

Empowering European Defense: The Crucial Role of Germany and the Framework Nation Concept *

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Introduction

When the US declared its commitment to the defense of Europe after WWII, there was a belief that this commitment would be shorter, and Europe would emerge as a military power to defend itself. This sentiment was encapsulated by General Eisenhower's statement at the time of NATO's creation in 1949: "If NATO is still needed in 10 years, it will have failed in its mission." However, NATO persisted beyond this timeframe, working towards its unwritten and unofficial goal articulated by its first Secretary General, Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay: "NATO's goal is to keep the Russians out [of Europe], the Americans in, and the Germans down".

For many years, NATO successfully averted World War III, triumphed in the Cold War, and kept the 'Russians out' of Europe. However, in 2014, the Russian invasion of Crimea signaled a resurgence of Russian assertiveness, posing a renewed threat to Europe's security. Additionally, there is a growing hesitancy and occasional reluctance among Americans to sustain support for the defense of Europe. This has spurred a focused discussion on how Europe should defend its borders and interests in the outer ring of Europe. The central question emerges: Is the European Union 'capable and willing' to undertake this defense independently?

This study proposes the necessity of a hegemonic hard power in continental Europe to establish an effective European defense infrastructure, serving as a deterrent to potential adversaries and safeguarding the continent. The first hypothesis suggests that: 'Given NATO's continued presence in Europe, EU defense initiatives can only be realized through seamless integration with NATO.' The second hypothesis builds on the premise that there is no longer a need to keep Germany 'down' in Europe. Instead, it is time for Germany to take on the responsibility of European defense. The hypothesis is formulated as follows: 'Both NATO and the EU require a formidable power in continental Europe to spearhead and coordinate the defense efforts. Germany emerges as the most fitting candidate for this role, and the current Framework Nation Concept offers a suitable mechanism to facilitate this transition.'

EU and Defense of Europe

The concept of defense has not been precisely defined by the European Union; nevertheless, certain national definitions can be extended to the EU context. 'Defense' implies a policy aimed at protecting citizens and territories from various forms of attacks, emphasizing the utilization of military force. However, 'security' refers to a state characterized by a relative absence of threats, leading to a security policy that entails a broader spectrum of responses—political, economic, social, police, etc.—to confront potential threats.

The EU has been engaged in conducting 'military operations' since 2003; however, the twelve military operations executed under the EU banner since then are better recognized for their soft or stabilization characteristics than for their 'hard' and genuinely defensive dimension. As a

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result, the EU's military engagements are not widely regarded as collective defense activities. Thierry Tardy argues that the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) has evolved into more of a 'Common Security Policy' than a 'Common Defense Policy,' with defense remaining the 'poor relative' of CSDP.

There are disagreements among EU nations regarding security and defense policy. France aims to steer the EU towards a more independent stance, seeking strategic autonomy from the other side of the Atlantic. France intends to leverage the EU banner for power projection activities in North Africa and possibly the Middle East. On the contrary, Poland, feeling the pressure from Russia on its doorstep, recognizes that the EU, with its current capabilities, cannot guarantee its defense. Consequently, Poland prioritizes NATO's security framework over the EU's. Germany attempts to play a mediating role between the two factions within the EU. However, instead of aligning with the 'strategic autonomy' camp, Germany leans towards Mogherini's (former EU High Representative on Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) concept of 'cooperative autonomy.'

The 2016 German White Paper emphasizes that NATO remains 'an indispensable guarantor of German, European, and transatlantic security.' In this context, Germany seeks to "strengthen NATO's European Pillar" while actively contributing to European defense union efforts. Chancellor Merkel, in 2017, underscored that European defense capability must always align with NATO's capabilities and should never be perceived as an alternative to NATO.

The discussions on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) serve as a notable example highlighting the divisions within the EU. Activated in December 2017, PESCO was initially conceived as a platform to coordinate capabilities and defense projects. France envisions PESCO not only as a means to develop military and industrial capabilities but also to enhance deployability and readiness for supporting France's power projections in overseas operations. However, Germany perceived certain tasks, such as formulating defense policies, organizing military units, and establishing an overarching military command structure, as too ambitious. While some studies advocate 'giving a chance to PESCO,' Germany maintains its stance that the cornerstone of European defense remains NATO.

PESCO aims to harmonize the requirements of European militaries, presenting a potential advantage for both German and French defense manufacturers. Nevertheless, Germany hesitates to view PESCO as a platform for force generation in operations. This reluctance stems from Germany's reliance on the Framework Nation Concept for such purposes, a concept that will be discussed in a later section of this analysis.

The US, Europe, and NATO

When Europeans began discussing the establishment of their own arrangements for European Defense after the end of the Cold War, America was not fully satisfied with the idea. In this immediate post-Cold War period, Madeleine Albright, then the Secretary of State, demanded "no duplication, no discrimination against non-EU NATO allies, and no decoupling of the European Security and Defence Policy (the CSDP's predecessor) from NATO structures."

Despite changes in political leadership attitudes, ranging from a pro-European and pro-NATO president, Bill Clinton, who allowed NATO's enlargement for Eastern countries, to a president more suspicious of American assurances in Europe, Donald Trump, who questioned NATO's main defense commitments, the US continues to view Europe as its most willing and capable partner in international affairs. It should be emphasized, however, that Trump's views are not considered marginal in some political and academic circles. Major international relations

scholars, such as Barry Posen (2014), Andrew Bacevich (2016), John Mearsheimer, and Stephen Walt (2016), have called for the US to progressively withdraw from NATO and hand it over to the Europeans.

The data supports the significance of Europe as a crucial partner for the United States. The European Union stands as America's primary partner, contributing to 24 percent of all US trade goods and services, surpassing China, which accounts for only 11.3 percent. Furthermore, the EU is a substantial supporter of jobs in the US, with 2.6 million jobs, in contrast to China's 911,000 jobs. The United States and Europe not only share common values and heritage but also maintain a strategic partnership across various international contexts. This alliance is vital for addressing challenges posed by both state and non-state adversaries, extending beyond Europe, ensuring stability and security that directly impact the American way of life.

Even though Donald Trump has referred to NATO as obsolete, the US military has fulfilled all its commitments to NATO's forward presence plans by deploying combat forces to Baltic states and Poland. Therefore, at least in the short or midterm, let's say within the next ten years, it appears that the US will maintain its presence in Europe. This provides Europe with ample preparation time to enhance its capacity to defend its borders.

Until the end of the Cold War, US hegemonic leadership in NATO created European followership, which Europeans enjoyed by maintaining low defense budgets. The US decided to end this "free riding" of Europe and is now urging European members of NATO to bear the cost of their own defense. The two-percent threshold of GDP for defense budget requirements until 2024 poses a demanding goal for the Europeans. However, they have all committed to this new burden-sharing concept of the Alliance.

Chancellor Merkel famously declared in 2017, "the era in which we could fully rely on others is over, to some extent." While emphasizing "to some extent," she both made a commitment and reservation regarding the American request. She was referring to investing more in defense but not assuming the full responsibility of NATO. The hegemonic power in NATO is now in need of support from its European members, and they are also convinced of this. However, this move should not lead to the full "Europeanization" of NATO, maybe "to some extent!"

A report titled "NATO 2030: United for a New Era" emphasizes the need for capacity-building measures for collective defense. It states that a stronger European defense will contribute to a stronger NATO. The report also recommends preventing unnecessary duplication of efforts and capabilities, urging that ongoing European efforts should be better utilized to increase the role played by European Allies in supporting NATO capability targets.

Framework Nation Concept and Germany as a Hegemon Framework Nation

Whether the US stays in Europe or not, for uncertain and unexpected situations, Europe needs hard power and must "carry a big stick" while "speaking softly." To make this happen, Europe needs a hegemonic power within the continent. Achieving strategic autonomy is possible only by gathering around this hegemonic power, and the framework nation concept could be a way toward fostering this collaboration.

According to a recent study by John R. Deni (2021), Germany is already on the way to becoming a hegemon in Europe. From an economic standpoint, Germany's GDP is nearly \$4 trillion, far exceeding the UK's \$2.8 trillion, which is the next largest in Europe. Germany produces almost one-fifth of the total European economic output.

In 2014, Germany's president, foreign minister, and defense minister each acknowledged that it was time for their country to assume greater responsibility for international security. This inclination was reflected in the 2016 German Defense White Paper, Weissbuch, which emphasized that German security policy is "guided by interests" rather than "values," as mentioned in the 2006 version.

The Framework Nation Concept (FNC) was developed by Germany and proposed as a European project to NATO in 2014. It was defined as "a European solution to the problem of limited defense capabilities." While the initial focus was to cooperate around different capability clusters, the FNC has evolved into setting up larger force structures. Currently, twenty NATO member states and partners have joined the FNC, with ten of them contributing force packages or single components to larger formations.

The FNC is now primarily creating larger formations around the framework nation, with the Bundeswehr currently at the core of the concept. When focusing solely on the land domain of the FNC, the plan is to establish three multinational mechanized divisions, each capable of commanding up to five brigades until 2032. Currently, two of these divisions would be formed around German headquarters. Additionally, there are Air Force and naval components of the concept.

This is a highly ambitious project for the German armed forces. The positive aspect is that it was readily accepted by the major players, particularly those situated in the Northern and Eastern parts of Europe, given that the main logic of the concept is to be prepared for a conventional engagement where an attack is expected to come from the East.

The German FNC also aligns with German military history. Helmuth Von Moltke emphasized an intermediate level of warfare known as the "operational," which falls between the tactics of small units and the strategy of politico-military leadership. These FNC divisions were designed as operational headquarters, a concept where Germans were the inventors and successful executors. The operational level involves the movement and command of large units such as corps and divisions. Known as *Bewegungskrieg*, it is still regarded as Germany's best chance to win a future war.

Possible problems with FNC units can be identified by examining history. Given that German military culture emphasizes attacking enemies with large formations and maximum speed, logistics could pose a significant challenge, a problem the German military has encountered in the past. Addressing this issue requires a commitment of financial resources to the project. While multinationalism may incur costs, it brings about beneficial outcomes. As Churchill aptly said, "There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them!"

The FNC represents a substantial and enduring commitment from Germany, necessitating broad public and political support. Given the historical aversion to military involvement, German decision-makers may encounter challenges in garnering backing. Notably, CDU security experts have coined a term, suggesting that within the FNC structures, Germany will function as an "Anlehnungspartner" – a partner offering support to nations lacking sufficient military capabilities.

Conclusion

In an era characterized by liberal ideals and an aspiration for peace, the prospect of war tends to be an unwelcome topic. The prevailing sentiment often leans towards the belief that the current peaceful environment will endure indefinitely. However, history tells a different story, marked by countless statistical figures of casualties and civilian suffering in wars. The recent global experience with the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a stark reminder that warnings about potential threats, whether in academia or the public sphere, should not be taken lightly. The unpreparedness for such a crisis, resulting in significant loss of life and economic turmoil, underscores the importance of investing resources in anticipation of unforeseen challenges.

States and societies tend to forget the lessons of past wars during periods of peace. The perception that lasting peace has been achieved can lead to complacency, despite historical evidence to the contrary. While major conflicts on the scale of World War II have been averted, the world continues to witness various forms of conflict and war, particularly in the context of regional tensions, economic competition, and geopolitical shifts.

Looking ahead, factors such as economic competition, China's ascent, and instability between Russia and Ukraine, in the Middle East and Africa pose potential challenges with unforeseeable consequences. Although the United States currently maintains a strong interest in Europe, long-term shifts in policy, including isolationist tendencies, may alter this dynamic. Recognizing the need for a robust defense force, Europe requires a hegemonic power, and Germany emerges as the most fitting candidate. Germany's active acceptance and initiation of the Framework Nation Concept (FNC), aimed at establishing a European land power with the collaboration of other European militaries, represents a strategic initiative. However, the success of this long-term project hinges on the sustained commitment of participating nations, both in terms of financial investment and the allocation of manpower.

For the FNC project to flourish, Germany must address key areas of improvement, notably a steadfast political commitment over the long term and a concurrent focus on enhancing military capabilities. This initiative not only strengthens Europe's defense posture but also provides an opportunity for the European Union to demonstrate its commitment to the United States regarding the defense of Europe. In navigating the complex landscape of global uncertainties, investing in a collaborative and forward-thinking defense strategy is imperative for the security and stability of the European continent.