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ESSAY

# AFTER PARIS: WHAT PRICE EUROPEAN DEFENCE?

Anand Menon & Nick Witney

## SUMMARY

- In the wake of the Paris atrocities, France has asked its EU partners to share in some of its overseas military deployments.
- Any assistance will be bilateral, as the EU's common defence policy has broken down.
- Most Europeans have ceased to take defence seriously. Two years ago, national leaders proposed revitalising the Common Security and Defence Policy with an ambitious agenda, but then dropped the ball.
- With the EU tearing itself apart over the migrant crisis, an adequate response to France's appeal is vital. Few will want to bomb Syria. But aiding France's deployments in Africa would show solidarity – and address the migrant crisis.
- Population growth and unresolved conflicts in Africa mean that, even if Syria found peace tomorrow, migratory flows across the Mediterranean will continue for a generation in the absence of greater security and prosperity in Africa. UN peacekeepers are overwhelmed.
- Worthwhile military help to France will require national leadership; and whether today's leaders have the will to preserve the EU, let alone cooperate on defence, is an open question.

They say that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. The carnage on the streets of Paris has brutally reminded Europeans of the fragility of the cocoon of safety and security in which they have become accustomed to living. There is a world of violence surrounding the continent; and both geography and the long intermingling of populations mean that Europe, unlike the United States, has no drawbridge option. If Europeans want to stay safe, they are going to have to take their defence and security a lot more seriously than they have in recent decades.

Confronted with this reality, the instinctive reaction of most Europeans is to think NATO. So there was general surprise when, on 16 November, a sombre French president, addressing the French Congress (a joint session of both houses of parliament), invoked not NATO's Article 5 – the alliance's mutual defence guarantee – but the European Union's equivalent, Article 42(7) of the Lisbon Treaty.

This little-known provision commits EU member states to offer “aid and assistance by all the means in their power” (code for “including military means”), if one of their number is “the victim of armed aggression on its territory”.

The following morning, EU defence ministers met in Brussels under the chairmanship of EU foreign policy chief, High Representative Federica Mogherini. Speaking to the press afterwards, French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian expressed himself well satisfied. His counterparts had been unanimous in their expressions of readiness to help. Asked what support he hoped for, he referenced collaboration with the French interventions in

Iraq and Syria – and also for partners to assist in relieving France’s military burden in other theatres. France was already deployed, he pointed out, in the Sahel, in the Central African Republic, in Lebanon – “France cannot do everything by itself”.

So what next? Follow-up, it transpired, would be via a series of bilateral contacts between Paris and other European capitals. There would be no role for the European defence institutions: “This does not”, Mogherini emphasised, “imply any EU CSDP mission or operation.”

And no wonder. The Union’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is a busted flush. For years now, European leaders have been publicly reiterating in Brussels their determination to play a greater role in international security, and to make straitened defence budgets go further by pooling their efforts and resources – and have then gone home and done exactly the reverse. Defence policy, to the extent that it can be said to exist at all, has been renationalised; defence budgets are directed towards saving jobs or preserving national industrial capability as much as they are to producing useable military capability.

Will the attacks of 13 November in Paris make any difference? And, even supposing that the current crisis generates some of the political will needed to revive the EU’s moribund defence efforts, to what can they be usefully directed?

## A false summit

The yawning chasm between Europe’s rhetoric on defence and its actions is well illustrated by the recent engagement with the subject at the European Council – the forum that brings together the 28 heads of state and government. At their December 2013 meeting, they set aside time specifically to discuss how to re-energise the CSDP. The communiqué looked promising. “Defence matters”, they portentously declared. Going beyond the usual platitudes, the national leaders set out a specific agenda for reviving European defence, under the headings of operations, capabilities, and the technological and industrial base. Better still, they set deadlines – and promised to take stock of progress at the June 2015 European Council.<sup>1</sup>

Given the deterioration in Europe’s security situation in the 18 months leading up to June 2015, a particularly searching review might have been expected. But no review, searching or otherwise, took place at all. Defence is covered in the June communiqué in a few dismissive sentences – “Work will continue on a more effective, visible and result-oriented CSDP.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, on the day, national leaders found they had better (or, rather, worse) things to talk about – notably the Greek and refugee crises, with a short “commercial break” to discuss the renegotiation agenda of British Prime Minister David Cameron. Yet this is not a

convincing excuse. Ensuring that prior commitments are addressed, reports are prepared, and recommendations offered – ensuring, in short, that even if the meetings themselves are hijacked by events, the participants have something to “nod through” – is precisely what bureaucracies are for. Not as good as a properly engaged discussion, but at least a way to keep the show on the road. Incomprehensibly, no such procedure was followed on this occasion; defence may matter, but not, it seems, very much.

Some idea of what had or had not happened on the December 2013 agenda can, however, be derived from separate reports prepared earlier in 2015 by Mogherini and by the Commission, as well as from the rather limp-wristed “Conclusions” of the EU foreign and defence ministers who went over the ground themselves in May.<sup>3</sup>

There are a few seemingly encouraging aspects. The high representative has picked up with gusto her mandate to review the EU’s global strategy. And a degree of real progress has been made on air-to-air refuelling and satellite communications, two of the four capability areas highlighted in the December 2013 agenda. France, Germany, and Italy are also jointly working on a medium-altitude, long-endurance surveillance drone (yielding to pressure from their increasingly work-starved aerospace industries).

Beyond these elements, however, the picture is dismal. The member states have again demonstrated their unflagging readiness to talk about concepts, frameworks, and roadmaps, and to re-emphasise their commitment to the “comprehensive approach” and to “engagement with partners”. What they are not prepared to do is put their hands in their pockets, contribute to operations, or commit to collaborative projects. In short, they still see gradual national decline as preferable to concerted attempts to forge effective joint action.

True, Russian President Vladimir Putin has effectively braked the freefall of European defence budgets – though some countries continue to cut, Poland raised its defence spending by 20 percent and Lithuania by 50 percent in 2015.<sup>4</sup> But expenditure on defence research, the seed-corn of the future, is at half the agreed target levels, and declining. The issue of common funding for operations is deadlocked. Only where there is a prospect that someone else might pay (Commission funding for defence research, the European Investment Bank, or European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker’s still somewhat elusive investment initiative) have the member states shown enthusiasm.

In May, the foreign ministers announced that “the EU and its Member States are assuming increased responsibilities to act as a security provider”. Well, not really. There were 7,000

<sup>1</sup> See “Conclusions”, European Council, 19–20 December 2013, available at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/140245.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/140245.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See “Conclusions”, European Council, 25–26 June 2015, p. 6, available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/26-euco-conclusions/>.

<sup>3</sup> For the high representative and European Commission reports, see “CSDP Reports”, European External Action Service, 8 May 2015, available at [http://eeas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/2015/report-csdp\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/report-csdp_en.htm); and for the May 2015 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions, see “Council conclusions on CSDP”, European Council, 18 May 2015, available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/05/18-council-conclusions-csdp/>.

<sup>4</sup> According to figures from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), available at <http://www.sipri.org/>.

Europeans deployed on CSDP operations in December 2013 (most of them safely concentrated in the Balkans and off the Horn of Africa) – and there are no more today. After months of chaos on Europe’s periphery, there are now 17 ongoing EU operations – a net increase of one since December 2013. A security advisory team was deployed to Ukraine last year with an initial budget of less than €3 million; the security team in Niger (the epicentre of so much instability in the Sahel) has been “beefed up” to about 60 (the US has 250 people there, as well as 300 troops fighting Boko Haram in Cameroon, where the EU is absent); and the refugee crisis has produced a so-far-unavailing effort to find ways of destroying traffickers’ boats. None of this is much more than tokenism. Meanwhile, when it comes to getting the member states to contribute to operations, the high representative notes that on the vexed question of battle-group deployment there has been “no substantive progress”, while on the civilian side the continuing foot-dragging “raises the broader questions of political will and credibility”.

Things are no better in the areas of developing capabilities and the industrial base. One of the key elements of the December 2013 agenda was the demand for “increased transparency and information sharing in defence planning”, to identify opportunities for collaboration early on: a framework was required by the end of 2014. But the bureaucracies seem to have decided to ignore this, persisting instead with the old system whereby member states hold their planning cards to their chests and float the idea of cooperation only if unilaterally convinced that they will benefit. Even this inadequate approach has thrown up some new possibilities, listed in the high representative’s report – but ignored by the ministers.

Meanwhile, the insertion of drones into regulated airspace (a crucial requirement for the future of Europe’s civil aerospace industry) will evidently not be achieved as mandated by 2016, though no explanation or revised forecast is forthcoming. Delays on the military’s part are preventing progress on the required pan-European system for air-worthiness certification of military aircraft (currently one of the most egregious examples of waste and unnecessary duplication); the cyber-defence push is stuck for want of a lead nation; the Commission’s proposal to review the operation of its directives aimed at freeing up the defence market in effect concedes that these are widely ignored; the European Council’s instruction to replicate the successful model of cooperation embodied in the European Air Transport Command has produced no response; and so on.

Of course, much of the agenda is genuinely difficult to implement. Some of the deadlines may have been over-ambitious. But the December 2013 summit was tacit recognition that institutional inertia and resistance to matching words with action in the CSDP is such that it will require sustained political impulse from the highest level to spur progress. So an agenda was laid down, and deadlines set, which for the most part have been either ignored or missed. The European Council’s failure to conduct its promised stock-take this year, and demand real explanations, is not just incomprehensible – it is a dereliction of duty.

## Who cares?

The honest answer to this question seems to be: “No-one, very much.” The shortcomings of the June summit have been accepted with resignation on all sides. In Brussels, the attitude to the CSDP is now one of fatalistic inertia. But EU staffers need something to fill their days. So there is now a gathering clamour for a defence “white book” exercise to follow on from the high representative’s global strategy review when that is wrapped up next summer – an idea neatly skewered by one observer as “permanent structured reflection”. Yet the last thing the CSDP needs is more words, declarations, targets, or “headline goals”. Such things might have a purpose when it comes to translating real political will from the highest level into action lower down the political food chain. Absent such will, however, words remain nothing but words. And empty ones at that.

There are several problems bundled into one here. At their root is the fact that many Europeans – and particularly the populations of those member states that matter most in terms of collaborative European defence initiatives – have become increasingly uninterested in defence. In a recent survey, only 49 percent of British, 47 percent of French, and a mere 38 percent of German respondents expressed support for the idea that their country should use force to defend an ally involved in a serious military conflict with Russia.<sup>5</sup>

And it is not only that Europeans have become leery of military interventions. They are also increasingly insular and parochial in their outlook. For all Germany’s impressive response to the refugee crisis, Berlin remains staunchly unwilling to think in terms of addressing the problem at source – in the Middle East and North Africa. Equally, the current British government, like its coalition predecessor, seems to view foreign policy largely as trade policy, an integral part of the “prosperity agenda” that allows it, for instance, to cuddle up to the Chinese with no reference to the geopolitical anxieties plaguing east Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Today’s political leaders, of course, tend to follow rather than lead. Their increasing parochialism (we should perhaps exclude France from this criticism – its recent international activism is apparently in inverse proportion to its weight within EU debates) reflects that of the countries they are in charge of.

So the challenge is not one of rustling up good intentions in Brussels, but a far longer-term and more difficult one of convincing Europeans, and thereby their political masters, that we live in uncertain and dangerous times, and that Europeans should perhaps cease to believe in their own myths about having created a peaceful, post-modern world for themselves.

5 Katie Simmons, Bruce Stokes, and Jacob Poushter, “1. NATO Public Opinion: Wary of Russia, Leary of Action on Ukraine”, Pew Research Center, 10 June 2015, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/1-nato-public-opinion-wary-of-russia-leary-of-action-on-ukraine/>.

6 Anand Menon, “Littler England: The United Kingdom’s Retreat from Global Leadership”, *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2015, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/littler-england>.

The evidence, of course, goes well beyond the latest outrage in Paris. Nor is it confined to the immediate neighbourhood. While Europeans are becoming increasingly uninterested in the geopolitics of the world further afield, events there have become ever more important to us. As a group of trading nations, the EU is heavily dependent on the maintenance of the stable, rules-based, liberal world order that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Yet despite this dependence, Europeans seem largely content to either ignore geopolitics or leave it to others. The way they deal with China is a prime example. While the US adopts a pragmatic, precautionary approach to the potential dangers related to the emergence of a new superpower, Europeans remain divided and supine. Attempts to define a common EU approach are undermined by national capitals jostling for advantage. Individual governments prostrate themselves at the feet of China's new emperors in their desperation to secure lucrative contracts. When David Cameron goes to Asia, he does not even talk geopolitics.

The dangers of such an approach should be all too apparent. The world is an unstable place, and the role of foreign policy planners is to anticipate and prepare for the threats that will confront us. Of all policy areas, it is surely foreign and defence policies that should be governed by the precautionary principle. Until recent weeks it seemed unlikely that Islamic State (IS) would spread its tentacles and become a direct threat to the West, but it did. It may not be that China's rise leads to unrest and potentially even conflict, but it might. It may not be that Russia continues to seek to destabilise Europe's eastern fringes in a quest to regain lost prestige, but it might. Europeans are currently unprepared to deal with any of these eventualities.

Nor, increasingly, is the US prepared to step in and take up the slack. A combination of fatigue, of increasingly insular public opinion, and of diminishing resources has undermined US willingness to act as a global policeman. Moreover, the Washington foreign policy establishment is increasingly focusing on Asia. Consequently, the US is anxious to ensure that its allies take over more of the burden of maintaining security in their own backyards. And, in stark contrast to earlier periods, Washington has increasingly come to believe that, for Europeans to be able to do this, they will need to work together more effectively within the EU. The CSDP, therefore, no longer stands in contradistinction to the trans-Atlantic relationship but, rather, should be one of its primary building blocks.

## Responding to Paris

Will the Paris attacks shock Europeans out of their complacency? One can only hope so. For there is now a very great deal riding on how other member states live up to their promises to provide France with "aid and assistance by all the means in their power".

It is no exaggeration to say that the EU is currently in danger of pulling itself apart at the seams. The financial

crisis, with its resultant conflicts between creditors and debtors, between those whose economies continued to benefit from the euro and those who plunged into deep recessions, was bad enough. On top of this has come the refugee crisis, where the reluctance of national leaders to converge around a united and principled response has engendered, even before Paris, what Commissioner Frans Timmermans has rightly termed an existential crisis. Now, populist and Islamophobic forces are having a field day, gleefully conflating the refugee and terrorism crises, while a number of Eastern European member states have seized the opportunity to renege on earlier undertakings to carry a fair – indeed any – share of the refugee resettlement burden.

The EU cannot survive if its members ask only what the Union can do for them, and never what they can do for the Union. Some conspicuous solidarity is desperately needed. France's move to invoke the EU's mutual support commitment lays the issue on the line.

There would be a real problem if France's plea to its partners had been confined to "join us in bombing IS in Syria". True, Cameron has told Parliament that he sees the case for the UK doing so as being strengthened by the Paris atrocities. But, though he promises to lay out a "comprehensive strategy", many are left wondering what gains could be expected from a few British bombs on Raqqa. The risks inherent in such a course are numerous. These include bringing terror to British streets, and strengthening IS by reinforcing their narrative of being assailed by a coalition of "crusaders" who, after years of doing nothing while Bashar al-Assad slaughtered their co-religionists, are now happy to bomb true believers. Cameron's claim that Raqqa is "the head of the snake" suggests a failure to grasp that the enemy is not a state, whatever its grandiloquent claims, but the hydra-headed monster of a perverted ideology. And whatever the British Parliament concludes, it is hard to envisage any other European volunteer, except perhaps Denmark and the Netherlands, for attacks on Syria outside the context of a United Nations-backed solution to the country's long nightmare.

Fortunately, Le Drian was smart enough to suggest another manner in which military solidarity could be shown – by sharing the burden of French deployments in other theatres, particularly in Africa. Other Europeans should do just that – not just as a way of showing solidarity, but because a step change in European peacekeeping and crisis-management efforts makes sense in its own terms. The fact that 17 CSDP operations are ongoing across Africa and the Middle East shows that Europeans know what they ought to be doing – just as the tokenistic nature of these operations shows that most of them have preferred to fake it.

Even before the Paris attacks, Europeans were becoming uneasily aware that more serious efforts to stabilise their neighbourhood must be part of any comprehensive strategy towards the refugee crisis. There has been much talk of the need to tackle the problem at source, in the "countries of



origin and transit". But, as usual, most Europeans have preferred to reach for the chequebook, putting €3 billion on the table if the Turks will prevent refugee flows across their territory, and establishing a €1.8 billion "trust fund" to support stabilisation and development in Africa.

It may be hard to envisage a sensible military role for Europe in Syria (though Europeans should already be thinking about providing monitors to the UN if the ceasefire envisaged in the recent Vienna agreement on Syria comes to pass). But other areas in the Middle East could offer opportunities, such as Libya, Lebanon (where European peacekeepers would be of use) and Iraq. In Africa the possibilities are even more obvious, and potentially equally valuable. Almost half of the migrant tide flowing into Europe comes from Africa, in particular from or through the swathe of conflict-ridden territory stretching from the Horn to West Africa. It is here that most French troops other than those engaged against IS are deployed, fighting terrorists and traffickers as well as acting as peacekeepers, and it is here that Le Drian has appealed for help.

Unaddressed, the trans-Mediterranean migration problem will only get worse. Africa will be the site of the world's last great population explosion over the next three decades. The facts of demography and climate change will entail unremitting migration pressure on Europe's southern borders unless remedial action is taken now.<sup>7</sup>

The ultimate answer to unsustainable population growth is stability and prosperity. Given these two factors, fertility rates fall below the replacement level and populations begin to shrink. Africa's prognosis is not without hope – there is huge economic potential still to be realised there, and, despite all its problems, the continent has been marking up steady 5 percent growth rates for the past decade. Nonetheless, it is not going to become a real success story, the sort of place that can sustain its own population without huge displacements of people, in any useful timescale without outside help. That will mean investment, development aid, and a lot of security assistance.

The UN and African Union currently bear the brunt of crisis-management efforts on the continent, from Somalia and Sudan to Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo. But they are struggling to cope.<sup>8</sup> More forceful and immediate European contributions to CSDP operations in Mali and in the Central African Republic should have been forthcoming long ago. Proper European participation in UN peacekeeping operations, which was regularly discussed after the end of NATO operations in Afghanistan, would also have been a significant gesture, but new contributions were limited to Sweden and the Netherlands.

7 See "World Population Prospects: Key findings & advance tables", United Nations, 2015, available at [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key\\_Findings\\_WPP\\_2015.pdf](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key_Findings_WPP_2015.pdf).

8 Richard Gowan and Nick Witney, "Why Europe Must Stop Outsourcing Its Security", European Council on Foreign Relations, December 2014, available at [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR121\\_WHY\\_EUROPE\\_MUST\\_STOP\\_OUTSOURCING.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR121_WHY_EUROPE_MUST_STOP_OUTSOURCING.pdf).

President Barack Obama's push for more support to UN peacekeeping at the recent "leaders' summit" in New York may help. But the European response was slender (the best offer seems to have been Cameron's pledge of some 350 non-combat troops for Somalia and South Sudan) and was dwarfed by China's offer of 8,000 new troops.<sup>9</sup> It is time for Europe to step up to the plate, if only to share the burden with one of their own number.

## From crisis to opportunity

Here, then, is a ready-made way to turn a crisis into an opportunity – to respond to France's call for support, and at the same time take practical action to mitigate the migration and refugee emergency. Sad though it may be that the CSDP is in no shape to deliver a coordinated European effort, member states have the options of making bilateral arrangements with France, or bolstering UN deployments.

As Washington's UN Ambassador Samantha Power pointed out, when urging just such action on Europeans earlier this year, formats are of secondary importance; what matters is that Europeans should get out there and do something, in defence of their own interests as much as in support of the international community's wider peacekeeping efforts.<sup>10</sup> (In a similar spirit, a former US Ambassador to NATO rightly dismissed renewed talk about a "European army" by noting that Europe's problem "is not that it lacks an army. It is that it lacks a serious commitment to defence – national, European or transatlantic.")<sup>11</sup>

But nothing, of course, will happen unless national leaders show leadership – a quality, as we noted above, in short supply at the moment. The evidence today is of a more general disposition to pander to isolationists and xenophobes, and to indulge the fantasy that the world's ills can be shut out by hunkering down behind national borders. Perhaps, in the short term, France's appeal may help some at least recover their courage sufficiently to make the case for new deployments. In the longer term, a more sustained exercise of leadership will be required, to press upon reluctant European publics the hard truths that peace and security depend on taking defence seriously, and spending more on it; that no real security is to be found in staying home and pulling the blanket over one's head; and that a proper European contribution to international crisis-management efforts is a necessary condition for keeping the US engaged in Europe's security.

The daring may even be ready to spell out the fact that nothing individual European states choose to do will be enough. Even the largest among them lack the wherewithal to undertake anything but the smallest interventions alone.

9 Carole Landry, "Obama draws pledges of 40,000 troops for UN peacekeeping", AFP, 29 September 2015, available at <http://news.yahoo.com/nations-offer-30-000-troops-police-un-peacekeeping-193338715.html>.

10 For a transcript of her speech, see Ambassador Samantha Power, "Remarks on Peacekeeping in Brussels", United States Mission to the United Nations, 9 March 2015, available at <http://usun.state.gov/remarks/6399>.

11 Ivo Daalder, "Europe lacks commitment to spend on defence", *Financial Times*, 11 March 2015, available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/0ea9cb4-c7e8-11e4-8210-00144feab7de.html>.

European action must be coordinated and collaborative for security policy objectives to be achieved. European countries are no longer – to the extent that they ever were – capable of ensuring their security alone. The “defence deficit” – the gap between the military capabilities possessed by its states and those required to defend their interests<sup>12</sup> – continues to grow, and will not close without greater European defence cooperation.

Such arguments, of course, are easier to make if voiced collectively – which underlines the importance of the European Council picking up the defence ball it dropped earlier this year. Leadership among the leaders would be welcome, too; a happy dream would be a new Franco-British initiative to reprise their joint Saint-Malo Declaration of 1998 and re-launch the CSDP, in the aftermath of a British referendum vote to stay in the EU.

The more immediate question, however, is whether, by the time the British hold their vote, the EU will have managed to pull out of the self-destructive downward spiral of mutual recrimination and nationalism which threatens its very existence. It will do so only if it can find effective answers to the crises of security and migration which now engulf it – separate issues to be sure, but all too easily conflated by the enemies of the EU’s core values. Action will be needed on many fronts; but France’s invocation of the treaty commitment to mutual support in the face of armed aggression offers the rest of Europe the chance to do the right thing, and address both crises in doing so.

<sup>12</sup> Anand Menon, “The Other Euro Crisis”, *Foreign Affairs*, 10 December 2013, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2013-12-10/other-euro-crisis>.

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