



FUTURE WAR AND THE DEFENCE OF EUROPE

John R Allen, F Ben Hodges and Julian Lindley-French examine the growing potential threat to Europe and what it needs to do to stay ahead of the game

Europe is at another hinge of history where the possibility of another major European war can no longer be excluded. The publication of Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy reveals a host of hard choices about not only Britain's future defence, but that of Europe. What is not at all apparent are two hard truths. First, unless Europeans do far more for their own defence Americans could in future be unable to defend them. Second, there can be no credible deterrence or defence without the US! The British review also reveals a further truth: for the defence of Europe to be assured, Europeans must leave the analogue US

dependency of the recent past and help create the digital and AI-enabled transatlantic super-partnership of the near tomorrow.

The changing threat across the world and in and around Europe is creating such tensions in US foreign and defence policy and will stretch its forces to such an extent that the main tenet of European defence since 1945 can no longer be assumed: that US will always be present in Europe. Europeans need a bonfire of their illusions and America needs capable Europeans.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only challenges the assumptions upon which Europe's defence has been established since 1949 and fast accelerating the shift of power from West to East, it has already revealed and

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worsened many critical vulnerabilities in Europe's defences, which have become too static, too rigid and too complacent. Indeed, Europeans face daily the systematic application of 5D warfare – disinformation, deception, destabilisation, disruption and implied coercion via implied or actual destruction. And yet, far from adequately modernising their defences COVID-19 could see Europe's social welfare societies soon make a dangerous trade-off between health security and European security.

Any such trade-off will see the destruction of a fundamental tenet of European defence. From D-Day to today, the defence of Europe has relied on there being a sufficiency of legitimate military power. Shared innovation and the maintenance of the technological edge have also been key to maintaining the unity of effort and purpose vital to upholding and expanding Europe's freedoms. Europe's defence has rested on a 'defence contract' between the peoples of the Alliance and their respective leaders on both

sides of the Atlantic. In the face of the COVID-19 social, political and economic rupture and as the shared memory of struggle subsides, continued political support can no longer be taken for granted in many Allied countries.

At the very least the bond between defence, power and leadership must be revitalised and embedded in both NATO and the EU so they can be transformed to meet the coming challenge. There must also be a demonstrable re-sharing of transatlantic burdens without which any European defence will over time wither and die. Why?

Europe's eastern flank: Since President Putin came to power, Russia has become more steadily aggressive, modernising its armed forces and forging a new Russian asymmetric strategy of complex strategic coercion. Even though Russia is a relatively poor and politically unstable state, it would be a profound mistake to underestimate

EUROPE NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO ACT AS A FIRST RESPONDER AT THE HIGH END OF DETERRENCE

the importance to Moscow of maintaining a strong security state. Indeed, it is the toxic mix of relative economic weakness, political instability and coercive power which makes Russia so potentially dangerous, particularly to its neighbours. While there are many road-bumps on the way to developing the Russian future force Putin likes to imply already exists, Moscow's challenge to the European order must not be underestimated.

Europe's southern flank: Across the Middle East and North Africa social and political instability has worsened with the emergence of state versus anti-state Salafist Jihadism, further exacerbated by COVID-19. The West's humiliation during the Syrian war has enabled Russia to exploit Europe's loss of already limited influence, while the flows of desperate people towards Europe has weakened the political and strategic cohesion of the Allies, as tensions with Turkey grow. Sadly, the prospect of a major regional-strategic war is ever present while transatlantic cohesion has been undermined over what to do with Iran and its nuclear programme. Russian and Turkish interference in Libya also threatens not only to cut off vital oil supplies to Europe, but to further exacerbate the suffering of refugees and migrants. The impact COVID-19 will have on fragile states across the region is unclear, but the scale of potential risk, challenges and threat to European security and defence is very real.

China: The rise of China is the biggest single geopolitical factor to impact Europe's defence since 1939. It also implies a nightmare in which China and Russia join forces to weaken the US by creating simultaneous chaos the world over, rendering European defence incapable at a time and place of Beijing and Moscow's choosing. The US has long been a 'European' actor; China is fast becoming one. The impact of the irresistible rise of China on Europe's future defence will thus be profound post-COVID-19, not least because China is engineering a form of 'imperial overstretch' on the US, forcing Washington to make choices that weaken America. China is also a Jekyll and Hyde power – both constructive and invasive, while COVID-19 has also revealed the extent to which it seeks to exploit globalisation/sinicization to impose its will. The Belt and Road Initiative and the indebtedness

of many European states already enables China to exert its influence through those states on the EU, NATO, and the transatlantic relationship. China's use of "vaccine diplomacy" further links the post-COVID recovery of a number of states to its pervasive influence.

NATO: As the Secretary-General's 2030 review of NATO reveals the Alliance could still defend Europe, but only if it is truly modernised and transformed. NATO has already been 'adapting' for a decade and has made significant progress in meeting the coming challenges to Europe's defence. However, power is relative and while the Americans are increasingly overstretched trying to cover the expanding space and technology of warfare, Europeans are decidedly under stretched, unable or unwilling to meet the demands of defence, too often seeing it as a budget to be raided for domestic political concerns. Ultimately, NATO is in the business of deterrence and if it fails a successful defence seems unlikely, short of rapidly staring into the nuclear abyss. Europeans must thus understand that NATO is essentially a European institution and give it the tools to do its job.

Europe: Could Europe defend Europe? No, and not for the foreseeable future. France has called for European strategic autonomy organised around and focused on the Franco-German defence axis. However, strategic autonomy is a consequence of strategic influence and in the defence domain that means relevant and relative military power. Given post-COVID-19 pressures, the only way such a defence could be realised is via an integrated European defence and a radical European strategic public-private sector partnership that goes far beyond that which exists today. European defence integration is blocked because many European states see defence and the use of force as the core of state sovereignty and are unwilling to sacrifice relatively weak forces for the sake of the greater European good.

Can Europeans defence-innovate? They will need to, and in the EU's Permanent Security Cooperation

(PESCO) they have a vehicle to make Europeans more defence capable. But, could Europe defend Europe? No, not without profound and radical change. This is because Europe could be facing a digital Dreadnought moment when strategy, capability and technology combine to create a decisive breakthrough in the technology and character of warfare. The future of peace in Europe could well thus depend on the ability of Europeans and Americans to match the technology of defence and deterrence to the mosaic of hybrid, cyber and hyper-warfare. Critical to such a posture will be the closing of the growing gap between Europe's conventional and nuclear deterrents. For example, rather than match Russia's burgeoning short and intermediate offensive nuclear systems, the Allies should consider a new concept of digital deterrence which reaches across the conventional, digital and nuclear spectrum. If not, Europeans will remain vulnerable to digital decapitation and the imposed use of disruptive technologies. Only a strategic 'alliance' between public policy and private technology will enable the Allies to harness the revolution in (applied) military technology to assure European defence in the face of the gathering (tech) storm.

And all this must occur against the enlarging backdrop of a technologically sophisticated and militarily advanced China, increasingly assertive in East Asia, thus pulling American attention increasingly eastward, while deliberately and deeply penetrating Europe's political, social, economic, cyber and space spheres. Therefore, at the core of Europe's future war, future defence there will need to be a European future force able to act as a first responder at the high end of deterrence and thus credible as a force across air, sea, land, cyber, space, information and knowledge. That is precisely the ambition implicit in Britain's IR 2021 and is consistent with the recently issued Interim National Security Strategic Guidance by the Biden Administration. The bottom-line? NATO remains the *sine qua non* of European defence and must be transformed if it is to meet the future war, future defence challenge of Europe. The alternative is both unthinkable but increasingly plausible ●

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