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 EUROPEAN DEFENCE AND TURKEY

I want to talk first about the history of European defence since the Second World War. Semi-outsiders, like Turkey and Britain, often discount it as being of marginal importance in comparison with NATO, and as little more than a jungle of complex acronyms which conceals the lack of real defence capacity. There is truth in this, but I believe that the history I want to talk about bears witness to a longstanding and genuine aspiration; and that current circumstances may make the present the time when finally European defence institutions will start to turn this ambition into real operational capacity. Secondly, I want to speak about the important implications of this for our two countries, neither of which, depending on the outcome of the current confusion in the UK, are, or soon might not be, be EU members.

After the end of the Second World War, the victorious Western European allies regarded themselves as confronted by two threats: first the Soviet Union and, initially, the possibility of a resurgence of a militaristic Germany. To counter these, they established a military alliance called the Western Union consisting of France, the United Kingdom and the three Benelux countries in 1948.

The United States’ recognition that the defence of Europe against the Soviet Union was in its own security interests led to the establishment of NATO only a year later. During the Korean War, the defence arm of what by then had become the Western European Union was transferred to NATO and provided the nucleus of NATO's command structure at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). But the institutions of the WEU remained in place, and it is worth noting that Article 5 of the WEU’s modified Brussels Treaty committed all its members, which by 1954 included Italy and West Germany, to coming directly to the aid of any member which was the subject of aggression with ‘all the military and other assistance in their power’. By contrast, Article 5 of the NATO Treaty is more conditional. It requires agreement by the Allies firstly that a relevant armed attack has taken place, and secondly that this attack requires a military response, before the Alliance takes action.

In NATO, the huge disparity in military resources gave the US undisputed leadership of the alliance. But this imbalance as well as policy disagreements caused by cultural, historical and geographical differences, caused friction between the United States and their European allies from the outset. Here is a quote from a US President “Unless Europe quickly sets up its own unified army, the U.S. will be compelled to undertake an “agonizing reappraisal” of its commitment to defend its European allies.” But this is not Trump: it was Eisenhower in 1953.

In 1968, the European members of NATO established the Eurogroup, consisting of the defence ministers of the European NATO members. Its basic aim was to generate a stronger and more cohesive European contribution to the Alliance; to make the best possible use of limited resources; and to avoid duplication of effort and expense. In 1976, the Eurogroup was followed by the Independent European Program Group (IEPG), intended to foster cooperation on armaments procurement. Turkey was a member of the IEPG and of its successor, the Western European Armaments Group. So the story of European attempts to make better use of their economic and industrial strengths in the cause of defence is a very long one, matched only by their failure to succeed in this. All that has changed recently is US presidential language.

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And, as regards policy disagreements, geography mattered. A small example was Norway, which, like Turkey, shared a border with the Soviet Union. The Norwegians adopted a doctrine called ‘no tension in the north’. This involved abstention from stationing any forces close to the border. The Norwegians believed that if both sides did this, it might give time in an emergency to defuse tension and stop the outbreak of war. Perhaps surprisingly, the Russians followed suit. But seen from Washington thousands of miles away, ‘low tension in the north’ was inexplicable and unacceptable. It would be interesting to know if there was ever any discussion of such an approach in Turkey on the southern flank.

A much more serious example came in the 1970s with the Soviet deployment of the SS20, a theatre nuclear missile, to which NATO had no equivalent. Those who believed in deterrence doctrine had no difficulty with the decision to deploy cruise missiles and medium range ballistic missiles in Europe as a response. However, there were widespread and serious demonstrations against these deployments throughout Europe. Many felt that the United States, by basing more nuclear weapons in Europe, was simply making their countries potential targets for a Soviet first strike.

Of course the Cold War made entirely unfeasible the notion of a truly European dimension to defence, from which tensions with their superpower ally the United States would be absent. Indeed, as long as the defence of Europe was clearly a strategic interest for the US, it is hard to visualise what European defence would consist of. However this changed with the end of the Cold war, for two reasons:

-First, the demise of the Soviet Union generated an array of new tensions and flashpoints in Europe and nearby, for example in the Balkans. Transatlantic attitudes on how to handle these were far from united. Besides, NATO members’ attitudes to the many successor states of the Soviet Union often differed. How to handle Russia’s claimed ‘sphere of influence’, including Ukraine and Georgia for example, varied greatly. Only the United States truly favoured their incorporation into NATO.

-Secondly, the end of the Soviet threat led NATO to look for new missions ‘out of area’. But this also generated division within the Alliance. Libya was a NATO operation, but it was not supported by all members. ‘Coalitions of the willing’ papered over a la carte participation in missions.

The demise of the Soviet Union coincided with, and was also partly responsible for, the development of the EU’s handling of foreign and security issues. The Balkan crisis in particular had exposed both a lack of cooperation and a lack of capabilities in Europe to deal with what was essentially a European crisis.

In reaction to this, the treaty of Maastricht in 1992 created the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy which envisaged ‘the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might lead in time to a common defence’. This was followed by the identification of the so-called ‘Petersberg tasks’, which gave the EU and the WEU a military role, and in 1993 by the establishment of the Western European Armaments Group, which I’ve mentioned.

Meanwhile on the NATO side the concept of Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTFs) was developed. A CJTF is a multinational task force generated and tailored primarily for military operations not

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involving the defence of the Alliance territory. A CJTF could be led by the WEU as part of the development of the European Security Defence Identity. It could even include non-NATO members.

The Berlin Plus arrangement between NATO and the EU of 2002 took the NATO/EU relationship still further, by allowing the EU to draw on some of NATO's military assets in its own peacekeeping operations. ‘Operation Althea’ which replaced the NATO peacekeeping force in Bosnia in 2004 was a Berlin Plus operation. Arrangements were made to protect the interests of Turkey, a NATO but not an EU member state. However, when Cyprus joined the EU, a situation developed in which Cyprus, a neutral non-NATO state, could play a decisive role in military operations in which Turkey played no role but which however drew on the assets of NATO, of which Turkey was of course a member. For that reason, Turkey has blocked Berlin Plus missions ever since, though there has been NATO/EU cooperation at theatre level, for example in Afghanistan. I will return to this issue later, since the UK will be in the same position as Turkey if Brexit takes place.

I now want to take a slight detour from European security on a narrow interpretation to a wider view, in the context of the CSCE. As you know, the original Helsinki conference had laid the foundation for the Helsinki monitoring system in the Soviet Union and other communist countries. The resulting growth in media transparency and in human rights concerns in the East played a tangible part in the collapse of the system fifteen years later. A consequence of the break-up of the Soviet Union was that the CSCE enlarged to 54 members with the accession of all the former Soviet states. In the early 1990s, the fundamental issues at what then became the OSCE were still the same, namely pan-European security and human rights. It was attractive to the former Soviet republics, and in particular Russia, because they visualised it as a potential pan-European security structure, which could bring together the former Warsaw Pact countries and NATO members on an equal footing. By contrast, Russia regarded NATO as an intrusive victor which attempted to manipulate developments in its ‘near abroad’. (In parenthesis, it still does so, of course. Confrontation in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea are among the consequences. It contributes to their continuing mistrust of the West, and to Putin’s exploitation of this.)

At the time, the West was prepared up to a point to acquiesce in Russian enthusiasm for the OSCE because we didn’t entirely discount its usefulness. For example, it developed intrusive mechanisms for examining member states’ performance on human rights. However, the West suspected that the Russians supported a pan-European security structure because it might enable them to interfere in Western European security. From our point of view, an effective OSCE which went some way to alleviate the Russian sense of humiliation and inferiority might be desirable, but not at the cost of paralysing NATO.

An inflexion point in the development of the OSCE came with the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Should the OSCE send a peacekeeping force? It didn’t. One reason was that it would have been logistically very difficult for a hitherto untested organisation. But there was also concern that this would be a step too far in the direction of a pan-European security organisation. The OSCE’s gathering security significance was ended by this failure. Of course it still does important work on human rights and on election monitoring.

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Meanwhile the process of Europe defence integration continued, but as it did so, American suspicions about European aspirations to strategic autonomy rose. The United States had of course supported the development of the European project after the devastation of World War 2. But American calls for more defence commitment from the Europeans coincided with a steady growth in European wealth, self-respect and identity. The trend towards integration among the EU member states had the effect of strengthening European defence institutions as well. Tensions between the Europeans and the transatlantic superpower increased, and in 1998 Madeleine Albright made her ‘three Ds’ warning: no delinking of NATO from Europe; no duplication of existing efforts; and no discrimination against non-EU states.

Inspite of this, an array of new European defence structures started to emerge. Most importantly, in 2007 the EU adopted the Lisbon Treaty, a major step in the development of the EU and the successor treaty to its founding Treaty of Rome. Article 42.7 of the new Treaty states that if a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This is, of course, very similar wording to that of Article 5 of the NATO treaty.

These developments were not driven just by doubts about the relevance of NATO as new threats emerged at the end of the Cold War and by the steady integration of an increasingly confident Europe. Geostrategically, the power of the United States seemed to be in decline, as evidenced by indecisiveness over policy towards Syrian during the Obama years; and its security concerns seemed to have shifted from Europe to the east as the power of China rose. Russia, on the other hand, seemed to be increasingly confrontational in its relations with Europe, for example in the Baltic States, Georgia and Ukraine,, and ready to exploit US foreign policy hesitations, particularly in the Middle East.

The Unites States was, moreover, adopting a worrying attitude to the arms controls agreements with Russia which many Europeans regarded as fundamental to continuing stability between Russia and the West. In 2002, the US withdrew from the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, the first time that the United States has withdrawn from a major international arms treaty. The outcome was the creation of the American Missile Defense Agency and a Russian decision to build up of its nuclear capabilities in order to counterbalance those of the US.

Last autumn, the US announced its intention to withdraw from the INF Treaty, which banned the theatre nuclear weapons against which there had been such widespread demonstrations in Europe in the 1970s. President Trump claimed that the Russians had been in violation of the Treaty for many years. This is arguably true. Russian claims that the Americans have also violated it are very much exaggerated. The European members of NATO have vainly urged the United States to try to bring Russia back into compliance rather than abandon the Treaty, and highlighted the risk of a split between the US and the Europeans which the Russians might exploit. Trump has also been negative about the continuation of the New START agreement beyond 2021, when it is currently due to expire. It is relevant, in the context of changing US strategic interests, that it has been suggested that the decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty was also influenced by the steady build up in the missile capability of China, which is of course not a party to the Treaty. The same applies to New START.

Arguably, Trump’s attitude to the security relationship between the US and Europe is no more than a hardnosed interpretation of the world as it is. When he asks whether American soldiers should die for a

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NATO ally, the underlying fact of life is that the global security architecture is changing; that the relative economic and military power of the United States is declining while that of others, most notably China, is rising. The same could be said for President Macron, when he calls for a ‘real European army’ to defend itself against ‘China, Russia and even the United States’ and is endorsed by Chancellor Merkel. It may be a sign of the times that in 2015, France invoked Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris which left 139 people dead and 300 wounded, not Article 5 of the NATO treaty.

Would the farsighted conclusion, therefore, be to conclude that NATO belongs in past, and that Europe should quickly develop its defence capacities? This clearly matters to Turkey as well as to the rest of Europe. For most Turks, the idea that its main military ally should be Europe rather than the US is unthinkable. But the answer is not straightforward.

First, the evolution of America’s strategic focus does not mean that its concerns will be entirely different from those of the Europeans. The re-incorporation of Eastern Europe into Russia’s ‘sphere of influence’, for example, would not serve US interests. Equally, Europeans also have an interest in areas to which US attention is shifting, notably the Far East. The Europeans will often want to support the Americans politically and perhaps in other ways. The application of sanctions could be an example.

 Secondly, even if US power is in decline, Europe has no interest in hastening this. We all recognise that we are approaching the end of the era of pax, well mainly pax, Americana. When empires such as the Ottoman and British empires have fallen, subsequent years have often been unstable and violent. We don’t know what will replace the US-dominated order, and we want to make the transition as orderly and peaceful as possible.

Thirdly, the Western European enthusiasm for European defence is not shared by the Eastern European members of the EU, who fear their reincorporation into the Russian ‘sphere of influence’. At a time when the Baltic States for example have been the target of unconventional aggression by the Russians, they want a re-committed, unified NATO rather than its elimination.

Fourthly, and most importantly, there is a stark contrast between European aspirations and capabilities. I’ve spoken about the long history of European desire for independent defence structures and capability; and how uncertainty about US intentions on the one hand and the process of European unification on the other has driven forward the institutional development of European defence arrangements. It’s a commonplace that the combined defence expenditure of the EU28 amounts to about 80% of that of the US. And whether or not as a result of Trump’s attacks on them, European defence spending is rising. In fact, in the past four years it grew more than anywhere else in the world.

However in practice, the Europeans do not have the capabilities to conduct significant operations on their own and are heavily dependent on the US. In critical areas, the US provides more than 50% of NATO’s assets. Only 15 NATO members are expected to meet their NATO defence expenditure goal of spending at least 2% of GDP by 2024. Even if the European allies can deliver what is required of them by the mid-2030s, they will still depend on the US for more than a third of what is needed in the face of a major threat.

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Even with the will on the part of the Europeans to commit the resources needed to develop a fully independent defence capability, it would take many decades to implement. To take just two challenges. First, the changes needed in defence industrial architecture, where there are important national industrial interests at stake, would be complex, politically fraught and time-consuming. Secondly, the design, production and deployment of complex weapon systems take decades. The gaps in European capabilities in mission-critical areas would take a very long time to fill.

So, while there are strong reasons in the current and future global environment why the Europeans should do a great deal more, Macron’s rhetoric is dangerously misleading. It delivers popular complacency rather than defence. And by referring to a capacity to take on the Russians and even the Americans, he trumps even Trump in divisive isolationism. If the Europeans cannot and will not deliver, their leaders should not pretend to the contrary.

The Europeans therefore need to recognise that both that their and US interests will continue to have a great deal in common and that the process of developing European defence autonomy, if achievable at all, must be undertaken in a manner which continues to contribute to European and American security. It needs to be a ‘hedge’ against long term change, not a ‘wedge’ between the US and Europe. EU defence and NATO should be viewed not as alternatives but as complementary. In practice, threats vary in scale and in location, and some are unforeseeable. In some cases, a NATO response will be needed, in others a European, and in still others a combined one.

Russia’s growing assertiveness in the Baltic region is an example of the last of these. The Baltic states are a weak spot for both the EU and NATO, of which all are members. Their proximity to Russia and the large Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia make them a vulnerable target, particularly in the context of hybrid warfare. In 2007, Russia undertook a cyber-attack on Estonia which disrupted institutions such as the media and banks.

 NATO has deployed around 4,000 to the Baltic States and Poland to counter the threat to the alliance's eastern flank, particularly since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. However, hybrid warfare includes disinformation campaigns, cyber operations and propaganda. These are areas in which the EU has much to offer in terms of enhancing resilience. This is therefore a testing ground for enhanced cooperation between the Alliance and the Union. In July 2016, the EU and NATO issued a joint cooperation declaration which identifies countering “hybrid” threats as a common objective. This is clearly relevant to the Baltics. The threat in Georgia and Crimea, of close interest to Turkey, is clear as well.

In sum, the Europeans need to regard their defences effort as complementary to NATO’s rather than as an alternative to it. We can discern the global trends which make eventual European defence autonomy an important objective, and we can identify many of the obstacles to this. But if our advocacy is no more than rhetorical, and identification is not complemented by solution, we will make matters worse, by hastening the departure of the US from its European commitments and by reducing the credibility of European resolve to defend its interests.

I want to turn to the implications of BREXIT for European defence. Taken literally, Brexit will mean the loss by the EU of a member state which possesses 40% of the EU’s defence research and development and contributes 25% of the Union’s defence spending. The UK for its part will lose access to the EU’s defence institutional framework, notably the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) established in 2017 to jointly develop defence capabilities and make them available for EU military operations, and the European Defence Fund, also established in 2017 to coordinate and increase investment in defence research and improve interoperability. As in other fields, the UK will

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lose all the multiplier effects of EU membership. The UK’s exclusion would block both sides’ access to significant budgetary and military resources, inhibiting capability-development projects that require high-end technology, especially those in aerospace. At the same time, we might also expect that without the British brake, there will be further integration in EU foreign policy, security, and defence, with coincidental loss of British influence on issues of interest to it, both within the Union and globally.

At least in the short term, these losses to both sides are unavoidable. After Brexit, the UK will need to regain lost credibility, guard against regional instability in a context of waning US commitment, and make efficiencies at a time of straitened fiscal capabilities. But it will also regard close collaboration with EU defence policy as a core component of the national interest after Brexit, and both sides will both want to limit the damage. Talks are already under way about how to achieve this and could lead to an agreement embracing continued military collaboration between the UK and EU member states in a way which would maintain the sovereignty of both, including military research and development, through the European Defence Fund.

 In the longer term, the geo-strategic trends I have described, including the eventual supersession of NATO by European defences, should make the continued isolation of a European state with nuclear forces, the highest defence budget in the continent, and 40% of the European defence research and development appear so absurd to both sides as to lead to re-integration. But that is far away and it is unavoidable that Brexit will damage both British and European defence credibility for years to come.

Finally, I’d like to turn to the position of Turkey. Like the UK, it is an important military power located on the edge of Europe. The general deterioration of relations between the EU and Turkey over the last decade applies to defence as well. At the same time, Turkey has always regarded its membership of NATO as vital to its security, but this relationship has also weakened, in part at least because of Turkey’s tempestuous relationship with the Trump administration. But Turkey is affected by many of the long term developments which I have described. As with the rest of Europe, Trump’s language has arguably just articulated the future in stark terms for Turkey too.

It is entirely reasonable for Turkey to be sceptical about the mismatch between the EU’s words about defence and its deeds. However, as I’ve said, that mismatch is not sustainable indefinitely. In the long run it is more likely than not that the rhetoric of President Macron and others about European defence will be translated into reality. If that is correct, Turkey and the EU need now to recognise the importance of each to the other in the field of defence and security and to find ways to develop the relationship inspite of Turkey’s non-membership of the Union. The alternative would be isolation. Russia’s behaviour in the Baltics, the Western Balkans, Georgia, Crimea, and the blockade of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov all argue strongly against this, however attractive transactional deals with Russia, over Syria for example, may seem in the short term.

The UK will soon join Turkey as a non-EU member state, with, however, close interests in the Union. In the defence field, the difference will be that the UK will be trying to find ways of limiting the damage that Brexit will cause to both the UK and the EU. For Turkey, the need is for both the EU and Turkey to find ways of involving Turkey more closely. The political obstacles may differ, but the institutional obstacles will be very similar for both. I believe that both the Union itself and these two non-members must, in the environment I have described, find ways to overcome these. I also believe that Turkey and the UK should work closely together to find ways through, because of what they have in common and because of what they can potentially achieve together.