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Stronger Together

The Chances and Roadblocks of Further EU-NATO Cooperation

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“Don't forget your great guns, which are the most respectable arguments of the rights of kings”, Frederick II. of Prussia once supposedly summarized the relationship between military and political power. The arguably largest array of *“big guns”*, the military power of NATO, is a perfect example for that. The alliance has been a highly successful tool for the United States and its allies to ensure the survival of their democratic and liberal values against any systemic rivals. But since new threats such as cyber warfare or deliberate disinformation can hardly be fought with artillery barrages, the tasks for NATO have expanded far beyond its traditional métier. Additionally, negative coverage on its internal divisions recently dominated the headlines. With a few European nations reluctant to pay a greater share of the financial burden whilst publicly fantasizing about a European Army on one side and U.S., occupied by waning domestic support for global leadership and the ascension of China, on the other, the immediate future for NATO appears to be rather grim.

Here again, wise words spoken by Frederick II. can be applied: *“He who defends everything, defends nothing.”* Any actor should thus carefully evaluate how to best use his limited resources when countering threats because ubiquitous defense not feasible. Regarding the EU-NATO controversy this leads to a second question: Do both institutions need to defend everything in Europe by themselves or could they complement each other?

Since both share similar ideological values and strategic interests but generally resort to different means to pursue their goals, a cooperation between them appears to be the logical consequence. The High Representative of Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, repeatedly stated that the primary goal of the EU's security policy is not to create a massive force of deterrence but to apply softer tools such as aiding post-conflict stabilization, offering economic assistance or institution building in instable countries in the its periphery. Worrying developments in the EU's immediate vicinity make these efforts necessary and lighten the burden on NATO. Whilst the traditional military supremacy of NATO as the main argument of its members against foreign aggression should be maintained, cooperating with the EU's 'softer' security policy with special regards to non-military issues could take pressure of the struggling alliance and improve the security situation of both parties. The fewer sources of conflict on the borders of Europe, the more unlikely the necessity of military action.

Secretary General Stoltenberg and Mogherini advanced the EU-NATO cooperation over the last years, most notably to the EU-NATO declarations of 2016 and 2018. But many of the agreed steps to ensure better cooperation have yet been unimplemented. This was in part caused by the limited personnel resources of NATO. Besides an overdue expansion of NATO's financial resources for civilian personnel, the coordination between it and the EU could be boosted by establishing an exchange of staff-members. Such an exchange of knowledge could especially be useful in the areas of counterterrorism and cyberwarfare. Simultaneously, counter-productive promises of an “European army” only strain transatlantic ties and should be avoided.

Considering that for example Germany does not have a sound strategy to fulfill its financial as well as its military contributions to NATO, anger in Washington over the newly discovered interest in a 'EU-Army' is understandable.

However, using the enthusiasm in Berlin and Paris for increased military cooperation within the EU could also be profitable for NATO. The harmonization of military equipment and procurement through EU-initiatives such as the European Defense Fund could reduce the expensive inefficiencies and redundancies of the European defense markets. And NATO would indirectly benefit when its members cut costs on procurement. Furthermore, this would be a first step to close the widening technology-gap between the U.S. and many of its European partners. However, in this process the U.S.-access to the European market must be guaranteed on a basis of mutuality. Mechanisms that limit the intellectual property rights of U.S.-companies and thus Washington's say in the export of the developed arms should be avoided in the future.

Therefore, the shared interest of the two institutions combined with the potential of their cooperation speaks for further collaboration. At the same time, the possibility of worsening relations between the global liberal orders' two most respectable arguments against threats from its systemic competitors would be a dream come true for countries looking to undermine the liberal hegemony. Although neither the EU nor NATO have the resources and capabilities to defend Europe in every sector, together they can make sure nothing is being left undefended.



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Peer Klaus Braak is a recent graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Governance and Public Policy as well as Media and Communication from the University of Passau. His fascination for the topic of transatlantic cooperation began when he spent a year as a fellow of the Congress-Bundestag-Exchange in the United States. As a volunteer for the American-Field-Service he made the facilitation of people-to-people contacts between the USA and Germany his hobby. He spent this summer in Washington DC, where he interned in the office of the German Ambassador. However, his interest in foreign affairs is not limited to the United States. In order to delve into the topic of international and religious terrorism, he spent a semester as an exchange-student in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and a summer as an intern in the office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation in The Republic of India.