piece of the puzzle. In response to Juncker's request, without a paradigm change, the time has not yet come for a European army.

METHODOLOGY

I approach the question of identifying obstacles with a longitudinal research design, by observing the key factors that have historically prevented the creation of a European army during three time periods: at the start of the European integration project in the 1950s, after the Cold War, and in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo. These three cases are historically significant time periods in that they had the potential to alter the political context and paradigm substantially. The world order and political environments during those time periods provided the EU with windows of opportunities for implementing significant policies in common defense.

With each case, I start by discussing the political landscape at the time—what was happening on the continent and around the world—to capture a still shot of the paradigm that key decision-makers were operating within. The context surrounding each of the three cases exposes why a European army was judged not viable then. The resulting (constrained) foreign, security and defense policy choices that key policymakers pursued further illuminate what the political context deemed permissible. The longitudinal study unearths the similarity of factors preventing the creation of a European army during the three time periods.

After looking at the political environments, obstacles standing in the way of an army, and resulting policy, I discuss

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the implications and whether a European army is a possibility today. Pulling from historical institutionalism and neo-functionalism, I surmise at the relationship between paradigms, exigencies and resulting policies to predict what it would take to see substantial change in common defense in 2015.

CASE ANALYSIS

The Early Days of European Integration

Europe lay in ruins at the end of World War II. The continent was in need of massive reconstruction, and the creeping influence of Communism loomed large. The Marshall Plan, a European Recovery Program financed by the U.S., along with the Soviet's comparable Cominform plan for Eastern European states, highlighted the split of Europe into two camps.[3] In March of 1948, the United Kingdom (UK), France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg responded to the Soviet security threat by signing the Brussels Treaty, a treaty of mutual defense assistance.[4] Several months later, these five countries created a military agency named the Western Union Defense Organization (WUDO).[5]

Security talks were soon underway between the U.S. and the Brussels Treaty powers in hopes of creating a framework for an expanded regional security arrangement. In 1949, twelve nations, including the five signatories of the Brussels Treaty, signed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) charter, designed to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."[6]

Meanwhile, the European integration project was in its infancy stage as its influential designer, French statesman Jean Monnet, sought to reconcile France and Germany, two countries that had been at war with each other three times in the preceding eight decades.[7] On May 9, 1950, the Schuman Declaration launched the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) comprising six member states, setting the stage for forthcoming peace and stability resulting from economic cooperation. The ECSC masterfully reintegrated Germany into a framework that would develop peaceful relations with other European states.[8]

As this cooperation progressed, the Korean War broke out and the U.S. pressured the French "to rearm Germany so that it might contribute to the defense of the free world." [9] In essence, Secretary Dean Acheson was asking for Germany's integration into NATO. Potential rearmament was tantamount to diplomatic defeat for the French. Opposed to the reconstitution of the German army, Monnet proposed, and successfully petitioned U.S. support for, the creation of a European Defense Community (EDC), which would establish European armed forces directed by a European defense minister.[10]

Why the EDC Treaty Failed

Monnet suggested that the principles underlying the ECSC be extended to the armed forces: soldiers of the European states that joined the EDC would wear the same uniform and serve under a single command. He understood that a European army was the quickest way to achieve a political community and deeper integration.[11] Although all of the ECSC partners in 1952 signed the EDC Treaty, it was rejected in 1954 for two main reasons: lack of member state support for federalist projects and a changing security environment.

Monnet encountered little resistance when uniting the countries into an economic union, considered an area of 'low politics,' but that was not the case in the area of defense. A classic 'high politics' issue, member-states preferred not to forfeit policy-making powers to supranational entities.[12] Already during the EDC treaty negotiations, Benelux opposed supranational control over political and financial arrangements.[13] With changing leadership in France, Monnet saw reluctance by the French Parliament to take further steps toward federalism. No matter how much the French desired to keep Germany contained, France was reluctant to take the plunge in 1954. Former German Minister Egon Bahr explained the rejection of the EDC in the French National Assembly as France being ready to die for France, and not for the EDC or Europe.[14] Even U.S. pressure could not "overcome the hostility of national governments, politicians, the military and foreign policy bureaucrats to the demise of the nation-state and Europe's political federation." [15] The death of the EDC treaty meant the death of an accelerated European political unit,

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dashing the hopes of federalists.[16]

Not long after Secretary Acheson's request for German soldiers to be in uniform by 1951, Cold War tensions in Europe eased as a result of a robust NATO framework for security.[17] The Korean War had alarmed many in the U.S. and Europe, with some policymakers fearing invasion of Europe. The Soviet threat quickened the pace of NATO's transformation into an active defense structure, with the U.S. Congress appropriating large sums of money for the Military Defense Assistance Program (MDAP), which would provide equipment and training for the armies of NATO allies.[18] With the death of Stalin in 1953, and the creation of a permanent defense mechanism via NATO, the hot war cooled, and the need for a European army was no longer exigent.

The Resulting Security Structure

A few months after the defeat of the EDC, nine NATO powers agreed to terminate the military occupation of the Federal Republic of Germany.[19] The Paris Accords, seen as an alternative solution to the failed plan for a European army, established the Western European Union (WEU) alliance. This meant the accession of West Germany and Italy to the Brussels Treaty and WUDO.[20] The Western German government was subsequently invited to join NATO. European defense collaboration continued but in less ambitious forms and primarily within the framework of NATO.[21] The consequence of limited European cooperation foreshadowed Europe's dependence on the U.S. military umbrella, embodied by NATO.[22]

Case 2 – A New World Order

As the Cold War thawed, Europe was slowly climbing out of an identity crisis. Contrary to Haas' neofunctionalism theory that once an initial commitment was made, forward momentum of integration was inevitable, European integration stood still.[23] After the inauguration of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958, spillover and institutional deepening slowed down as French General Charles de Gaulle dealt "a fatal blow to [spillover] expectations by intervening dramatically to shatter the Commission's credibility, and reclaim decision-making for national leaders and their governments." [24] This culminated in the Empty Chair crisis and even France's secession from NATO in 1966.[25] With de Gaulle finally out of office, more cooperation became feasible in Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), and the EEC widened to include Denmark, Ireland and the UK. Yet the widening and resultant economic synergies could not insulate the Community from the global recession shocks of the 1970s. The average annual GDP growth, which had been 4.8 percent from 1960 to 1973, declined to 2.1 percent from 1973 to 1983.[26] Academics coined this time period, at its climax in the 1980s, 'eurosclerosis.' [27]

With the election of Jacques Delors in 1985 to the post of Commission President, great strides were taken to make Europe relevant again. Delors sought to develop an agenda to overcome the stagnation. By uniting leaders to pursue common objectives, Delors capitalized on the especially cooperative relationship between French President Mitterand and German President Hermut Kohl. Delors was a dynamic leader for three terms, and the voice of reason at the end of the Gulf War, highlighting Europe's dismal appearance:

"It is true that the very first day ... the Community took the firm line expected of it. It confirmed the commitment of its member states to enforce sanctions, the first line of dissuasion against aggressors. However, once it became obvious that the situation would have to be resolved by armed combat, the Community had neither the institutional machinery nor the military force which would have allowed it to act as a community. Are the Twelve prepared to learn from this experience?" [28]

He strategically used key moments of European weakness to inspire vision and willingness for political cooperation among the member states, be it economic or political.

The end of the Cold War opened the door to what U.S. President George H. W. Bush coined the "new world order." [29] The world order created a window of opportunity for more European leadership, especially in its eastern neighborhood, increased cooperation and substantial strides toward political unity. One unexpected consequence of the collapse of the Soviet empire was a resurrection in Western Europe to establish a European army. The Franco-

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German proposal of October 1991 was to create a European Corps as the basis for a future European army. Paradoxically, while the idea was originally devised in 1950 to counter Communism's expansion, it was revived again in the wake of Communism's disintegration.[30]

Single Market over Defense

In the heyday of eurosclerosis, economic cooperation won over direct political integration by way of defense cooperation. When Delors became Commission President in 1985, in efforts to relaunch the Community after two decades of stagnation, he visited each member state to find out what major project was likely to be accepted by them all.[31] In Monnet's tradition, he proposed federalist projects, like the single market and common defense. The lowest common denominator among the member states at that time, especially among the three major players, was the desire to overcome the economic stagnation of the 1970s. Key players like Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher prized trade liberalization, anticipating economic growth from the removal of non-tariff trade barriers.[32] The single market project was pursued with gusto.

The choice to pursue a single market over common defense highlighted a preference for a gradual approach toward further integration; pursuit of a European army would be anything but that—demanding, not gradual. Although he believed economic cooperation would lead to an eventual political union, Delors recognized that the European Community (EC) was on this gradual road and attempted to speed it up by stressing the need for more cooperation in foreign policy and security. In his words, a European Europe,

“... cannot be achieved unless the Community acquires a distinct political identity and the influence derived from economic strength. The two are intimately linked. An ambitious project of this kind cannot be achieved if the Community is perceived as nothing more than a single market backed by a few common policies. It requires political will, based on an awareness of vital national interests. It requires the conviction that the defense and promotion of these interests will be more effective if member states act together, exercising pooled sovereignty.”[33]

Contrarily, the Gulf War highlighted that member states were not ready to pool their sovereignty when it came to high politics. Member states were deeply divided over the issue of involvement and American mobilization—the Germans strongly opposed it, the British and French favored it, and at one point, Belgium even refused to sell ammunition to Britain.[34] When Operation Desert Shield turned to Desert Storm, and Saddam Hussein was toppled, it was hardly a surprise that Europe showed up too late.[35] Only low levels of political unity were even possible given the lack of a shared vision for security and foreign policy.

With the Soviet threat gone, and a military structure in place via NATO, Britain resurfaced its preference for Atlanticism to Europeanism in the defense arena. “Britain's ambivalence to Franco-German plans for a separate European Defense Pillar in the autumn of 1991 was a faithful echo of her preferences in the 1950s: Britain instituted at the Rome NATO summit in November 1991 that the proposed WEU force should be autonomous, constituted within NATO and outside EC control but linked to both and subordinated to neither.”[36] The European Corps proposal worried London and Washington, but the French and German defense ministers reassured both that the “Eurocorps would not question the primacy of NATO.”[37]

Attainments in Foreign & Security Policy

Though the single market became the most prominent project, “a European foreign, security, and defense policy was a further welcome opportunity to establish close institutional ties among the members” of the Community.[38] Thus the era of eurosclerosis, although engrossed in economic integration, set into motion several key foreign policy achievements that became forerunners for future developments in defense policy. The Single European Act passed in 1986 set the EC an objective of establishing a single market by December 31, 1992, but it also made a gradual step in foreign policy: it brought the European Political Cooperation (EPC), an intergovernmental forum where member states discussed foreign affairs, under the EC framework.[39]

In 1991, the Treaty on European Union (TEU), later renamed Maastricht Treaty, formalized European foreign policy.

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It created an intergovernmental second pillar, titled the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), providing a budget for joint and common member-state actions.[40] Maastricht marked a decisive shift in Europe's foreign policy goals.

Given Europe's dismal performance in the Gulf War, defense was mentioned in the treaty, "but in ambiguous terms to accommodate the French desire for an autonomous European defense capacity and British opposition to any such thing, for fear it could weaken NATO." [41] In June of 1992, WEU foreign and defense ministers developed the defense component of the EU, setting forth the Petersberg Tasks. The Petersberg Declaration allowed for military units of WEU member states to be employed for humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management.[42] Nevertheless, "NATO remained the major forum for consultation and the major player in out-of-area missions." [43]

Case 3 – European Failure During the War in Kosovo

Not long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, an important security issue demanded the attention of European leaders: the relevance of a transatlantic security organization in light of an absent Soviet threat. In his 1990 speech, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner spoke frankly about the Alliance's identity crisis, saying, "...the security environment that gave birth to NATO, and with which it had lived for forty years, has suddenly gone." [44] NATO's identity crisis was soon resolved when it was repurposed to intervene in Bosnia and later Kosovo.

With the disintegration of Yugoslavia and onslaught of war, Luxembourg's Foreign Minister and President-in-Office of the Council in 1991, Jacques Poos, famously stated, "This is the hour of Europe." [45] In an era of superpower shrinkage, Europe knew it would have to bear more of the burden to ensure peace and stability in its own backyard.[46] Yet throughout the 1990s, European armed forces were unable to resolve crises that broke out in the very heart of Europe; the continent looked to U.S. leadership and NATO forces to resolve these conflicts. The war underscored that, militarily, Europe remained largely dependent on the U.S. Spending about half of what the Americans spent then on defense, Europe only possessed about ten percent of America's capacity to deploy and sustain troops." [47]

The 1990s were a time when EU leaders acknowledged the incoherence and ineffectiveness of CFSP, and presumed that war might not have broken out had a robust European defense policy been in place. Moreover, U.S. President Bill Clinton's reluctance to intervene and NATO's leadership in Kosovo frustrated Europeans. Europeans were actually more willing than "the U.S. to commit ground forces at an early stage, but then experienced great difficulties putting 50,000 troops into the field, in spite of their impressive overall numbers of uniformed personnel." [48] The shortfalls motivated leaders to undertake drastic defense reforms in and within European defense industries. Change in the British attitude toward European defense, vocalized by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, reopened the 'horizon of possibilities.' [49] Naturally, Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, advocated for a European Army, saying, "that Europe should in time have a common foreign policy—which would logically lead to a common defense policy and a common army." [50]

Securing NATO's Future

Following the humiliation in Kosovo, the 'Big Three' (France, Germany and Britain) played leading roles in setting the stage for ensuing progress in European defense. The Franco-German Summit in Postdam in December of 1998, followed by the British-French summit in St. Malo, were essential in guiding the development of an autonomous military capacity. It was quite the feat for the UK, who had finally changed its view about European defense, and the French, to agree that there was a need for high politics cooperation when they normally opposed each other.[51] When faced with three options—maintain the status quo, build up European defense mechanisms within NATO, or pursue defense capabilities completely apart from NATO—the Atlanticism security preference trumped Europeanism. Despite Blair's analysis that Europe depended too much on the U.S. and his eagerness to build up European defense capabilities, along with France's decision to forego its detachment from NATO, the imbedding of the St. Malo Declaration in a transatlantic yet European framework highlighted the desire for a European Rapid Reaction Force capable of fulfilling the Petersberg Tasks rather than a standing European army.[52]

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The headline in the Financial Times following the two summits, "The Right Balance Will Secure NATO's Future," summed up the debate nicely.[53] U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright supported the European defense project, but stipulated the 3Ds: Europe needed to avoid decoupling, duplication and discrimination of non-EU members in its pursuit. As much as the Americans were frustrated with the lack of European leadership on the global stage, and voiced the need for burden-sharing, it was not a viable option for Blair to break the transatlantic security umbrella no matter the difference of opinion that had surfaced regarding ground troops in Kosovo.[54] The NATO security structure was too operational, and the alliance too important, to stray far from the given ultimatums.

The Birthing of ESDP

Being the only European military powers with nuclear weapons and also permanent members of the UN Security Council, the collaboration between France and UK at the St. Malo Summit triggered significant gains in European defense developments. The two actors put aside their differences on defense issues to launch the defense arm of CFSP: the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), later renamed Common Defense and Security policy (CSDP) under the Lisbon Treaty. The other member states followed suit and outlined the instruments to enact ESDP at the Cologne Summit in 1999: the restructuring of the armament sectors in six countries,[55] the appointment of NATO Secretary General Javier Solana to the post of Mr. CFSP, and a set of principles to ensure that the EU could "decide and conduct [Petersberg] operations effectively." [56] Equally important for the credibility and development of ESDP was that NATO endorsed the European plans for ESDP at the Washington summit on April 24, 1999.[57]

Although the instruments of ESDP did not equate to a standing army, it is important to note, however, that the horizon of possibilities shifted considerably toward greater European independence in foreign policy and by extension, defense. The consensus surrounding ESDP laid the groundwork for later developments, including rapid reaction force stipulations and multinational "EU Battlegroups" organized under the European Defense Agency (EDA), founded in 2004. The Berlin Plus Agreement once again emphasized that ESDP was about complementing the existing transatlantic security structure and allowed EU-led military missions to access NATO assets and planning capabilities.[58]

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS

Since the creation of a European army would be a federalist project, two theories explaining European integration are applicable for understanding the three cases enumerated above: historical institutionalism and neo-functionalism. Historical institutionalism posits that though institutional arrangements stress continuity over change, critical junctures or crises can bring about abrupt change.[59] Borrowing from biological science, patterns of punctuated equilibrium are interrupted by short bursts of rapid change when a structure is stressed beyond its capacity. Applying this idea to Case 3, the failure of the EU to deal effectively with the war in its own backyard caused significant changes in the attitudes of key policymakers, to the point that the UK and France were more open to discussing a high politics issue. The system was not as stressed in the 1950s, especially once the Soviet threat diminished, and the heyday of eurosclerosis which encompassed a low external threat perception. A weakness of critical juncture theory is that it lacks criteria for measuring whether a crisis is paradigm-shifting, and thus predictability factors for determining whether an existing paradigm will result in rapid change. One can only speculate what sort of environment could produce significant institutional change by looking at the effects of comparable critical junctures retrospectively.

It was the founding father of the EU himself who predicted the gradual nature of integration, saying,

"We want the Community to be a gradual process of change. Attempting to predict the form it will finally take is therefore a contradiction in terms. Anticipating the outcome kills invention. It is only as we push onwards and upwards that we will discover new horizons." [60]

Echoing Monnet, the second theory, neo-functionalism, explains why Cases 1 and 2 produced some cooperation in defense, if only gradually and slightly. The central tent of spillover is that integration in one area intensifies interdependencies in adjacent sectors, which need to be solved in a supranational forum.[61] Motivated by benefits

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to be gained from synergies, cooperation in economics inevitably spills over into high politics, leading to a political union. Yet the war in Kosovo clarified that a single market would not inevitably lead to a federal state. "A federal state has to have power over armed forces, and this does not necessarily follow from the adoption of the euro." [62] Consequently, although the Soviet threat, the new post-Cold War world and the Kosovo war all stressed the system to the point of change in defense policies, they never did it enough to lead to a European army. Instead, all defense developments were the result of gradual spillovers that continued to evolve as they reacted to interdependency needs and external stimuli. As Haas proposed, integration in high politics is bound to be fuzzy and unpredictable, rather than linear. [63]

The past certainly does show that European defense moves ahead if and when there is political will. Nonetheless, political will is not the only consideration when evaluating changes in defense policy. The three cases irradiate that the resulting defense advancements, which were a result of actors' political will, were substantial during some decades and not as significant during others. The historical context and landscape shaped and constrained the nature of the policy choices, and how rapidly such undertakings could be achieved.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF DEFENSE POLICY

Although there is no formula to predict whether or not there will be a paradigm shift that will finally tip the CSDP-pendulum toward a European army, a number of factors point to why member states may continue to take gradual steps toward more cooperation in defense. First, the EU continues to suffer from a 'capability-expectations gap' in foreign policy and defense, making it probable that synergies in armament will grow with the current austerity measures and high unemployment rates; simply put, member states cannot justify allocating funds to the maintenance of idle tanks. [64] Second, there exists a permissive public sphere for development of a supranational defense policy. In a 2001 survey, when asked to choose what organizations would best address defense, Europeans overwhelmingly chose the EU (43%), over national governments (24%) and NATO (17%). [65]

However, the same underlying obstacles from 1954, 1991 and 1998 live on today. Member states are still reluctant "to permit delegation of sovereignty to centralized institutions." [66] The majority of European defense collaboration projects are managed by member states, though the EDA supports nearly 60 projects related to pooling and sharing. [67] Moreover, even though public opinion backs coordinated European defense, increases in defense budgets lack support. [68] Possibilities like the Synchronized Armed Forces Europe (SAFE) show that European leaders are more interested in achieving economies of scale in defense and aim to pursue cost cutting through intergovernmental cooperation that does not undermine sovereignty. [69] On that note, with the guarantee of a NATO security umbrella, to what extent does Europe need to go beyond what already exists? Are the threats really that serious?

According to Monnet's law, "people only accept change when they are faced with necessity, and only recognize necessity when a crisis is upon them." [70] With Juncker today utilizing Russia's aggression to manufacture the fuel for more coordinated policy in defense, threat perceptions in 2015 are undoubtedly shaking up the system. Threat perceptions have particularly moved the European Parliament to act; there are 400 ongoing military cooperation initiatives in Europe in early 2015. [71] The ongoing migration crisis and threats of Grexit and Brexit are destabilizing the equilibrium, requiring a response that only a coordinated and integrated political union can provide. Only the future will tell whether the U.S. pivot to Asia and current crises were capable of altering the paradigm enough to induce the environment and political will necessary for EU states to enact profound defense cooperation.

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