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The United States Should Not Back a European Union Army

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Out of desperation for European allies to do more to improve their military capabilities, many American policymakers are looking to the European Union as a panacea for Europe's ills. The belief that a stronger EU role in defense matters will encourage European countries to invest more in defense is based on the false premise that the EU will be able to achieve what NATO has not been able to do since the end of the Cold War.

The EU is not the answer to Europe's military woes. Instead, the U.S. should be pushing for more NATO-centric solutions which will ensure that all advancements in European defense capabilities are done through the NATO alliance or at least on a multilateral basis. This will ensure NATO's primacy over, and the right of first refusal for, all Europe-related defense matters, and it will guarantee that the U.S. has the amount of influence relevant to the level of resources it has committed to Europe.

The Common Defence and Security Policy Is Duplicative and Discriminatory Toward NATO

European Union member states have slowly been constructing institutions to build an EU defense identity by duplicating NATO institutions. These

developments read well on paper but deliver very little in reality. European Union defense initiatives have diverted scarce resources away from NATO. This has led to a growing culture in Europe of "double hatting" national troops, for both EU and NATO commitments, in order to create the illusion of increased military capability.

Proponents of EU defense integration argue that military capabilities developed under the auspices of the Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) will always be made available to NATO.¹ For example, an EU Battlegroup could also be on call for NATO operations if and when NATO was ever to request its use. While theoretically appealing, this is unlikely to work in practice.

This impracticality is on account of the institutional workings of the EU and the composition of its membership. Any time that EU military assets are used, unanimous agreement by all 28 EU members is required. (Great Britain will exit the EU by 2019.) Six veto-wielding EU members are not members of NATO. Of these six countries, five are established neutral countries: Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta, and Sweden. The other, Cyprus, is politically hostile toward NATO member Turkey and has a history of blocking NATO-EU cooperation.

EU Operational Headquarters

The U.K. has always been the most outspoken critic of deeper EU defense integration, frequently using its veto power to block some of the more controversial initiatives. With the U.K. leaving the EU, the U.S. will have to keep a close eye on EU defense developments, which threaten U.S. interests.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4616>

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In light of the U.K.'s decision to leave the EU, some EU officials have taken advantage of the situation and have called for controversial initiatives like an EU Military Headquarters and even an EU Army. The U.S. should strongly discourage both initiatives.

EU Military Headquarters

An EU Military Headquarters is a needless and expensive proposal that is more about planting the EU flag than it is about increasing Europe's military capability. The EU already has access to the full range of NATO's military headquarters at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) under the Berlin-Plus agreement.² Furthermore, the EU already has access to five national headquarters for use by EU-led military missions.³

The cost of establishing an EU military operational headquarters is likely in the region of tens of millions of dollars. At a time when NATO has been decreasing the number of its major headquarters to save money, it hardly makes sense for the EU to increase its own numbers. Although a number of EU countries have called for the creation of an EU Military Headquarters, the British have so far been successful in blocking it.

EU Army

For the European Commission, the executive branch of the EU, the ultimate goal is the creation of an EU Army under supranational control, either in full or in part. Although the EU is not yet close to achieving this goal, recent comments⁴ by senior EU officials make it clear that many across Europe would like to see this happen.

First, an EU Army would be disadvantageous for Americans and Europeans alike. First and foremost, unelected, unaccountable, supranational bureaucrats in Brussels should not decide when troops are placed into harm's way. It is fundamentally and morally

wrong for those who do not have to answer to electorates to send young men and women into war. An army is certainly the goal for many of Europe's ruling elites.

Second, an EU Army would be expensive and resource-intensive to form, equip, and maintain. In an era of insufficient levels of defense spending across Europe, this would come at the expense of national armies that could be used in NATO operations. Finally, it would not be in the security interest of the U.S. to have the bulk of Europe's fighting force under the control of the EU—which, in many cases, no longer shares America's world view.

How the U.S. Should Respond

American support for deeper EU defense integration will disappoint those who believe it will lead to greater military capability and prove to be dangerous to the NATO alliance. To help put the brakes on deeper EU defense integration, the U.S. should:

- **Ensure that NATO retains its primacy over, and the right of first refusal for, all Europe-related defense matters.** NATO has been the cornerstone of transatlantic security for almost seven decades. Now is not the time to replace NATO with new security structures that will compete with, not complement, the alliance. Ensuring that NATO maintains its lead role in European defense policy will also ensure that America has the amount of influence relevant to the level of resources it has committed to Europe.
- **Make clear that the U.S. does not back deeper EU defense integration.** U.S. policymakers need to see the CSDP for what it is: a paper tiger that has not delivered increased military capability for the U.S. or for NATO. Instead, the U.S. should focus on re-energizing NATO as Europe's premier defense alliance.

1. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, "Special Address," given at the European Defence Agency (EDA) Conference, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, November 17, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_124507.htm (accessed October 19, 2016).

2. The 2002 Berlin-Plus agreement allows the EU to have access to NATO resources and capabilities should all NATO members agree. It also guarantees NATO's right of first refusal for all military missions pertaining to Europe. It has been used only twice: for the EU's Operation Concordia (Macedonia) and the EU's Operation Althea (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

3. The five national headquarters are: Northwood, U.K. (until the U.K. leaves the EU); Mont Valérien, France; Potsdam, Germany; Larissa, Greece; and Rome, Italy. The EU also has access to NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) under the Berlin-Plus agreement.

4. "In or Out of the EU, Juncker's Plan for a European Army Is Not in Britain's Interests," *The Telegraph*, September 14, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/09/14/in-or-out-of-the-eu-junckers-plan-for-a-european-army-is-not-in/> (accessed October 19, 2016).

- **Work with key NATO EU members in Central and Eastern Europe to advance a pro-NATO agenda.** There are members of the EU who are skeptical of the EU's defense policy ambitions. The U.S. should work with these NATO allies to advance a "NATO first" agenda.
- **Voice opposition to the creation of an EU Army.** Although there is not currently an EU Army, the creation of one is clearly the goal of many in Europe. It is not in U.S. or NATO interests to have an EU Army under the control of unelected European bureaucrats.

Time to Fix NATO

As the EU develops a more integrated defense capability, the U.S.'s influence in European defense matters through NATO will be reduced. European capitals should focus their energy and resources on fixing NATO before creating more institutions and signing up for further military commitments within the EU. This is the only way the U.S. will see greater burden sharing. Any increase in European military capability needs to take place under the NATO umbrella.

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