

SOLID FOUNDATION, ROCKY FUTURE?

ASSESSING TRANSATLANTIC DEFENCE AND SECURITY TIES AFTER NATO'S MADRID SUMMIT



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Summary

Russia's war on Ukraine has raised serious questions about European security, but it has also led to much greater transatlantic unity. This Policy Insights paper argues that the war on Ukraine has given rise to a new consensus among large parts of NATO and the EU to reinvest in collective security.

Charting the progress made by both NATO and the EU, this paper looks at how transatlantic partners are addressing questions related to the so-called need to balance between Europe and the Indo-Pacific, EU strategic autonomy and the implementation of NATO's Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass, as well as the conclusions of the NATO Madrid Summit. It finds that there are several areas for enhanced EU-NATO cooperation, but issues pertaining to future US elections, defence industrial policy and NATO's force posture could sorely undermine transatlantic unity.



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Introduction

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European security architecture is in greater flux than at any time since the end of the Cold War. The US 'pivot to Asia' has been called into question, with the United States reaffirming its foundational European security relationship and bolstering its regional presence. Both NATO and the EU have issued new security documents— respectively, the [Strategic Concept](#) and [Strategic Compass](#).

The two organisations are independently rushing to generate policies and agreements to enhance Europe's defence capabilities, in areas such as military logistics and mobility, and are thinking again about their mutual relationship. Major NATO and EU members have pledged to substantially increase defence spending and bolster their military postures. The result is the most important moment in collective security in Europe since at least the end of the Cold War.

This Policy Insights paper reviews and assesses these changes, offering a snapshot of the evolving institutional basis for European security. It first looks at the US view of recent events, European security, and the NATO and EU documents. It then surveys those institutions and their revised strategic plans, and the possible outcomes of Europe's current rededication to self-defence.

The paper also looks at some of the challenges facing NATO and the EU as they respond to Russian aggression. In particular, the paper flags the potentially sensitive future debate about defence spending and whether NATO allies should move beyond the '2 % of GDP' pledge. Additionally, the paper looks at potential spoilers in future EU-NATO cooperation, including transatlantic defence industrial cooperation, and the development of the Military Mobility project.

These developments add up to an important new consensus among the United States, most of NATO and EU Member States about the need to rededicate themselves to collective security.

Where exactly these developments head, and how effectively NATO and the EU manage to coordinate their activities, remains to be seen. But measured against realistic standards of multinational security endeavours, the reaction to Russia's invasion has seen a remarkable degree of unity and commitment from Europe and its American partner.

What remains most uncertain is the future of the US political consensus behind its international commitments in general – something that, given the dangerous trends underway in US politics, is far from assured.

The United States and the demands of European commitments

US views on European security today reflect an unusual and possibly unstable tension: a strong element of largely traditional ideas about the importance of Europe and the essential role of US leadership, alongside a brewing disaffection with US global commitments and a seemingly unending frustration with burden sharing issues.

It is not clear where this more dubious viewpoint is headed, or how extreme it will become. One American president has already [expressed](#) a desire to withdraw the United States from NATO, and since then the broader substructure of American politics has become even more disrupted.

Less radical versions of this contrarian view reflect a waning of classic US opposition to a stronger European security role and more urgent demands for burden sharing. One thing seems certain – post-Ukraine, the US stance toward Europe is in more flux than at any time since 1945. This can be seen regarding two key issues, those being the relative emphasis on Europe as opposed to Asia and the US position on the EU's new Strategic Compass.

Defining success in the 'pivot'

The war in Ukraine has called into question the most significant over-arching recent judgement in US national security strategy: the choice to 'pivot to Asia', to identify China clearly '[as our most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge for the Department](#)'. Some [believe](#) that this focus is now threatened by the renewed commitment to Europe, Russia and NATO¹.

Part of the problem in making this assessment, however, is that it was never clear how to judge the success of the pivot to Asia.

The idea emerged in 2011, in a [speech](#) by President Barack Obama which promised that the United States was 'all in' on its commitment to Asia-Pacific security and an accompanying [essay](#) by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Neither of these statements suggested that the United States would abandon or even downplay other commitments in favour of Asia. The renewed focus on Asia was not so much an effort to abandon Europe as a balancing exercise but rather recognising the relative underinvestment in the region in areas such as economic aid and security cooperation.

Nor is there any clear threshold for measuring the sufficiency of the pivot. Advocates of a stronger regional military posture demand more US capabilities in the region, but it is not clear

¹ Elbridge Colby, the hawkish penholder behind the Trump Administration's 2018 National Defense Strategy, has also been issuing the most urgent warnings that a US recommitment to Ukraine will undermine the pivot to Asia, and US capabilities to deter and defeat potential Chinese aggression. He has made this argument primarily on Twitter. See for example <https://twitter.com/elbridgecolby/status/1524030030430588930>.

how many would be enough, or if this level can be reached without stripping Europe bare of US forces. If the United States is shooting short of the mark on the pivot, it is not clear by how much, and in what areas.

That is not to say that US efforts to indicate a renewed seriousness about the theatre have been sufficient and a very small handful of observers (such as [Robert Ross](#)) saw the pivot as dangerous and excessive from the start, creating an unnecessary security spiral with China.

By most assessments, regardless of the absence of a clear measuring stick for its success, the almost universal view is that, as a strategic initiative, the pivot to Asia failed². It did not create a widespread sense of a return of American power, did not halt China's basic trajectory in overtaking the US regional position, and did not alter the military trends in Asia.

Giving just one example, US military deployments in the region have remained relatively static, the [Pacific Deterrence Initiative](#) remains mostly a paper exercise, and US economic aid in the region has [not been substantially expanded](#). But the shortfall cannot be traced to any specific European requirements, nor is it sure to be addressed by cuts in the Euro-Atlantic theatre.

Primary themes of the debate: Europe versus Asia

In the current debate about the potential trade-off between these theatres, it is possible to identify a few consistent themes. **First**, outside the group of analysts advocating a retrenchment of the US global posture, no one is calling for an abandonment of Europe in favour of Asia. **Second**, while opinions on this are mixed, the response of US allies to the current crisis, both in terms of promises of increased defence spending and aid to Ukraine, have helped (at least temporarily) to alleviate some of the more bitter burden sharing arguments on the US side.

Third, many US officials and observers see a countervailing strategic truth – responding decisively to Russian aggression and reinforcing the long-term credibility of the US position in Europe will strengthen US commitments in Asia.

Some of those arguing that the US should extricate itself from European commitments contend that a failure to respond to Chinese aggression in Taiwan would fatally undermine US global credibility. It is not clear why this same logic does not apply to Ukraine. If the United States began signalling that it expected NATO allies to increasingly go it alone, even though the US has a history of stronger security commitments to Taiwan, Beijing could easily take European disengagement as a [signal](#) that the United States was beginning to tire of its global commitments.

² Peter Harris, Peter Trubowitz, '[The Politics of Power Projection: The Pivot to Asia, Its Failure, and the Future of American Primacy](#)'; Simon Tisdall, '[Barack's Obama's Asian Pivot Failed: China is in the Ascendancy](#)'. Some are more positive, crediting the pivot with at least beginning a new emphasis on diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives in Asia but remaining incomplete, such as Victor Cha in '[The Unfinished Legacy of Obama's Pivot to Asia](#)'.

Fourth, reinvigorated ties with Europe are widely [viewed as helpful](#) to the US position in Asia, not an alternative to it. Washington has been recruiting NATO partners to engage in freedom of navigation operations and other signals of allied commitment to maritime law and a rule-based order in Asia. As Europe's view of China has soured, the potential for European support for US, Japanese, Australian and other security policies in Asia has grown. Strong US leadership on Ukraine helps make this more likely, at least on the margins.

So far, then, there is little evidence that the broader national security community has sympathy for the argument that the US should streamline its global posture in favour of Asia. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has [described](#) US, European and Asian strategies and postures as 'mutually reinforcing', and that remains the most common perception in Washington. An inescapable result of the global nature of US interests is that a pair of dominant regional concerns can, at least in theory, strengthen rather than undermine each other.

American views of the Strategic Compass and European strategic autonomy

Up until now, there is not much that can be said about US views of the security elements of the EU Strategic Compass³.

The general American attitude toward greater European defence capabilities has been consistent for some time, essentially intrigued with the idea of any mechanisms that could enhance European burden sharing, but sceptical that the EU as an institution could build a significant security role. This is in part because Member States have been unwilling to make the necessary compromises regarding national authorities and capabilities, alongside concerns that greater emphasis on an EU role might weaken national commitments to NATO requirements⁴. US observers have shared the [general view](#) that the EU has lacked the institutional muscle for a stronger geopolitical role, and its requirement for unanimity in matters of foreign and security policy is a hindrance to decisive action.

On the broader subject of 'strategic autonomy', for the dominant proportion of the US national security community, the basic attitude remains roughly unchanged. More European autonomous capabilities are welcomed, whereas more independence in European decision-making can still ruffle feathers.

To the extent that the Compass presages much stronger EU defence investments and EU institutional enhancements to complement NATO capabilities, US officials and analysts [will welcome it](#).

³ See for example Constantine Atlamazoglou and Jason C. Moyer, '[A Strategic Compass: The European Union Expands Its Toolbox](#)'; Javier Solana, '[European Security After NATO's Madrid Summit](#)'; and Sebastian Sprenger, 'EU Nations Circle the Wagons In New 'Strategic Compass''.

⁴ This mixed perspective is nicely laid out in Max Bergmann, James Lamond, and Siena Cicarelli, '[The Case for EU Defense: A New Way Forward for Trans-Atlantic Security Relations](#)' and Jack Thompson, '[European Strategic Autonomy and the US](#)'.

Indeed, the US became even more explicit in its newfound tolerance of strategic autonomy after the announcement of the [Australia-United Kingdom-United States \(AUKUS\) initiative](#), whose submarine component left France furious at the lack of coordination and produced, according to public reports, an [American compromise](#) on the issue of autonomy at the 2021 Rome G20 summit. A senior State Department official was afterward [quoted](#) as saying, 'US President Joe Biden "absolutely" supports European allies developing their own, stronger military capabilities — but it's high time for EU leaders to move beyond theory and rhetoric.'

The debate about strategic autonomy, the value of an EU security role, and the endless arguments about the prospects for a 'European army' has grown somewhat stale. Objections on the US side have eased somewhat, partly out of recognition of relatively ebbing US relative global power, and the focus now appears to be on making a stronger EU role work rather than opposing it⁵.

Essential steps needed to boost a potential EU defence role, such as improved logistical capacities and capability for military movement, readiness, interoperability, modernisation, and institutional reform in European militaries, are the same things that will make them more capable if NATO comes calling. US officials and observers may also have concluded that fears of a decisive European autonomous break from the United States are overblown: European nations continue to rely on the United States for critical military enablers such as logistics, tanking, and air and missile defense capabilities.

The wild card: The future of US politics

Drastic changes in US politics over the next two years could create a radically different context for US policy toward NATO and Europe. The last several years have witnessed clear evidence that both main US parties contain elements that are increasingly sceptical of European commitments.

In April 2022, more than 60 Republican members of the House – roughly a third of the caucus – voted against a seemingly anodyne resolution supporting the US NATO commitment. Not all those votes reflected true anti-NATO sentiment, as some members [objected](#) to more specific components of the resolution. But this vote in itself clearly reflects a drift toward a GOP that is [less automatically supportive](#) of NATO.

On the Democratic side, most members have voted for resolutions and sanctions supporting NATO and condemning Russia. However, there has been [growing scepticism](#) of the US global

⁵ See for example Lucia Retter, Stephanie Pezard, Stephen J. Flanagan, Gene Germanovich, Sarah Grand-Clement, and Pauline Paillé, '[European Strategic Autonomy in Defence: Transatlantic Visions and Implications For NATO, US and EU Relations](#)' and Bergmann et al., '[The Case for EU Defense](#)'. This is certainly the view among more restraint-oriented analysts; see for example Rachel Rizzo, '[A Sovereign Europe ... and the United States](#)'.

posture on the progressive left for some time, and it is likely to return to the forefront once the current crisis over Ukraine ebbs.

These views remain a distinct minority for the time being, but the 2022 midterm elections could see a new influx of many members of Congress uninterested in traditional US foreign policy commitments and thus willing to withdraw from traditional, long-standing alliances. Few expect the midterms alone to radically alter the course of US foreign policy, though getting congressional assent to further large-scale Ukraine aid bills could become more complicated for the Biden administration.

But the trend is running against consistency in US policy, a trend that could be accelerated depending on the results of the 2024 presidential election. The current supportive and relatively stable US posture, one increasingly open to some forms of independent European security efforts, could give way to something far more unpredictable.

Autonomy – a concept smothered at birth?

The debate on strategic autonomy within the EU has undergone significant change among institutional actors and politicians. While the Covid-19 pandemic, AUKUS and the unceremonious departure from Afghanistan blew new wind into the sails of the concept of strategic autonomy, Russia's actions in Ukraine have ensured that there is little time to expend on theoretical debates.

In any case, some can successfully argue that the EU is now practicing the logic of strategic autonomy by delivering lethal equipment and weapons to Ukraine while also lowering its dependency on Russian fossil fuels⁶. Uncharacteristically, the EU has been relatively quick in agreeing to [several rounds of sanctions packages](#) on Russia, even at considerable short-term cost to the European economy. The support the EU is providing its Member States to welcome millions of Ukrainian refugees should also not be forgotten, nor the fact that the EU has boldly bestowed [candidate status](#) on Ukraine while it is still at war.

An alternative view, of course, is that EU strategic autonomy in defence has proven shallow and the response has only solidified the US position as Europe's ultimate security guarantor. This can be seen in the vastly higher levels of US equipment being shipped to Ukraine when compared to Europe, as well as the post-Madrid defence [reinforcement measures](#) in Europe (which includes a permanent base in Poland, 300 000 troops on high alert and four additional ballistic naval destroyers based in Rota, Spain).

This is not even to mention the fact that the EU will gradually [end its dependence](#) on Russian gas for supplies from the US, Qatar, Norway, Algeria and others. This is a necessary, if challenging, geopolitical move that has exposed the frailty of the EU's (and certain Member

⁶ See Steven Blockmans, (ed.) '[A Transformational Moment? The EU's Response to Russia's War in Ukraine](#)'.

States') energy policy and has raised important questions about the Union's renewable energy strategy.

Russia's war on Ukraine has ensured that NATO has experienced a second wind, and that previous attempts to label the alliance as ['brain dead'](#) are not a fair reflection of the current situation. In combination with the end to stabilisation missions thanks to challenging experiences in Afghanistan and Mali, NATO is clearly set on reinvigorating its approach to deterrence and assuming its responsibility as *the* guarantor of European defence.

Autonomy and Europeans' ongoing anxiety about their world role

Indeed, NATO's reinvigoration has certainly taken the momentum out of the EU's strategic autonomy in defence, even if the latter is [enhancing its relative autonomy](#) in areas related to regulating 'Big Tech', semiconductor production or the modernisation of its space assets and health disaster response mechanisms.

Even the recent French Presidency of the Council of the EU was loath to repeat the mantra of 'strategic autonomy' (it preferred calls for European 'sovereignty' or 'power' instead), which is surprising given that President Macron was in the middle of an election campaign and calls for European autonomy have resonated with the French public. Instead of the concept of strategic autonomy being preached as if it were the dogma of the Catholic church, with its scarlet-clad cardinals preaching the good word, today the concept is treated in the EU as if it were the unspoken secret held between members of a masonic lodge.

Therefore, silence on notions of EU strategic autonomy should not necessarily be taken as a sign of its demise. On the contrary, the many political strains that gave life to the concept in recent years are still present, including the risk posed by the uncertainties of future US presidential elections.

Many European states vividly remember the Trump Presidency, not least because the former president put in plain and brutal terms the pitiful state of European defence and its unhealthy addiction to American power. Of all the concerns being whispered in the corridors of Brussels and chancelleries across Europe, uncertainty about future US administrations is the one that keeps serious decision makers up at night.

Yet, Europeans also harbour serious questions about the intensifying competition between the US and China and Europe's place in this conflict. Closer to home, Europeans also fear [Turkey's trajectory](#) and instability in the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel. Turkey, alongside Donald Trump, is one of the main objects of President Macron's 'brain dead' comment about NATO as it has proven its continued ability to disrupt European affairs time and time again: just ask Finland and Sweden (and Greece and Cyprus, of course).

A more subterranean approach to EU strategic autonomy can certainly be seen in the Strategic Compass, which makes eight specific references to EU autonomy across 46 pages. The bulk

relates to the decision-making autonomy of EU institutions, but access to outer space and space capabilities are mentioned several times, too.

The document also refers twice to the need for European ‘technological sovereignty’. Yet we should not get too drawn in to counting words. The reality is that even if the EU Member States deliver on half of the 80-plus action points contained in the Strategic Compass, especially those that pertain to military capabilities, defence investments and military force, then the Union will have become far more autonomous, and would be shouldering a much fairer share of the burden within NATO.

While NATO has undoubtedly received a new impetus, it is in the Compass that most European countries have seriously pledged to develop military capabilities and where potentially game-changing defence investment mechanisms have been developed.

The Transatlantic alliance after the Madrid summit

Alongside the EU’s recent efforts in defence, it was the Madrid NATO summit that set the tone for European security over the next decade or so.

The summit itself can be classed as a relative success, especially given that Turkey was holding a potential showstopper up its sleeve with its objections to Finnish and Swedish NATO accession. Instead, an [agreement](#) between Ankara, Helsinki and Stockholm was found, adding to the sense of unity and purpose felt in Madrid.

The summit was also an opportunity to unveil NATO’s new Strategic Concept, which will guide it over the coming years. Considerably shorter than the EU’s Strategic Compass at a mere 11 pages, the document gets to the point in stating that NATO’s core business is collective defence and nuclear deterrence. While it is also true that the Concept makes references to unconventional security challenges such as climate change, and it underlines the importance of a 360-degree approach, the document leaves [little ambiguity](#) that the Alliance is chiefly concerned with checking Russian aggression.

The Strategic Concept’s main thrust is on defence and deterrence in the Euro-Atlantic region, and here it appears as though central and eastern European states managed to secure direct language – and [reassurances](#) – on Russia.

Even if the US has a declared policy of not becoming directly involved in the war in Ukraine, it clearly used the Strategic Concept to reassure allies that Washington is still committed to European security. However, Washington was also able to secure relatively direct language on China, which the alliance sees as using all possible means available to challenge NATO’s ‘interests, security and values’.

Yet China is not described as a threat to NATO – in fact, it is not really described as anything in the Concept, even if the [Madrid Summit Communiqué](#) clearly refers to China as a strategic

competitor. In this sense, it was noteworthy that leaders from Australia, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand were present in Madrid, even if each country thinks differently about Beijing.

Although the Madrid summit resulted in several commitments related to non-core tasks for NATO, the bulk of the official communique is focused on outlining the Alliance's updated deterrence and defence posture.

In the immediate wake of the summit, the US announced a raft of measures to support Europe's defence, but the summit itself did not address the core issue of [burden sharing](#). True, the Alliance reaffirmed its commitment to the Defence Investment Pledge, but it put off a discussion about new commitments until 2023. This will likely remain a sore point, despite several European countries pledging higher defence spending since the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

Yet, as with all European announcements of this kind, it is important to assess whether budgets are being increased in real terms over a short period of time. Germany's [pledge](#) to inject EUR 100 billion into its defence is certainly welcome – if overdue – news, but how this money will be spent and whether inflation and high energy costs will eat away at increased spending will be key to NATO spending discussions. Should a bulk of European nations actually meet the 2 % of GDP pledge in the coming years, however, then sensitive discussions on whether to raise the bar further will begin within the Alliance.

Transatlantic unity after the Madrid summit will also depend on the ties between NATO and the EU. Fortunately, senior officials from the EU were in Madrid. Cooperation between the two organisations is key, given that the EU is developing a range of financing tools that can be used to boost defence investment in the EU even further. This is a fact that the US government may largely welcome, even if the US defence sector may complain that additional resources will largely benefit European manufacturers.

When combined, NATO's Strategic Concept and the Madrid summit communique interestingly only refer to the EU on six separate occasions – compare that with 28 references to NATO in the Union's Strategic Compass. We can perhaps read too much into this, as NATO has stressed the importance of EU unity and its role as an essential partner for the alliance. Nevertheless, this tally of references clearly indicates that the bulk of European countries wanted to stress the importance of NATO to overall European defence rather than that of the EU.

Even so, there are grounds to believe that EU-NATO cooperation will have to face difficult discussions in the coming months and years. These challenges will mainly centre around defence-industrial issues, even if this is nothing new.

How – and whether – to include third countries into EU defence initiatives

Concretely, it is interesting to read in the Strategic Concept that the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU can only thrive if non-EU allies are afforded the fullest involvement in EU defence efforts. This can be read in many ways but it largely reflects fears that EU initiatives, such as [PESCO](#) and the [EDF](#), could be used to exclude American, British and Turkish

defence contractors. While it is true that non-EU Member States have already been included in PESCO projects, such as [Military Mobility](#), they have not been invited to participate in those projects where European industrial interests are at stake or where technology transfers might be included.

Making deeper EU-NATO cooperation contingent upon greater access to EU defence initiatives is therefore an interesting development. The difference today, of course, is that Turkey has joined the US and UK on this track, as was made apparent in their trilateral memorandum with Sweden and Finland on NATO accession. As [Point 8](#) of the memorandum states, *'Finland and Sweden commit to support the fullest possible involvement of Türkiye and other non-EU Allies in the existing and prospective initiatives of the [EU's CSDP], including Türkiye's participation in the PESCO Project on Military Mobility'*.

The spillover from the Finland-Sweden-Turkey memorandum into NATO's Strategic Concept raises several questions. Principally, it is unclear whether Sweden and Finland can make good on the pledge to work for Turkey's inclusion in PESCO projects given that exceptional participation as a third state is conditional on political and legal conditions.

In particular, the [guidance on third-state participation](#) stresses the need for project members to share EU values and to not contravene the security and defence interests of the EU. So far, Turkey has not met either of these political conditions given its domestic political situation and its illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. While it is not publicly known whether Sweden or Finland consulted EU bodies before signing the memorandum with Turkey, the NATO Summit was clearly used to put pressure on the EU to open its defence initiatives.

Regardless of the NATO Summit conclusions, it does not seem obvious how the EU can further revise its existing rules to accommodate American, British and Turkish calls to be included in EU defence initiatives. For example, initiatives such as the EDF are legally founded on an [EU Regulation](#) that delicately balances the interests of the European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the EU. It is often underappreciated how difficult it is for the EU to craft legislation in defence industrial policy, and so any revision to third-state access rules could result in a lengthy and uncertain process.

There are political considerations as well, as opening up initiatives such as the EDF to the US or UK would raise serious questions about technology control. Here, a major risk is that regulations such as ITAR would apply to projects with US participation, and this could potentially restrict how Europeans use and export capabilities and technologies they develop under the EDF.

Therefore, pegging access for non-EU states to EU defence initiatives with healthy EU-NATO cooperation does not seem like a sound basis for cooperation between the two organisations. In any case, this knot in defence industrial cooperation between the EU and NATO could also have knock-on effects for other areas of potential EU-NATO cooperation.

Cooperation on defence innovation might be curtailed. Indeed, there is clearly a need for coordination between the EU's well-developed financial tools for defence (in particular the European Defence Fund), the Union's new initiatives (such as the [Defence Innovation Hub \(HEDI\)](#)) and the Alliance's brand-new innovation mechanisms (the [Innovation Fund](#) and [DIANA](#)). It remains to be seen what impact new NATO initiatives for defence innovation will have but ensuring that the Alliance better links its tools with the EU could be a positive step forward in building trust on defence industrial matters.

Where the EU and NATO can cooperate: Military mobility

Despite concerns related to the defence-industrial dimension, there are areas where the EU and NATO can successfully cooperate, not least because it is the EU which holds the regulatory and financial firepower to seriously address them.

We speak, of course, about challenges such as resilience, countering hybrid threats, and the response to climate change. While the NATO Madrid communique and Strategic Concept talk up all these issues, and while the Alliance certainly has a role in ensuring that European nations do not neglect such security concerns, it will ultimately be up to the EU to deliver on these areas for Europe.

That being said, joint EU-NATO action should also intensify in areas such as cyber defence, space and emerging and disruptive technologies.

However, the main area of focus in the coming months and years should be military mobility. Both organisations recognise the importance of secure and efficient transportation infrastructure for Allied forces, and the project has become symbolic of EU-NATO cooperation for several reasons. With the war in Ukraine, it has also become more apparent why such a project is needed.

Bringing together 24 EU Member States and three NATO allies (Canada, Norway and the US), the project to better military mobility was once seen as being [overly bureaucratic](#) and it excluded key NATO partners. Today, however, the key challenge facing the EU and NATO is whether dual-use infrastructure investments (railways, ports and airfields) can be developed in a timely fashion, and whether EU Member States and NATO allies can address national legal and regulatory barriers to cross-border military movements. While overcoming these challenges has become a key focus for the EU and NATO, the war on Ukraine has raised a further dimension that requires attention.

Indeed, military mobility was initially – albeit partially – conceived to deal with rotational NATO troop and equipment movements in central and eastern Europe. Since the Madrid Summit it has become clearer that NATO is also interested in more permanent troop placements as a reassurance measure for eastern flank NATO allies.

While there is still political disagreement over how permanent ‘permanent’ means, the prospect of a non-rotational NATO force posture has implications for military mobility. Not least, there will be a need to [explore](#) whether the EU can financially support the modernisation of military bases on its territory or whether it should invest in missile and air defences to protect military bases and infrastructure, as well as civilian populations. Interestingly, the EU’s [2022 strategy for filling defence investment gaps](#) specifically refers (on page seven) to the need for enhanced EU air and missile defence. Thus, this capability area could in time become part of the military mobility project and an integral element of future EU-NATO cooperation.

Conclusion

This Policy Insights paper has surveyed US and European security perspectives in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The range of US and European actions to resuscitate energetic, effective and focused security planning has been impressive, ranging from an expanded US posture to leadership from both NATO and EU as institutions, to commitments by many European countries for improved defence spending.

Much remains to be determined and the follow-through on recent promises is essential. The relationship between NATO and the EU will require constant tending if it is to avoid tensions and recriminations, let alone reach its potential in efficient coordination. Overall, however, assessed against realistic standards for multinational action rather than against some theoretical ideal, the US and European response has been impressive, and the publicly expressed views of all parties are encouraging... at the moment.

It is likely that some European countries could fail to meet the full scope of their commitments in the areas of defence and security. It is possible that NATO-EU coordination could still stall.

But by far the biggest wild card going forward is American domestic politics – whether the brewing hostility toward traditional US commitments returns to the fore, either in a presidential administration or a radically different Congress. The trajectory of Western security cooperation is impressive, especially since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, but whether it remains lasting is yet to be seen.

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