

# MAKING DEFENCE EUROPEAN AGAIN

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## SUMMARY

- Between an expansionist Russia and a careless America, one thing is clear: Europeans must be prepared to defend themselves, and quickly.
- To do so, they need to adopt a distinctly European way of defence. They cannot hope to replicate America's security approach, nor do they need a new institutional superstructure. Rather, they need to be pragmatic and resourceful by building on what exists.
- A European way of defence has three pillars. First, a layered decision-making architecture would draw on NATO's command structure for military operations; on the EU for funding and pan-European solidarity; and on minilateral arrangements for fast adaptability.
- Second, Europeans would build up their military capabilities, capacity and readiness to deter and defend effectively with little to no American help.
- Third, all of this must rest on a coordinated European defence industry wherever possible and draw on capabilities from diversified, allied sources if needed.
- This model would set Europeans up to defend themselves with America where possible, with less America where necessary and without America if it comes to that.

# Between the devil and the deep blue sea

European security has rarely looked more precarious. To the continent's east, Russia continues to wage its war on Ukraine and test European sovereignty with everything from airspace incursions to disinformation campaigns. Even a ceasefire would not change the underlying reality: a revisionist Russia is intent on establishing a sphere of influence backed by a military buffer zone across central and eastern Europe. In other words, Europe is the number one target. A limited Russian attack on allied territory, met with a divided or hesitant response, could alone be enough to erode confidence in the mutual defence commitments that Europe's security rests on—and with it, the political project they protect.

Meanwhile, to Europe's west, US president Donald Trump has been unusually consistent in signalling that America is done guaranteeing Europe's security and has shown little appetite for confronting Russia. In practice, NATO remains the backbone of European security and America still provides the bulk of the alliance's operational strength: roughly 75,000 US troops are still stationed across Europe (even though this number seems to change by the day) and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), NATO's top military leader, is American. Politically, however, Europeans find themselves in a world where American willingness to uphold security guarantees is frail at best. What to many seemed like heresy in summer 2024—preparing to defend Europe with less America—has become necessity.

Europeans thus face a kind of “Schrödinger's NATO”: the US appears both committed to, and absent from, the alliance at the same time. Instead of keeping NATO fully reliant on America and risk finding it dead in their hour of need, Europeans need to create a security architecture underpinned by Europeans themselves.

This paper sketches out a plan for Europe to confront the possibility of American abandonment head-on within the critical 5 to 7 year window in which the risk of Russian aggression is highest. The goal is not to replicate America's role in Europe, but to develop a distinctly European model of defence that builds on NATO's structures but can function with little to no US participation.

This plan rests on three pillars. First, Europeans need to work with, not against, their institutional fragmentation through a structure of interoperability. This requires an agile system in which NATO frameworks, EU instruments and flexible coalitions cooperate effectively. Rather than trying to redesign institutions, the short-term priority should be to better connect existing tools and ensure they work even if there are delays or blockages in triggering Article 5, NATO's mutual defence clause. Second, Europeans need to build better military capabilities and enough rapidly deployable, combat-ready forces, otherwise any newly established European defence model will be nothing more than a paper tiger. And third, this

will need to be supported by a strong, home-grown military industrial and technological backbone. A European way of deterrence and defence—coalition-based, flexible and rooted in mutually reinforcing NATO and EU structures—would allow Europeans to generate military power without depending on American goodwill.

To keep their continent safe, Europeans must build their ability to act with America where possible, with less America where necessary and without America if it comes to that. And they need this plan to be ready immediately in the case of aggression, not after weeks of political deliberation. This paper sets out how Europeans can do so—deterring Russia and ensuring that no country under attack would have to fight alone, whether or not Article 5 holds.

## Defence for Europeans, by Europeans

Most European leaders are coming to accept that their defence relationship with the US as they knew it is over. To come out stronger on the other side, Europeans must be clear-eyed about what they can and should achieve in the next few years.

### What would not work

First, they need to know which paths are worth pursuing and which, on their own, are not. For one, burden shifting—in which Europeans take over more conventional military responsibilities from the US and try to fill emerging gaps—is necessary, but not sufficient. If this simply occurred within the existing set-up, Europeans would remain dependent on the US for commanding these forces. With a US president who has frequently demonstrated indifference towards allies' interests and has even leveraged a security crisis to gain concessions from them, this is too risky an arrangement.

Similarly, there is little value in simply elaborating the EU's mutual defence clause, Article 42.7, as a substitute for NATO's Article 5. The clause alone cannot organise Europe's defence in a military crisis. The EU lacks the command structures, operational authority and military planning capabilities needed for complex, large-scale operations, mostly because member states never granted it the mandate or means to do so—and they are unlikely to any time soon. While the ambitions are admirable, hopes of one fully integrated EU army or EU nuclear deterrent put the cart before the horse. Without a federal European authority, national governments remain accountable for the life-and-death decisions at the heart of defending Europe. There is also little reason to assume political cohesion among EU member states would appear quickly enough, even if under attack. And, relying solely on the EU for defence would ignore its neutral states like Ireland and exclude sizeable militaries such as those of Britain, Norway and Canada.

While the steps outlined in this paper could be the building blocks of a future European defence union, it would be irresponsible to delay advancing practical improvements to Europeans' ability to defend themselves in hopes for one perfectly calibrated grand design.

## A European way of defence

The conclusion to draw is that Europe must hedge: building the capabilities, command structures and political arrangements that allow it to act if Washington will not—while keeping the US engaged wherever possible. But hedging is not imitation. A distinctly European way of defence does not require a new institutional superstructure, nor any attempt to replicate American power. It requires something more pragmatic: working with what already exists. NATO's command architecture reorganised into sub-regional coalitions of European countries would provide the operational backbone. These coalitions will share more coherent threat perceptions and would more easily align their defence efforts. Then the EU would supply the funding, political mobilisation and legitimacy to hold the broader effort together, while groups of adaptable coalitions can provide the flexibility to act when institutions cannot. This decision-making architecture must then lead to something worthwhile—a European defence that is smarter about its capabilities, better prepared for war, and backed by a strong industrial base. Under this model, Europe is more than the sum of its parts, and its territorial integrity would be protected by a military ready to defend.

Finally, this way of defence is, by definition, defensive in character. But, to quote the Prussian strategist Clausewitz, “the defensive form of war is not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows.” This plan is concerned with deterring and defeating an adversary's ability to advance into European territory, and, as such, should be capable of mounting offensive operations to deny Russia the ability to use its territory for launching attacks. For the Kremlin even the most considerable attrition—1.2 million casualties in a “special military operation” that has now lasted longer than the Soviet Union's involvement in the second world war—has not led it to change course, after all. Deterring Russia requires more than just a shield alone.

## Knowing the limits

This paper addresses the problem now facing Europe, not those that may come later. The immediate challenge is managing a “Schrödinger's NATO” moment in which America remains formally inside the alliance while behaving as though it were not, just as the Russian threat looms larger. The solution this paper suggests is premised on the assumption that the US is cooperative in the gradual restructuring of NATO because it wants to offload to Europeans the

burden of defending Europe. Washington may welcome a “European-led NATO” in principle, but it will not design the architecture for it.

In the future, however, it is not out of the question that Washington may not merely step back from but actively work against European defence efforts. The rhetoric emanating from the president’s Truth Social posts suggests this cannot be ruled out, but it cannot be the starting point for European action either.

Europe must first build the capacity to defend itself with less reliance on America before it can seriously contemplate the possibility of American obstruction. As long as Europe remains structurally dependent on US military capabilities, strategic divergence from Washington will remain difficult to sustain. The more capable Europeans become of defending themselves, the less destabilising a reduced—or even hostile—American role would be.

In the meantime, Europeans can begin laying the groundwork for a more demanding future by anchoring their defence architecture in European technology and European industry wherever possible, reducing points of dependence before they become points of leverage. But this must not become an excuse for delay or self-imposed capability gaps. Europe is not yet in a position to be purist about its supply chains. Given where Europe currently stands, a weapon that depends on American software is preferable to no weapon at all.

## Pillar one: Shared leadership

For decades, the US has functioned as a political and military linchpin without which Europe struggles to forge a common security policy. European governments across the political spectrum have pursued policies that entrenched this dependence on Washington’s leadership. American presence in Europe therefore served not just to protect against external threats, but also to stabilise a continent marked by mutual distrust and divergent threat perceptions. In other words, Washington’s leadership was both desired and necessary precisely because Europeans were unable to lead themselves.

Europeans must now fill America’s coordinating and stabilising role collectively. Europe’s major powers are too similar in size and capacity for any one country to have a natural claim to lead. The alternative, therefore, is not a European equivalent of American primacy, but a more distributed model of defence leadership based on coalitions, specialisation and flexible institutional formats.

This approach is not intended to weaken cohesion. On the contrary, it would reinforce it by distributing responsibility in a politically and operationally manageable way. The strength of both NATO and the EU has always been in their ability to sustain collective responsibility across

their members, ensuring that geographically distant or less immediately affected states do not disengage from crises unfolding elsewhere. A more layered model can strengthen, not dilute, this logic of shared responsibility. Pre-assigned roles raise the political costs of disengagement and, if a country still pulls back, prevent that from causing total blockage. In this way, Europe's diverse capabilities can become an asset: more agile, pragmatic and localised responses to crises can go hand in hand with a broader strategic unity.

A new, multidimensional approach should therefore be structured around three mutually reinforcing functions. First, NATO would remain the operational backbone of European defence, but with Europeans progressively taking over responsibility for the planning, leadership and force generation. This ensures the alliance remains operationally effective even with reduced or selective US engagement. Second, the EU would serve as the central platform for political solidarity, capability development, financing, defence industrial policy and strategic alignment across member states. Third, flexible minilateral coalitions would provide the operational layer for rapid response, enabling groups of willing and capable states to act quickly in specific crisis scenarios. Meanwhile, close coordination among the E5 group of Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Poland can ensure coherence across these different formats. These three layers are not hierarchical alternatives but interlocking components of a single system.

## A European NATO

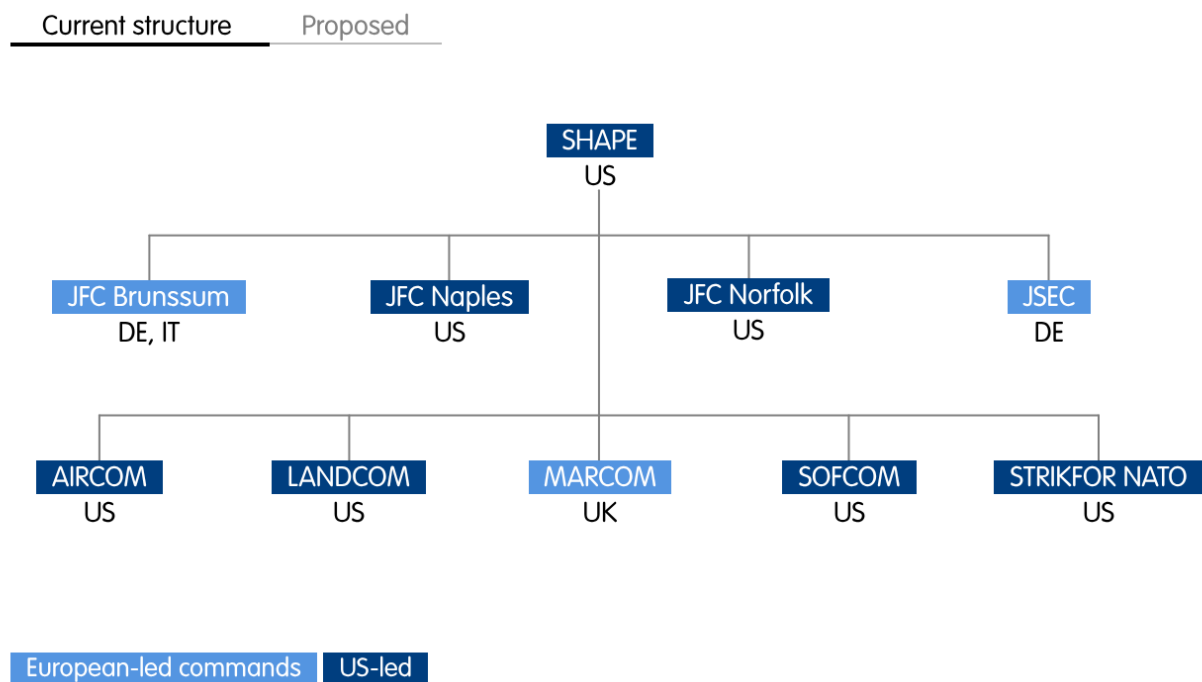
To realise a “European-led NATO”, in the words of the US defence secretary, Europeans should empower themselves to be able to conduct large-scale combat operations without all NATO allies, that is, short of unanimous activation of Article 5 and independent of US leadership (or lack thereof). This means creating a NATO in which Europeans are increasingly responsible for planning, leadership and force generation, while US engagement becomes conditional and situational rather than assumed.

The recent NATO agreement in February for European four-star officers to assume command of all three of the alliance's Joint Force Commands (JFCs) is a promising first step. Next, Europeans should use the opportunity presented by the command reassignments to reform NATO's command structure by strengthening the JFCs' capacity to act as operational headquarters for sub-regional coalitions. Currently, JFC commanders sit firmly in the NATO military hierarchy—their guidance and orders flow from the North Atlantic Council and the SACEUR. Going forward, the JFC commanders should remain attached to NATO structures but also assume full responsibility for sub-regional coalition forces, akin to US commanders wearing two hats simultaneously: in NATO and US military hierarchies.

This will require new political arrangements at the sub-regional level: mutual-defence treaties and memorandums of understanding, as well as training for these processes and regular ministerial consultations to align civilian and military leaders’ threat perceptions and preferred courses of action before a crisis hits. It would also require governments in the JFC group to pre-delegate authority to its commander—granting them, to the maximum extent governments can agree upon, the power to activate specific forces, capabilities and plans without requiring fresh political approval once a conflict has begun. This is not a new idea: pre-delegation was common NATO practice during the cold war, when waiting for consensus among a dozen capitals was seen as dangerously slow in the event of a surprise attack, but fell out of use as Russia came to be seen as a partner rather than a threat.

Reviving it in a sub-regional format will strengthen Europe’s deterrence for two reasons. First, these groups of countries share a similar threat environment and are therefore more likely to reach a closer agreement, and be able to delegate more, than all of NATO would. Second, the pre-commitment structure would mean JFCs can act without having to wait for a full NATO consensus. The aim is not to override civilian control of the military, but to credibly commit national forces to each other’s defence through reformed command structures, ensuring a quicker response.

## The Allied Command Operations command structure in 2026



Source: Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS)  
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Each of the three JFCs is responsible for implementing one of NATO's regional defence plans: Norfolk, Virginia commands the plan for the High North and the Atlantic; Brunssum for central Europe from the Baltic to the Alps; and Naples for the south-east including the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea. The distinct security environments of the three regions require tailored military and political approaches. A crisis in one JFC's area of responsibility would oblige the other two to support it commensurate with the intensity of the challenge. Reflecting the distinct geographical and security features of the three regions, each JFC's constituent members should assign it with its own sub-regional component commands for air, land, maritime and other operations (as was the practice during the cold war and for some time thereafter).

Europeans should also align the locations of JFC headquarters with their growing leadership in the NATO command structure. With the recent agreement, Germany and Poland will share leadership of JFC "Centre", so it should relocate from Brunssum to western Poland, for example. JFC "North", to be British-led, should move from Norfolk, Virginia in the US, to Britain or one of the Nordic countries. JFC "South" under Italian leadership is well located in Naples. The headquarters infrastructure in Brunssum could then house NATO's Supreme Allied Command Transformation, which is currently in Norfolk, Virginia. These relocations would foster greater proximity and immediacy between the headquarters and their respective areas of responsibility.

Europeans' goal should be to establish self-sustaining sub-regional structures that can orchestrate large-scale, high-intensity, multi-domain combat operations even when all 32 NATO members are unable to respond to aggression as one. There are trade-offs to doing this. A set of command-and-control arrangements centring sub-regional coalitions would require some duplication and thus be less efficient than one fully integrated structure. But this is a small price to pay for an operational defence structure that is more resilient to the kind of strategic-political paralysis that NATO currently faces and that is likely to increase in the future. This model would also trade some whole-of-NATO-level political coherence (to the extent that this still exists) for a greater ability to act at speed and scale at the sub-regional level, making the organisation nimbler in a crisis and less reliant on every member state's whim.

Regionalisation should not lead to fragmentation, however, which needs to be offset by burden sharing and political coordination across European countries. Europe's biggest military powers should be meaningfully present with forces in all three sub-regions, especially Europe's two nuclear-armed countries, France and Britain, which add strong deterrent value. Critically, Europeans should integrate Ukraine as much as possible. In a conflict in the Baltics, for instance, a Ukrainian-European military buildup in the Baltic Sea region could force Russia to relocate its forces.

## The EU

Such NATO restructuring cannot succeed on military architecture alone. Burden-sharing and political solidarity—the glue that prevents sub-regional coalitions from drifting apart—require a political platform to sustain them. This is where the EU comes in. It can legitimise sub-regional military action as a pan-European cause, coordinate civil preparedness, and fund the defence industrial base that sustains it all.

None of this is straightforward. The EU is not a defence union: national security is a national responsibility, the commission has a very limited defence mandate and most member states have consistently chosen NATO as their primary defence framework. They are wary of ceding military authority to EU institutions, fearing duplication, a loss of sovereignty to Brussels, lack of command structures, limited geographic scope and an inability to take decisions unanimously. Yet the union has done more for defence in past years than ever before, and the case for it doing more still is a strategic necessity.

The momentum is there. Since 2021, the EU has launched the European Defence Fund, began prioritising military mobility, and fast-tracked ammunition production. By 2024, it had published its first European Defence Industrial Strategy and a year later the EU had launched a defence industry programme, a new initiative for large-scale collaborative industrial projects, and the new SAFE mechanism, providing €150bn in low-interest loans for investment in defence. Just this year at the European Council in March, member states set the goal of defence readiness for major confrontation by 2030 and the White Paper for European Defence, published days later, set out the strategic framework. The future is promising, too. The proposed 2028–2034 EU budget would quintuple spending on defence and space to €131bn. For an institution not designed for defence, this is a genuine achievement.

Despite the EU's transformation, the obstacles to it becoming a defence actor in its own right are not going to be overcome in the next 5 to 7 years. But even if it cannot command the fight, the union has a clear, more immediate, role to play.

### *Political legitimacy*

The EU's most distinctive contribution to a European way of defence is its legitimating power, capable of turning sub-regional military responses into a pan-European political cause. If a sub-regional coalition acts without full North Atlantic Council consensus, the EU can provide the political legitimacy and solidarity framework needed for the rest of Europe to recognise the fight as its own. NATO's model is instructive: its graduated response plans ensure that every ally knows its role before Article 5 is ever invoked—which units deploy, which authorities are pre-delegated and which thresholds trigger which responses. This provides deterrence. The

aggressor knows a tripwire exists and that crossing it sets a predetermined chain in motion. Article 42.7 should work the same. While the sub-regional JFC would provide the immediate military response to an attacked country, the EU's mutual defence clause can give political legitimacy and European solidarity.

The article operates bilaterally: each member state decides what aid and assistance to provide and is treaty-bound to do so. When a line is crossed, a sub-regional coalition will bear the brunt of the fighting—and indeed is more suited to do so—while the EU member states should immediately activate pre-designated support packages. Such pre-agreed protocols, for example, could specify that designated states are committed to ammunition and air defence transfers, that others pre-authorise overflight and logistics corridors, that the European Defence Fund releases emergency procurement financing within a fixed timeframe, and that cyber and intelligence-sharing arrangements escalate automatically. Every member knows its role and every contribution is pre-assigned, not negotiated or improvised under fire.

As a political authority of 27 states, the EU's mutual defence clause works as a connecting tissue. Countries further from the front line can help politically and materially: sustaining supply lines, transferring capabilities, maintaining political will and societal support for a war in the east of Europe, and in the best case, contributing forces. The flexibility of the article would also allow for neutral countries such as Austria, Ireland and Malta to contribute through logistics and humanitarian or budgetary support instead. This flexibility, combined with sub-regional coalitions taking charge of the military response, reduces the risk of fracturing because it gives every country a meaningful role, raising the political costs of standing aside.

## *Finance*

Separate to Article 42.7, the EU can also prepare the financial and economic instruments needed to sustain a war. First, if a sub-regional coalition is engaged, the EU should be able to rapidly procure military equipment. For this, it could use repurposed existing funds and procurement mechanisms, or create new funds like in the covid pandemic. Beyond military procurement, the EU must also develop contingency plans for the economic shock that a conflict brings. The EU has the regulatory reach and financial firepower to prepare for this too. The institutional architecture is already there: the European Central Bank can stabilise financial markets and shield sovereign borrowing costs, as it did through its pandemic bond-buying programmes, and it can open swap lines with partner central banks to cushion the euro against external shocks. Meanwhile, the European Stability Mechanism can extend emergency credit lines to states under pressure. What is missing is the pre-agreed wartime application of these tools. The EU should have standing protocols that trigger rapid military procurement through repurposed funding, automatic activation of economic stabilisation measures, and immediate sanction packages against the aggression the minute a red line is crossed.

## *Essential infrastructure*

A nation's ability to withstand war, as we are seeing in Ukraine, depends not only on the front line and the markets, but also on keeping the lights on. Without power, households lose heating, hospitals and factories slow down and communication breaks down. Russia knows this, systematically destroying Ukraine's energy grid and probing European energy infrastructure with cyber-attacks and sabotage. The EU has demonstrated its capacity for rapid coordination on energy resilience: within weeks of the Russian invasion, the bloc mobilised nearly €2bn in energy support and relocated a decommissioned thermal power plant from Lithuania to help fill the gap. At home, the Critical Entities Resilience Directive provides a framework for protecting essential infrastructure.

While an important step, implementation has been slow and institutions have not adequately prioritised which infrastructure is most critical. To be more prepared, the EU could set binding timelines for stress-testing under wartime scenarios, not just peacetime risk assessments; mandate minimum decentralised generation and storage capacity targets for member states, so that no single strike or act of sabotage can take down a regional grid; and create pre-agreed energy emergency protocols. If a member state's energy infrastructure comes under attack or large-scale sabotage, these protocols should trigger automatic mutual assistance: cross-border electricity transfers, emergency fuel reserves and the deployment of mobile generation capacity. The logic is the same as the Article 42.7 argument: don't negotiate under fire, pre-agree who does what.

## *Military training*

To strengthen preparedness, the EU should also invest in Europe's ability to train for the war it may have to fight. Relying on European armed forces for large-scale combat requires exercise areas that can accommodate full brigades and their enablers, and digitised exercise equipment that allows control teams to throw unpredictable, real-time challenges at commanders and their forces. No single member state has both at the scale needed. The EU could fund shared exercise infrastructure and digitised training facilities across Europe, including in post-war Ukraine, whose vast territory and combat experience would offer unmatched training value.

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Finally, the layered defence architecture this paper proposes requires the EU and NATO to open a new chapter in their relationship and recognise that each makes the other stronger. This is especially critical for military mobility, where the EU's ambition to move forces rapidly across Europe requires close civil-military, public-private and EU-NATO cooperation in addition to coordination among member states themselves. At the sub-regional level, many of the same countries sit in both institutions—making practical coordination a matter of political will. The

EU can serve as a cohesive link with NATO, ensuring its funding, military mobility schemes and pre-agreed responses are calibrated to NATO's evolving operational needs. This requires NATO to systematically brief the EU's political, security and military committees as the alliance restructures its command.

## Minilaterals

As a final shared-leadership component in the European way of defence, minilateral arrangements are an agile supplement for slower NATO and EU action. Many European governments are increasingly pursuing their security objectives this way. Some are reinforcing regional cooperation: in particular, Nordic-Baltic coordination within the NB8 framework has gained both momentum and strategic relevance in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. Others have created issue-based coalitions, for example on questions such as future security guarantees for Ukraine or the protection of the Strait of Hormuz.

Many of these initiatives have so far remained politically rather than operationally driven. To enable faster and more adaptable action in emerging crises, however, European governments should look at creating smaller and more flexible arrangements outside established institutions. Such groupings can support a broad range of functions, from capability development (such as the European Sky Shield Initiative) to strategic planning and operational coordination. Their strategic value lies in their ability to act in situations where consensus within NATO or the EU may be delayed, contested or politically constrained. Even a more regionally organised NATO will not eliminate the need for flexible forms of cooperation outside formal institutional structures. There will continue to be situations in which neither NATO nor the EU provides the most suitable framework for those European states willing and able to move further and faster together. To avoid fragmentation, however, European governments must ensure that such arrangements are designed to work with the broader institutional architecture, rather than contradict or obstruct it.

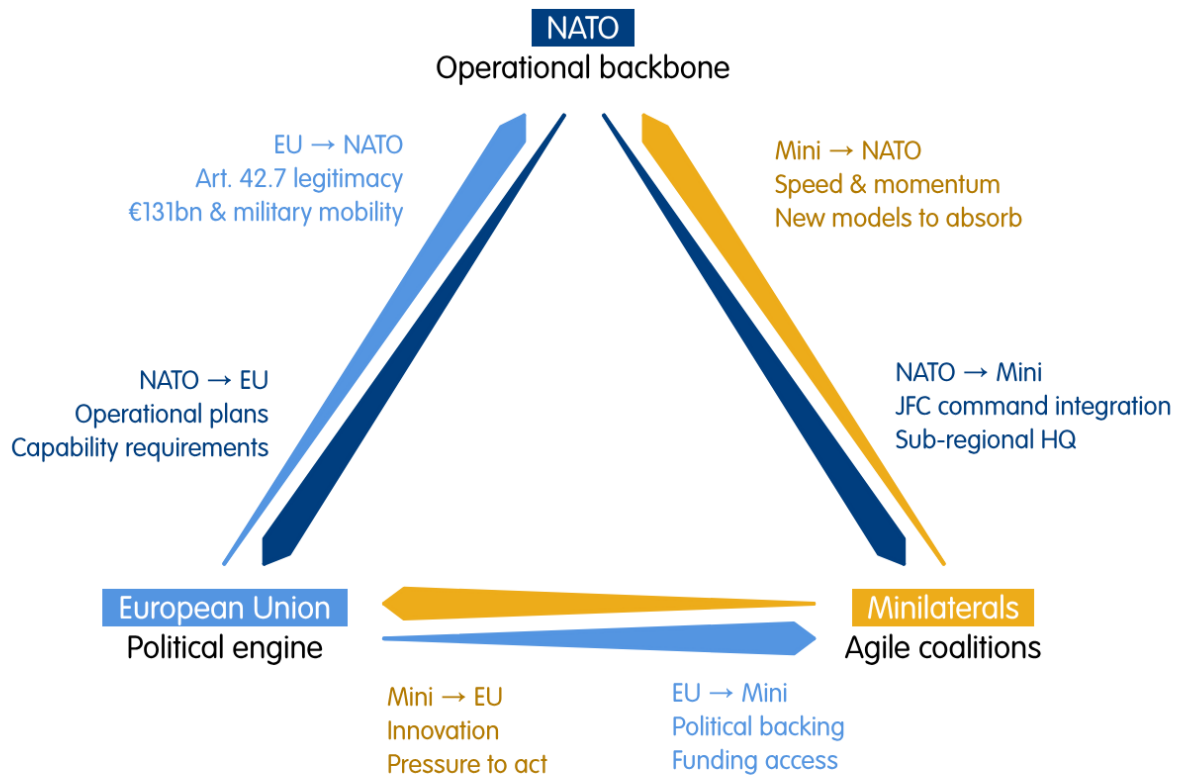
While bilateral and minilateral arrangements are no replacement for established institutional mandates, they can compensate for institutional limitations by linking different parts of Europe's security architecture more effectively. Because they involve fewer actors with more closely aligned threat perceptions and strategic priorities, small coalitions can often coordinate decisions and responses more rapidly than larger institutional frameworks. Their added value lies especially in their ability to generate political momentum, coordinate leadership and push European action beyond the lowest common denominator. In some cases, these informal formats can also serve as political and operational incubators by developing approaches that may later be absorbed into existing institutions or evolve into broader European initiatives. This is particularly relevant in areas such as capability development or strategic coordination, where

smaller coalitions can test new forms of cooperation before they are adopted at the institutional level. To fulfil this role effectively, European minilateralism should evolve beyond ad hoc cooperation towards more structured forms.

Current arrangements already point in this direction. The UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force demonstrates how smaller coalitions can enable rapid consultation, operational coordination and crisis response among strategically aligned states. At the same time, frameworks such as Nordic Defence Cooperation illustrate how minilateral cooperation can deepen interoperability, capability development and long-term military integration without needing new supranational structures. Military mobility, for example, is happening outside EU frameworks with bilateral agreements between Poland and Germany on military transit, Nordic-Baltic transport corridors and UK-Norway maritime arrangements. On military capabilities, France has recently sought to join a British-German long-range missile plan. Such formats show how flexible coalitions can strengthen Europe's defence readiness while remaining compatible with NATO and EU frameworks.

Finally, to preserve coherence across these three formats, close strategic coordination among a small group of key European states—namely Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Poland—needs to be a key priority. This can foster coherence in threat perception, capability development and crisis response across NATO, the EU and ad-hoc coalitions. Collectively, these countries represent the bulk of European military capacity and defence spending, alongside one of the most substantial defence-industrial capacities, representing close to a quarter of all arms exports globally. This gives them significant weight in shaping the direction of European defence transformation—not as a governing authority, but as a mechanism for aligning priorities across European institutions. They also encompass the interests of both NATO's north-eastern and southern flanks. Coordination among these states is not sufficient for European strategic coherence, but it is probably necessary.

## The shared leadership model



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## Pillar two: Better capabilities

The multi-institutional framework set out above establishes how Europeans can make decisions about their own defence—who acts, under what authority and through which coalitions. But decision-making capacity is only half the equation. Europe must also possess the capabilities to back those decisions up. There is little reason in setting up elaborate structures or transitioning political leadership and command and control from the US to Europeans, if Europeans then have little to lead, command and control. To build distinctly European defence capabilities, Europeans need to adapt to the threat Russia poses, the geography of the continent and the political realities of an alliance in transition. This should consist of filling out conventional forward defence and being bolder in developing Europe’s own nuclear deterrence model.

## Forward defence

Even assuming America does care about Europe's security interests, reliance on the US military for the continent's forward defence faces real constraints. Between the Pentagon's plans to prioritise other regions and the president's proclivities to ignore formal strategy altogether, Europe will hardly receive a warm embrace. Moreover, simultaneous crises or synchronised aggression by US adversaries in other regions would stretch America's capacity to orchestrate and sustain Europe's defence. Already, US stockpiles of critical long-range strike and air-defence munitions have dwindled with its war against Iran. And despite impressive tactical performance, the war has imposed costs on US military readiness and capabilities that will take a long time to recover.

Building forward defence from the bottom up is therefore the most promising and fastest way Europe can be ready to act at the necessary scale and speed. For this, Europeans should build on and evolve NATO's defence plans and capability targets. Between "critical but more limited" and potentially no US support, Europeans will need to replace US formations and capabilities in front-line countries and reinforcement plans when and where these are withdrawn.

But in doing so they should avoid trying to replicate America's military posture in Europe, just as they should avoid simply replicating Ukraine's force structure and strategy. The former would be unrealistic in the short term, and the latter are products as much of Ukrainian grit and ingenuity as they are of insufficient means and materiel to escape the attritional mode of warfare.

If deterrence against Russia fails, effective forward defence by a sub-regional coalition of European countries would prevent a rapid land grab and buy time for the EU and smaller coalitions to convince and mobilise other, less immediately affected partners when there is no NATO consensus to activate Article 5. But to realise this forward-defence posture, Europeans need to first address shortfalls in their military capabilities and make sure these are tested and ready to go.

### *Capabilities and capacity*

Europe's defence spending increases since 2022 are beginning to translate into new capabilities and capacity. The US represents on average just under half of NATO's collective might—a share that NATO allies have agreed to reduce to 38% by 2029.<sup>[1]</sup> While a long way off, they have made progress to this end. Yet these figures obscure that the US is still doing the heavy lifting on things that a military needs to function.

Currently European forces still lack firepower and numbers, and the support elements that enable and sustain their forces at scale and speed—and in many cases what they do possess is

too poorly integrated. Closing these gaps demands action across the full spectrum of modern warfare—from the targeting systems that find and strike enemies at speed, to the munitions, drones and fortifications that determine whether forces can fight, sustain and manoeuvre at all.

An area of considerable inadequacy is intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, both sides are identifying and destroying targets at ever greater distances in ever faster targeting cycles. Without upgrades to their own targeting systems, Europeans risk being outpaced by Russia's improving reconnaissance-strike complex. Ukrainian innovations in this area, such as the use of personal smartphones for reconnaissance and battle management or the organisation of intelligence fusion cells, could help Europeans to maintain or even expand the advantages they currently hold thanks to American NATO contributions. The multinational reassurance force for a post-ceasefire Ukraine envisioned by the so-called coalition of the willing could serve as a transmission belt for such operational adaptations.

NATO targets call on Europeans to stock up on munitions. As a short-term step towards achieving this, European countries should focus on getting cross-certification of munitions among allies. In Ukraine, difficulties with the provision of artillery systems and shells—not all 155mm munitions could be fired effectively from all 155mm artillery tubes—demonstrated persistent struggles even with nominally NATO-standardised systems. EU funding for researching and developing new munitions could be tied to such a requirement. The EU could also fund a testing regime to certify interchangeability of munitions. These efforts should extend to artillery shells as much as to air-defence interceptors and strike munitions. In a similar vein, European governments should plan to cross-certify maintenance when their armed forces use the same equipment, rather than hauling kit to its home country for repairs. In this, they could build on the repair hubs that have been set up to maintain Ukraine's Western-donated equipment in eastern flank countries.

As a longer-term ambition, Europeans should work towards standardising missile systems to fire both offensive and defensive weapons, giving commanders greater flexibility and reducing the inefficacy of having separate launchers. NATO navies already practise this, though European warships and submarines still carry too few missiles for prolonged engagement. For ground forces, the priority should be to invest in dedicated air-defence and strike capabilities. European armed forces having containerised and concealed composite launchers with mixes of offensive and defensive munitions would complement these capabilities well and present a formidable, hard-to-anticipate challenge to any attacker, who would have to assume their presence.

The need to mix and match defence and offence extends to the adoption of drones. The challenge for armed forces lies in integrating these systems with legacy systems to maximise

their respective advantages while mitigating their weaknesses. Autonomous and remote-controlled systems change combined-arms warfare—they do not make it obsolete. For example, a brigade that can locate and attack an enemy earlier and at greater distance thanks to reconnaissance and strike drones will have an advantage over one that cannot. This requires European armed forces adopting drones and counter-drone systems at scale as well as corresponding concepts of operations. The EU, meanwhile, can help foster an adaptable and scalable production base.

The same logic applies to fortifications—long neglected by the US, but a natural advantage for Europeans defending their own terrain. No fortification is impenetrable, but they can channel and slow enemy forces' advance. Eastern-flank countries are already investing in border fortifications, combining natural elements like bogs and forests with trenches and minefields. But any fixed position can eventually be found by enemy forces and enemy fire can create breaches across a fortified border. In turn, offensive action as part of Europeans' strategic defence might aim to demilitarise Kaliningrad, deny staging areas in Belarus or the Russian rear, or seize Russian terrain or critical assets as bargaining chips to end a conflict. To facilitate such manoeuvres, Europeans need sufficient breaching and obstacle-clearing equipment as well as protected mobility of their own.

### *Readiness and exercises*

To demonstrate their combat readiness at scale, European militaries will also need to have this operational muscle exercised and tested. Currently, US-run command-post exercises usually give European commanders their most intense and demanding learning experiences. <sup>[2]</sup> These tend to be longer, more dynamic and thus more realistic than their European equivalents, reflecting the US military's greater willingness to invest in building and demonstrating combat readiness.

Europeans—whether NATO, the EU or smaller coalitions—should learn how to do this themselves. As a first step, the EU in particular can finance and coordinate the necessary capabilities for bigger and better exercises. The goal should be for commanders to adapt and improve against dynamic challenges—and those who prove unable should be removed from roles of combat leadership. Moreover, where exercises are open to partner countries, especially Ukraine, all participants should take the opportunity to reinforce mutual learning.

A lack of infrastructure and equipment also limits European armed forces' ability to train as they would fight. Few exercise areas in Europe can accommodate full battalions—sometimes upward of 1,500 troops and hundreds of vehicles. Where it is possible, a lack of digitised exercise equipment restricts the ability of control teams to give real-time feedback or challenge units and their commanders with the dynamic conditions they would experience in wartime.

The US army's premier training facility has around 2,600 square kilometres of Californian desert for brigades to fight a similarly sized opposing force. Europe's largest manoeuvre exercise areas are a tenth of that size, while the few larger ones that do exist are used as artillery ranges and lack the facilities to train and assess manoeuvring formations. European armies, with the help of EU funding, should expand, modernise and digitise these exercise areas and develop new ones to accommodate combined-arms brigades, including their reconnaissance and strike drones.

But few countries in Europe have the necessary space. In any case, field exercises for formations the size of divisions and above would have to take place outside of military training installations. During the cold war, West German farmers often sought compensation for damage NATO tanks did to their fields—some of the EU's agriculture funds could therefore be dedicated to supporting these kinds of manoeuvres once again. As the second largest country in Europe, post-war Ukraine would have some space and plenty of combat experience to offer. It also has a deterrence interest in Russia watching it host large European combat formations on its territory for exercises.



Mines are set off as they are deployed by unmanned vehicles during an open test of unmanned weapon systems conducted by the Polish Armaments Group at the Military Institute of Armament Technology training ground in Zielonka, near Warsaw, February 19th, 2026. [Picture Alliance / NurPhoto | Aleksander Kalka]

## Strengthening European nuclear deterrence

When commenting on the deployment of a French army battalion to Romania, National Assembly member Thomas Gassilloud said: “It’s better to have 1,000 troops with a nuclear deterrent in Romania than to have 5,000 troops without one.” In that same logic, when nuclear-armed America, Britain and France deployed a few thousand troops in cold-war West Berlin, they were not supposed to defend the city from a Warsaw pact attack. What they did instead was heighten the risk that any such attack would trigger a nuclear retaliation—and this deterred Moscow through two Berlin crises.

Then as now, and for the foreseeable future, Europeans are confronting a Russia that is working to decouple Europe from the US and fracture European unity with nuclear intimidation, hybrid campaigns and military pressure. To come out the other side, Europeans need a credible nuclear deterrent to accompany their stronger militaries. The trouble is that Europe’s deterrence strategy rests on a foundation that was never designed to stand alone.

For decades, the continent has outsourced its ultimate security guarantee to Washington. America’s nuclear capabilities are still viewed by European leaders as the “supreme guarantee” of alliance security and US officials have repeatedly assured Europeans that the nuclear umbrella will remain open for them. Even a residual risk of nuclear escalation with the US might be enough of a deterrent to Putin if push comes to shove. And yet, the US president’s desire to “own” allies’ territory and his repeated threats of abandonment if allies do not “pay” what they “owe” have hurt Europeans’ confidence that the US would risk nuclear attack on their behalf.

Europeans have been quick to realise their uncomfortable position. Just five years ago, leaders showed little interest in President Emmanuel Macron’s invitation for even a “strategic dialogue”. Today, they are publicly engaging with his proposals to strengthen the European contribution to nuclear deterrence and have established a new baseline for coordinating and operationalising nuclear deterrence. Even if they are now aware of the problem, Europeans still need to put in the hard work to address it.

Some progress has been made. In 2021, Britain decided to increase the number of strategic nuclear warheads that can be launched from its submarines from around 225 to 260 and last year announced that it would rejoin NATO’s nuclear-sharing arrangement and re-establish an airleg for its nuclear deterrence. Europe’s other nuclear power, France, has begun adapting its nuclear doctrine, including by deploying its nuclear-capable assets to signal their explicit link to European deterrence. Meanwhile, NATO is updating its nuclear capabilities by upgrading the fighter jets of non-nuclear European allies that can carry US nuclear weapons, modernise those nuclear weapons and improve command, control and communications systems. Importantly,

there is also a growing appreciation among allies that there are connections between nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities, such as air and missile defence and deep-precision strike, that can affect escalation pathways and deterrence credibility.

Russia will likely criticise and announce “military-technical” responses to any adaptations to Europe’s nuclear posture. But Moscow itself has already revised the post-cold war nuclear status quo by deploying nuclear weapons to Belarus and building new military infrastructure, including for nuclear-capable systems, along its border with Finland and the Baltic states.

The challenge then for Europeans is to minimise the opportunities for an adversary to exploit gaps in Europe’s deterrence architecture by adapting the size and composition of their nuclear forces while generating conventional forward defence. Acquiring the nuclear capabilities that would put Europeans in a position to deter Russia without the US nuclear umbrella, should it be folded up, will take a decade, likely longer. But Europeans need to make decisions on this now, even if they only materialise from the mid-2030s. The following proposals are way to strengthen the credibility of European deterrence in the shorter term, and also deal with the worst-case scenario.

### *Organising the European contribution to nuclear deterrence*

Britain and France recognise “that there is no extreme threat to Europe that would not prompt a response by our two nations” and have agreed to deepen their bilateral cooperation on nuclear matters. They are also engaging non-nuclear European partners in various formats. Together, they are gradually moving from conversations exploring areas of agreement towards consultations advancing specific courses of deterrence action.

However, European defence bureaucracies have so few people who are well versed in nuclear and deterrence matters that they risk overextending their abilities to meaningfully engage in more nuclear formats. Building a separate deterrence system alongside NATO’s would also create ambiguous or inconsistent coverage across Europe that Russia would likely probe. So, while coordinating on activities like military exercises or deterrence signalling might well start bilaterally, these arrangements should quickly include as many countries as possible to avoid gaps becoming vulnerabilities.

The easiest way to achieve this would be for France to join (at least as an observer) NATO’s nuclear planning group, which the UK has always been a member of and France continues to reject. A next best option would be to formalise nuclear policy discussions in the E5 and use this format to establish a collective responsibility for the security of Europe at large, including through nuclear deterrence. Rather than raise the question “Could we [France] consider that the survival of our closest partners might be put at risk without it affecting our vital interests?” as Macron did in his February 2026 nuclear address, E5 leaders should answer it in the negative.

European countries' security is intertwined, just as their deterrence strategy should be. As such, E5 governments should extend this deterrence to other European governments through both nuclear and non-nuclear means. If successful in the E5 format, it could build the political trust needed to bring it to NATO-level planning.

### *Readying Europe for wartime escalation management*

Even with this adjustment, Russia's leaders could still misjudge Europeans' resolve to defend themselves and each other and attack expecting little pushback (the Kremlin arguably did so when it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine). In this case, deterrence would have failed.

Upon being asked how NATO land forces planned to reinforce the Baltic states if Russian forces attempted to block the Suwalki gap—a 70km land corridor between Belarus and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad—a European NATO general remarked, “we have Ramstein for that”, alluding to the US airbase in Germany which hosts the US-led Allied Air Command and the centrality of NATO (US) airpower.<sup>[3]</sup> In other words, such escalation management, like much else that carries considerable risks and costs, has been outsourced to the US.

To strengthen their ability to influence escalation and de-escalation, Europeans have made some inroads. They have made procurements of deep-precision strike and air and missile defence systems, alongside investments in capabilities to attack and defend against threats in space, cyberspace and the electro-magnetic spectrum. This is not to mention the evolving British and French nuclear postures. However, to achieve military objectives and dissuade an adversary who has already decided to go to war from escalating further, Europeans need to plan and coordinate these capabilities.

It is not clear, for example, to what extent European countries align on whether deep-precision strike assets are supposed to primarily deter Russia (with the threat of reaching targets deep inside Russia) or if they also assume some warfighting function. If the latter, that means those assets need to be integrated into operational defence plans.<sup>[4]</sup> There is strong military justification for using such missiles. Expendable cruise missiles and long-range drones (“precise mass”) could well support tactical formations' operations. They can also be used in complex air attacks to overwhelm Russian air defences and give the more impactful but expensive ballistic and cruise missiles a better chance at reaching high-value targets.

In 2023, NATO's military command regained the ability to identify and plot targets inside Russia. With JFCs acting as headquarters for sub-regional coalitions, European political leaders could therefore pre-delegate to JFC commanders the authority to strike some targets in a conflict and withhold approval for more sensitive ones until further notice. Even publishing the decision that NATO had resumed peacetime strike planning signalled to Russia that NATO would be ready to execute plans the moment Russia attacked. Communicating that Europe has

also pre-delegated certain employment options for long-range strikes would signal an even greater readiness.

Multinational civil-military exercises, for example in the E5 format, could also help familiarise political leaders with the process of authorising more far-ranging deep strikes in conflict. Naturally, some European countries will be more accepting of the risks than others. Sub-regional coalitions should therefore be better able to navigate those differences than a larger and more diverse group. Any joint European doctrine for deep strikes, though, should privilege the views of the most exposed allies along the front line.

### *A nuclear wildcard*

Historically, US nuclear deterrence has sought to reassure allies that they remain secure without acquiring weapons of their own. Macron's recent "forward deterrence" proposal aims to enhance "the feeling of security in Europe" and thereby "prevent potential future risks of proliferation on our continent". British nuclear weapons, too, serve to assure European allies.

Nevertheless, a series of events—Russian nuclear use followed by a timid response from Washington and subsequent hesitation by Paris and London to carry the risks of nuclear counter escalation alone, for example—might turbocharge other European leaders' desire to have their own nuclear capabilities. Political, technological, financial, operational and legal constraints abound to prevent proliferation under current circumstances. But this cost-benefit calculus could shift.

A nuclear hedging coalition—a plan Z, say, if all else fails—comprising countries such as Germany, Poland, Sweden, Ukraine and others should share certain nuclear knowledge and technologies without crossing legal thresholds or violating nuclear safeguards. (Sweden ran a nuclear-weapons programme during the cold war, while West Germany flirted with one; the Polish nuclear discourse is maybe the most energised today; and Ukraine had its sovereignty violated repeatedly after relinquishing its nuclear stockpile during the 1990s.) They should put themselves into a position to break out quickly if Russia employed nuclear weapons and their nuclear-armed allies failed to respond appropriately, thereby presenting Russia with the prospect of confronting an additional half-dozen nuclear-armed states in Europe. Regardless, the other recommendations outlined in this paper aim to avoid setting up Europeans on such a path.

## Pillar three: A truly pan-European defence industry

As the third and final pillar to a European way of defence, the continent will need a strong industrial backbone to support its decision-making structures and capabilities. Europe's current

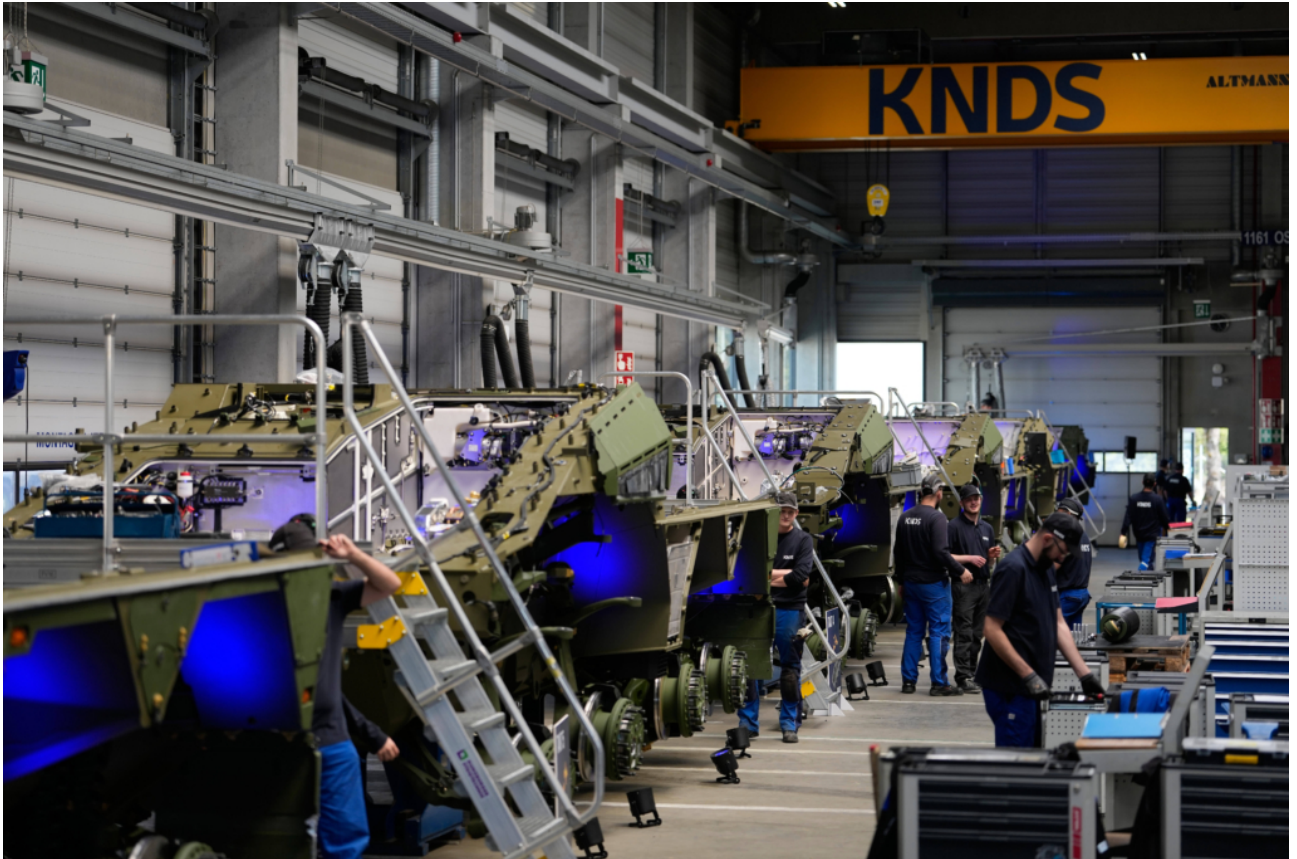
defence technological and industrial base—the ecosystem of companies, research institutions, supply chains and production facilities—is not prepared for the war it may have to fight.

The lack of significant progress is not due to a lack of ideas but the stand-off between European thinking and national industrial interests. With 27 national budgets, defence markets, procurement systems and regulation, and dozens of major defence companies, European cooperation remains the exception rather than the rule. Instead, many governments are in the habit of buying off the shelf from non-European suppliers, mostly American. Even within countries, defence ecosystems are siloed. Armed forces, prime contractors, startups and academia operate in parallel rather than as functioning networks, limiting the innovation and industrial agility that a wartime footing demands. What does exist does not work well together. Even nominally NATO-standardised systems are not necessarily cross-compatible.

This is the legacy of three decades of underinvestment in defence. In the event of conflict, stockpiles of key munitions—air defence missiles in particular—would be exhausted within weeks, and, in some critical areas, Europe’s current production capacity would be overwhelmed within days. The industrial base to produce replacements is only now being built. Ammunition production has grown from 300,000 shells annually in 2022 to a target of two million, but this is still not enough for a protracted conflict.

The vulnerabilities extend down the supply chain. Europe remains dependent on third countries for critical raw materials essential to defence production. European armed forces depend on the US for command-and-control systems, key software platforms and critical enabling technologies. Even assuming Washington will cooperate with Europeans taking control of their defence, such dependency could be leveraged against them. The answer is to build European alternatives where possible and spread what remains across multiple suppliers—reliance, wherever it sits, is vulnerability.

The EU has mobilised funding to address these shortfalls. The capability priority areas defined by the European Commission in the Readiness Roadmap 2030 are designed to be complementary to the NATO defence planning process, which aimed to prevent duplication and ensure that EU-financed projects help fill the most pressing gaps. But while the EU can identify priorities and fund them—it cannot compel member states to transform their industries. There is no mechanism to enforce who produces what, who procures from whom, or who fills which capability gap. Progress is too often measured by budgets committed and instruments created rather than by what matters: how many capabilities were made. Such a model favours structured budget cycles, caution, close regulatory supervision and long-term planning. This is not what Europe’s rapidly declining security environment requires.



Employees work at a new production line of Boxer 8x8 wheeled armoured personnel carrier produced by European defense company KNDS in Munich, Germany, April 22nd, 2026. [Picture Alliance / ASSOCIATED PRESS | Matthias Schrader]

### *Building Europe's arsenal*

Europe's defence industrial base needs a fundamental shift in how it operates. Decades of strategies, frameworks and coordination mechanisms have produced cooperation on paper but not industrial ecosystems in practice. There needs to be integration too: within countries, the silos between armed forces, prime contractors, startups and academia must give way to functioning networks that can innovate and scale at speed; between countries, joint development must become the norm. Common standards, connected supply chains and scalable production networks can make this possible, and these must be flexible and fast enough to match the threat.

The EU provides the impulse for inclusive, pan-European capability development and joint procurement. Short of the EU's coercive power, member states gravitate towards capabilities aligned with their industrial capacity rather than co-developing with other countries. This produces clusters in some domains and gaps in others. The EU needs to be able to override this and align Europe's industrial development so it can tick off NATO's capability targets.

There is precedent for doing things differently. When Russia weaponised energy in 2022, the EU moved from voluntary coordination to legally binding legislation including mandatory phase-outs of Russian oil and gas, national diversification plans, commission oversight and penalties for non-compliance. The existential nature of the threat unlocked political will that decades of voluntary cooperation had not.

Defence capability development needs the same shift from aspirational commitments to enforceable obligations, with the EU's funding power used as a lever. European industry can thrive with guarantees of long-term political prioritisation and investment. Furthermore, the European Defence Agency (EDA) should be empowered to actively broker pan-European defence industrial cooperations. In practice, this means first connecting member states willing to co-develop rather than waiting for bottom-up proposals that may not match strategic needs and simply represent national industrial needs. Second, the commission or EDA (whichever is leading on the development project) should have the authority to vet proposed projects and reject proposals that are misaligned with priority capability areas.

In this vein, the EU's role as the continent's largest defence funding platform should become a unique tool to ensure that no country dominates the defence industrial base. By requiring multinational consortia, distributing production across member states, and tying funding to collaborative rather than national procurement, the EU ensures that the defence industrial base strengthens European cohesion rather than concentrating strategic dependence in one country and potentially widening the member state division that comes with diverging industrial interests.

Where European industry can deliver at the necessary speed and scale, Europeans should back it. But where critical capability gaps cannot wait for European alternatives—particularly in air and missile defence, precision strike and ISR—governments should buy off the shelf from allied suppliers rather than accept a gap on the front line. In other words, Europeans must walk and chew gum at the same time. In the short term—5 to 7 years—governments have no choice but to field capability fast: scale up production of what European industry can already deliver, buy from allies when needed, and fill the most critical gaps by whatever means available.

In parallel, however, Europe must begin developing the strategic enablers it currently depends on the US for—command and control systems, space-based ISR, theatre logistics platforms, advanced communications networks—knowing that these will take a decade or more to mature. If development does not start now, Europe will still be dependent on American systems in the mid-2030s. The commission should be tasked with managing both timelines simultaneously: a short-term procurement drive focused on speed and availability, and a medium-term industrial strategy focused on building European capacity in the areas of greatest dependency. Neither can wait for the other.

More money will be needed to prepare for American abandonment, and Europe will need it in forms that do not penalise the countries most exposed to the threat. If the EU is serious about shaping the defence industrial base at the scale and speed this moment demands, the next EU budget must move beyond loans and towards grants for defence, just as it did with the pandemic recovery fund. A second round of SAFE loans is already under discussion, but more of the same will not be enough. Loans add to national debt, and some of the countries that need investment most are those least able to take on more borrowing.

In parallel, Europeans should pursue every available funding vehicle outside the EU too. The multilateral defence mechanism launched by Finland, the Netherlands and Britain, and the Canadian-led Defence, Security and Resilience Bank, signal that Europeans recognise the need for multiple financing tracks. Europeans should pursue all of them.

Europe's defence industry should also prioritise interoperability. As discussed, Europe's forces do not effectively share munitions and maintenance. Instead, the EU should harmonise qualification procedures so that allies can fire each other's ammunition and repair each other's equipment. EU funding for researching and developing new munitions could be tied to such a requirement and a testing regime to certify interchangeability of munitions.

Finally, the geographic scope of Europe's defence industrial effort must extend beyond the EU. Britain, Norway and Ukraine are indispensable partners, each bringing valuable capabilities, production capacity and operational experience. Ukraine's defence-industrial integration should be treated as a present-day security investment: its battle-tested innovations, from drone warfare to intelligence fusion, are assets Europe needs now, not after accession. Beyond Europe, partnerships with allied democracies—such as Australia, Canada, Japan and South Korea—can diversify supply chains, share development costs and reduce dependencies on any single source, including American suppliers. The EU's funding instruments should be designed to accommodate these partnerships where they add capability that Europeans alone cannot fill.

## Becoming better off alone

Europe cannot afford the luxury of building a new superstructure that replicates American security; nor should it. Instead, in the short to medium term, Europeans must build on what already exists—from NATO's defence plans, capability targets and command structures to EU solidarity and agile sub-regional coalitions. There is no reason for Europe to start from scratch—it has the wealth, technology, industrial capacity and military expertise to defend itself if it chooses to organise them effectively. Doing so would create an insurance policy for an alliance whose consensus mechanism is under unprecedented strain and ensure that collective defence remains credible even when allies are divided.

The aim of this paper is to envision how Europe can deter Russia on its own, even if America turns its back on the continent. European governments cannot afford to lose the momentum they have built so far. The threat this paper addresses is a revisionist, militarised, nuclear-coercing Russia that will outlast any ceasefire in Ukraine. Every investment, reform and structural shift proposed must be designed to survive the inevitable political temptation to stand down.

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[1] Authors' conversation with a European permanent representative to NATO, Madrid, April 2026.

[2] Authors' conversation with a European senior military leader, Berlin, February 2026.

[3] Authors' conversation with a NATO senior military leader, Szczecin, May 2023.

[4] Authors' conversations with government officials and experts, various northern and central European countries, March-April 2026.

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