Zone defense

NATO and the EU are muscling up

BY HEINRICH BRAUSS

Europe and the US face unprecedented challenges and threats. To the east, Russia's aggressive actions aim to destabilize and intimidate neighbors and undermine NATO and the EU. To the south, continuing crises and violence across North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) have fueled terrorism and mass migration that are affecting Europe's stability. Russia's operations in Syria, growing tensions between the US and Iran and conflicts between regional powers have aggravated the risks posed to Europe's security.

At the same time, China's global ambitions, its growing economic, technological and military potential and an emerging entente between China and Russia pose a double strategic challenge to the democratic West. For the United States, China has become the key strategic competitor – with implications for NATO's cohesion and effectiveness.

Europe is struggling to position itself within this new and emerging global power structure. Its unity and ability to act as a valuable partner to the US and as a recognized geopolitical actor on its own are at stake.

NATO is currently addressing the implications of global developments on Euro-Atlantic security while focusing on immediate challenges. These include strengthening its deterrence and defense posture while maintaining a dialogue with Moscow, and helping project stability by assisting partners in providing for their own security. As NATO has to be able to respond to threats from various regions across its area – at short notice and simultaneously – it must retain maximum awareness, flexibility and agility to ensure it has the right forces in the right place at the right time. This requires rapid decision-making, forces stationed at high readiness and the ability to move them rapidly over great distances to reinforce threatened allies.

Since 2014, NATO has taken a range of measures:

■ The NATO Response Force has been augmented to become a joint high-readiness force of some 40,000 troops.

■ European Allies alternate in leading its spearhead force of some 5,000 troops – ready to move its initial elements within a few days.

■ The multinational battlegroups in the Baltic states and Poland with 20 contributing allies, led by United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the US, demonstrate that even in case of a limited incursion, Russia would immediately be countered with allied forces, including from NATO's three nuclear powers.

■ In the Black Sea region, NATO's presence is being enhanced through multinational exercises and additional air and maritime activities. Prompted by the 2018 NATO Readiness Initiative, European Allies are providing 30 maneuver battalions, 30 kinetic air squadrons and 30 warships at a maximum of 30 days' notice to employ in the theater. They will develop into a number of larger formations – combat brigades, maritime task groups and enhanced air wings at very high readiness.

■ NATO has enhanced cyber defense and set up a Cyber Operations Center. Two new commands, one in the US, one in Germany, are in charge of moving forces across the Atlantic and across Europe.

■ EU and NATO work together to create the legal, logistical and infrastructure conditions for military mobility; the European Commission will co-finance the improvement of infrastructure in Eastern Europe: roads, bridges, tunnels, harbors, airfields.

■ The Alliance has reinvigorated its nuclear deterrence. Its response to the deployment of new land-based, intermediate-range nuclear-capable missiles by Russia will be defensive and balanced, focusing on conventional capabilities. It must preserve Alliance unity and the credibility of NATO's posture as a whole while denying Moscow any option of decoupling Europe's security from that of the US with its extended nuclear deterrence.

The EU, in turn, has built significant momentum in improving its capacity for civilian and military crisis response missions as part of its Common Security and Defence Policy. While the collective defense of Europe remains NATO's sole responsibility, the European Defence Agency contributes to projecting stability beyond Europe and thus to trans-Atlantic security. Its two flagship projects, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF), help member states engage in multinational cooperation to develop more capabilities, reduce duplication, converge capability development plans and consolidate the European defense industry.

To date, EU nations have launched 47 cooperative projects. Enhancing their capabilities also benefits the Alliance and reinforces its European pillar, as 21 NATO allies are also EU members. NATO and EU staffs work together to ensure that capability development within the two organizations is complementary and that respective priorities and outputs are coherent.

Since 2014, NATO and the EU have enhanced their collaboration to an unprecedented level. They are now cooperating on 74 projects in a range of areas that include countering hybrid threats and expanding cyber defense, capability development, military mobility, defense capacity-building for partners and maritime security. It is essential to ensure complete transparency and the fullest possible involvement of non-EU NATO members, especially the UK after Brexit, since they provide substantial contributions to Europe's security.

As the US shifts its strategic focus to the Asian-Pacific region, however, European nations will need to take far greater responsibility for the security of Europe, for NATO's deterrence and defense and for crisis management in the MENA region, as well as supporting the US in upholding freedom of navigation, which is vital to Europe's own economies. In addition, the disruptive technologies of the digital age will profoundly change the nature of conflict and defense in the future. The Alliance as a whole must invest in innovation programs to maintain its technological edge and interoperability.

The totality of all these challenges posed to the trans-Atlantic partners makes equitable burden-sharing between the US and Europe a strategic necessity. European nations must make vigorous efforts to restore, strengthen and transform their armed forces. They need to increase defense expenditure considerably to invest in high-end capabilities. And there is progress: By the end of 2020, European allies and Canada together will have spent some $130 billion more than they did in 2016.

The multiple strategic challenges, however, also require the EU to further enhance its contributions to Europe's security. PESCO and EDF should be used to support the development of those capabilities that are essential to the entire mission spectrum – crisis response and high-end defense alike – and help develop technologically advanced capabilities required to protect Europe, such as missile defense and long-range precision weapons. Furthermore, European nations should assume a challenging level of responsibility and ambition for their fair share of NATO's entire set of capability requirements – in quantitative and qualitative terms – and its demand for high-readiness formations. These efforts would strengthen the trans-Atlantic alliance and its European pillar as well as Europe's capacity to act on its own.

North America and Europe must stand together against the multitude of challenges that concern both continents. The US must remain a European power to counterbalance Russia's military potential. But it also needs Europe to remain the global superpower it is today. Europe, in turn, must take on far greater international responsibility, and act as a unified, self-determined and capable partner of the US. ■

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Combat ready? A KSK soldier of the Bundeswehr's special forces

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Eastern promises

For an active EU policy towards Eastern Europe

BY DIRK WIESE AND REINHARD KRUMM

The future looked brighter 30 years ago. In 1990, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe gave its brand-new Charter of Paris the title "For a New Europe." The 30-page document began with the words: "A new era of Democracy, Peace and Unity."

Much progress has been made in Europe since then. The Central and Eastern European countries of Poland, Slovakia, Czechia and Hungary are now equal members of the EU and NATO, and their citizens have carried out a remarkable economic and social transformation.

The results have not always been stable, however, as developments in some countries show. Above all, European unity has not been achieved. The split in the continent now lies further east.

On the other side of that border lie the states of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine – but also the Russian Federation.

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have signed Association Agreements with the EU; Armenia, which is part of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), signed a watered-down version of the same. The other states conduct trade with the EU without any political ambitions toward Brussels.

In the 30 years since 1990, people living in these countries have undergone a major transformation process. And yet, prosperity and stability are still fragile, and people are dissatisfied with the results of the transformation.

This goes for the field of international relations, as well. According to a survey conducted last year by the Vienna-based Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (ROCPE) affiliated with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation together with the Paris-based global market research company IPSOS, citizens in Latvia and Poland are not satisfied with the international standing of their respective countries, in spite of their membership in the EU and NATO. Russians and Ukrainians also express a similar dissatisfaction.

Moreover, the world is now in an era of increasing competition between China and the US. For its part, Russia has regained military strength and is also getting involved. In other words, the EU cannot exempt itself from this field of conflict.

Even before taking office, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that she intended to lead "a geopolitical commission," whereby the concrete political formulation of that goal is still pending. The volatility that characterizes international relations at the moment is likely to increase rather than decrease. In the meantime, the US is redefining its interests and involvement in Europe while its economic sanctions continue to impact EU countries.

The EU's policy toward Eastern Europe is unclear and based on three separate concepts: the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Russia policy (steered by five principles credited to Federica Mogherini, the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and the Central Asia strategy. The EU's policy toward Eastern Europe will have to tie together these strands and come up with a viable strategy going forward. For example, in the future, EaP civil society projects carried out at the EU level could – depending on their relevance – include the Russian side.

European policy toward eastern neighbors is burdened by a tangible historical distrust felt by Poles, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians as well as Georgians and Ukrainians. They fear a potential agreement between Russia and EU countries, such as Germany and France; an agreement that would, in the worst-case scenario, be carried out over their heads.

It is of the utmost importance to take these objections into serious consideration. Still, it should not prevent us from seeking out political solutions together. For example, the situation in Ukraine is no cause for satisfaction on the part of us EU citizens.

Fifty years ago, at a time when the situation was just as muddled as it is today, Egon Bahr – a key political figure in the era of *Ostpolitik* – called for a policy of small steps. At that point in time, Germany's long-term strategic goal was reconciliation with the countries of Eastern Europe and, ultimately, German reunification. For the EU today, the long-term strategic goal should be a united Europe.

In 2019, OSCE chairman and Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák argued that OSCE rules and regulations were entirely sufficient to ensure security in Europe. According to Lajčák, the decisive move would be a shift away from a zero-sum game "toward dialog that can actually lead us to compromise." The prerequisites for this shift would include publically naming differences without reservation, exploring interests and designating potential areas of cooperation. It would behoove the EU to initiate such a dialog, most importantly out of respect for the victims of World War II and the subsequent responsibility to ensure a peaceful Europe.

Today, the export-oriented EU relies on a strategic foreign policy. It is in their interest to formulate a concrete policy toward Eastern Europe. After all, if the EU seeks to achieve peace and unity in Europe, it will have to act with energy and foresight. ■

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