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BRIEF

HOW TO STOP THE DEMILITARISATION OF EUROPE

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SUMMARY

Discounting threats of armed attack and disillusioned with liberal interventionism, Europeans are shrinking their militaries and banking on “soft” power. But this betrays a failure to understand the nature of the new, multiplayer global environment that will determine Europe’s future security and prosperity. The value of Europe’s armed forces is less in countering specific “threats” than as necessary instruments of power and influence in a rapidly changing world, where militaries still matter. Unless it gets over its discomfort with hard power, Europe’s half-hearted efforts to improve the efficiency of its defence spending will continue to fail.

This Policy Brief argues that Europeans now need to reassess their strategic environment, reconsider the role that hard power should play in it and relaunch their efforts to combine their defence efforts and resources. The Weimar Triangle – Germany, France and Poland – should jointly press for a heavyweight commission to conduct a European Defence Review, which would examine member states’ defence policies, much as the budget plans of eurozone members are now reviewed in a “European semester”; rewrite the European Security Strategy; and present to European leaders a menu of big, bold proposals for decisive further defence integration. The alternative will be not just the end of the common defence policy but the steady erosion of Europe’s ability to defend its interests and values in the twenty-first century.

In his valedictory speech in Brussels this summer, Robert Gates, the outgoing US Defense Secretary, warned of a “dim, if not dismal future for the transatlantic alliance”. Such was the lack of military capability and will displayed by many European allies that NATO faced “the very real possibility of collective military irrelevance”.¹ Those who assumed that Americans would always be ready to provide the defence that Europeans were reluctant to pay for themselves, Gates bluntly cautioned, had better think again.

The immediate causes of Gates’s disquiet were the deficiencies exposed by the Libya campaign and the scale of European defence spending cuts in response to the global financial crisis. But his worries clearly ran deeper. In early 2010 he had already voiced his concerns over what he identified as a culture of “demilitarisation” in Europe – a situation “where large swaths of the general public and political class are averse to military force and the risks that go with it”.²

Americans – even particularly smart and perceptive Americans like Gates – tend to see Europe as basically a decadent society, corrupted by state-provided welfare and all too ready to free-ride on the military might of the United States. But though these things are never black and white –

¹ US Secretary of Defence Robert M. Gates, “The Security and Defense Agenda (Future of NATO)”, Speech in Brussels, 10 June 2011, available at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581>.

² US Secretary of Defence Robert M. Gates, “NATO Strategic Concept Seminar (Future of NATO)”, Speech at National Defense University, Washington D.C., 23 February 2010, available at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1423>.

Britain and France, for example, can scarcely be labelled gun-shy – there is certainly plenty of evidence around for anyone wanting to build the case that Europeans as a whole are simply no longer serious about defence, or about the need for countries that value their freedom to maintain, and periodically use, effective armed forces.

However, the scale of recent European defence budget cuts may not be the most powerful exhibit in the prosecutor's case. There have been wide variations across Europe, ranging from cuts of more than one quarter in Latvia and Bulgaria to continued growth in defence spending in Sweden and Poland.³ In 2010, the 27 EU member states together accounted for almost one-third of global, non-US, defence spending; in other words, Europeans continued to spend on defence comfortably more than Russia and China combined. Given the overwhelming imperative to shore up tottering state finances – the example of the Soviet Union stands as a stark reminder of what happens to states that maintain levels of defence expenditure which their economies cannot support – this does not look unreasonable. And even the US defence budget is not immune to the laws of financial gravity: as incoming Defense Secretary Leon Panetta recently reminded the NATO allies in Brussels, a staggering \$450 billion is due to come off US defence spending over the next 10 years.⁴

What is worrying is not so much the scale of cuts as the way they have been made: strictly on a national basis, without any attempt at consultation or co-ordination within either NATO or the EU, and with no regard to the overall defence capability which will result from the sum of these national decisions – a point Panetta also emphasised. Such autism suggests a fundamental lack of regard for any wider strategic context – and recalls the longstanding concerns about how much of European defence spending is wasted through unnecessary duplication, or through the pursuit of objectives that have little to do with the primary aim of equipping and supporting effective armed forces (employment or regional policy, industrial policies or just old-fashioned vested interest and pork-barrel politics). The results, as Gates pointed out, were on display in Libya: extensive absenteeism, prompted not just by political disagreement but, in some cases, by the simple lack of the requisite capabilities, and an air campaign handicapped by a lack of smart munitions and the right “enablers” of modern warfare (surveillance, air-tanking and so forth).

Thus, even if the evidence on defence spending is inconclusive, the charge of a basic lack of seriousness in Europeans' approach to defence looks *prima facie* all too plausible – and so, too, does the related accusation of a basic distaste for the whole business of military power. Indeed, Europeans explicitly pride themselves on their commitment to a “rules-based” world, in

which disputes between nations are increasingly regulated by a growing corpus of international law, and global competition works itself out through export markets and rising prosperity rather than on the battlefield. Europe, many feel, represents a new, “post-modern” kind of power that prefers to assert its interests and values through the “soft” power of attraction. Indeed, European leaders claim to be more far-sighted than the rest of the world in having understood before others what globalisation and interdependence mean – a future in which competing visions of how the world should work, and competing national pursuit of prosperity, will be determined less by geo-strategy than by geo-economics.

Thus the creation of a new EU foreign policy chief and a European diplomatic service has paradoxically been accompanied by the near-collapse of Europe's efforts to forge a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). CSDP went “missing in action” during the Libya crisis. The impulse that saw more than 20 European crisis-management operations launched in the period from 2003 to 2008, in conflict areas as far-flung as Afghanistan, the Balkans and the Democratic Republic of Congo, has so thoroughly dissipated that only one new operation has been initiated since. The structures of the new diplomatic service evoke such functions as “peacekeeping”, “stabilisation” and even “mediation” – but the word “defence” is eloquently absent. Little wonder that obituaries of CSDP are now being written.⁵

To claim that Europe has simply “gone soft” would be to ignore the diversity of strategic cultures among the 27 member states – not to mention the tenacity with which the majority of them have stuck with a bloody and debilitating mission in Afghanistan, or the ultimate success of a campaign in Libya in which, for all the problems, Europeans took the leading role. Nonetheless, this Policy Brief will argue that Europeans have been lulled into a complacent attitude towards the continuing importance of armed force and hard defence – not just by decades of peace under American protection, but by failure to grasp the full implications of the changes sweeping the world of the early twenty-first century. It concludes by proposing that Europeans – who, whether they like it or not, find themselves in the same geostrategic boat – should set up a European Defence Review to renew their strategic vision for the twenty-first century before it is too late.

³ For a comprehensive overview, see *The Impact of the Financial Crisis on European Defence*, a report for the European Parliament by Christian Mölling and Sophie-Charlotte Brune, April 2011, available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201106/20110623ATT22404/20110623ATT22404EN.pdf>.

⁴ Remarks by Secretary Panetta at Carnegie Europe, Brussels, 5 October 2011, available at <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4895>.

⁵ See, for example, the view of Newsweek national security correspondent John Barry, who writes that “Libya has probably consigned notions of a ‘European defense identity’ distinct from NATO to the scrapheap of history”. See John Barry, “Lessons of Libya For Future Western Military Forays”, The European Institute, August 2011, available at <http://72.249.31.51/EA-August-2011/lessons-of-libya-for-future-western-military-forays.html>.

Demilitarisation: pathology or common sense?

To a man with a hammer, Mark Twain is reputed to have said, everything looks like a nail. Many Europeans would regard this as a fitting epitaph for the Bush presidency. If Europeans are generally less fixated on military might than Americans, does that make them wimps – or just wise?

Whichever, there is certainly a palpable trend across Europe to take defence and the need for strong armed forces with diminishing seriousness. The limits to the utility of armed force are widely acknowledged not least by some of its most distinguished practitioners.⁶ “Security” issues are ever more widely drawn: public discourse – even NATO’s Strategic Concept – prefers to focus on energy- or cyber-security, or even (departing entirely from the realm of what it is useful to regard as a “security” issue) climate change or pandemics.⁷ ECFR’s own research, conducted in 2010, revealed that even security elites in the so-called New Europe – that is, in countries that still have a vivid memory of living under Russian domination and were particularly unsettled by the 2008 Georgia conflict – widely discounted traditional “threats”.⁸ Many people felt insecure. But the insecurities felt were almost entirely economic. People feared a declining standard of living, or losing their jobs to migrants – in short, not the sort of threats that armed forces could be expected to counter. An EU-wide poll by Gallup found a similar picture: only 13 percent of respondents regarded a “resurgent Russia” as a serious security threat and almost as many people cited climate change as Al-Qaeda-type terrorism as the most important security threat.⁹

None of this should really be a surprise given the remarkable transformation of “East-West” relations over the past two or three years, with the US “reset” of relations with Moscow and the Polish/Russian détente. Of course, Russia will remain a difficult and abrasive neighbour – especially when Vladimir Putin resumes the presidency and troubles less than Dmitry Medvedev to conceal the nature of Russia as, in the words of a leaked cable, a “mafia state”. But the Georgia conflict, which marked the end of the eastwards expansion of NATO, has in practice induced a new sense of stability in the European security order. Russian hubris has evidently been moderated by a combination of the financial crisis and the damage done to Gazprom’s revenues by the emergence of North American shale gas. Russia finds itself deeply preoccupied

with the problems of modernising both its economy and its armed forces. Described by Robert Gates two years ago as “a shadow” of the conventional capability of the old Soviet Union, the Russian armed forces are now in the throes of major reorganisation and are struggling to cope with the problems of moving to an all-volunteer force in a country where military service was widely loathed.¹⁰

But, concerned Americans might argue, Russia is not the point. After all, we have all known for years that it is a range of “new” threats that now challenge us – terrorism, nuclear proliferation, state failure and other phenomena so well described in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS). In a globalised world, security is not about manning the ramparts to resist invasion but about being ready to tackle such threats at source. Defence in the twenty-first century is about proactive crisis management – the ESS’s “early and robust intervention”. The readiness to undertake “expeditionary operations” is a matter not just of self-interest but also a moral imperative – as acknowledged by the UN’s adoption in 2005 of the doctrine of “responsibility to protect”. The real charge against the Europeans is that having signed up to a new concept of the role of their armed forces in ensuring a safe and secure world, they have (with only a few honourable exceptions) lost their nerve at the first whiff of cordite. Just look at the number of Europeans who chose to sit out the Libya intervention.

Again, the European loss of appetite for liberal interventionism is undeniable. While elites with their eyes on Washington continue to assert that national security starts on the Hindu Kush, European publics have manifestly lost whatever stomach they had for the fight in Afghanistan. Gallup found a four-to-one plurality of Europeans concluding that their involvement there had made their country more, not less, vulnerable to terrorism, and a clear majority wanting their troops withdrawn. True, European navies have rushed to demonstrate their continuing “relevance” by joining the operations against the Somali pirates. But, with that exception, the once-steady flow of new CSDP crisis-management operations has faltered and dried up.

All this may indeed be evidence of a certain European pacifism. On the other hand, however, it may be evidence of a certain European ability to learn from experience. Many Europeans believe that Afghanistan is a failed experiment – a right and necessary response to 9/11, which, instead of being brought to an early conclusion, was allowed to metastasise into a futile exercise in nation-building which the last eight years have demonstrated to be, at least in Afghanistan, undoable.

Couple this with the earlier experience of Iraq, and the millennialist optimism of a decade ago – the heady sense that history had ended, capitalism and liberal democracy had triumphed, and that it was the right and the duty of the

⁶ See, for example, General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005).

⁷ No one has a monopoly on the use of language, so it is not “wrong” to talk, for example, of “food security”. But it is important to maintain a clear distinction between those security issues that should sensibly be analysed alongside defence issues, and those which should not. The presence or absence of hostile human intent may be the best discriminator: so, while climate change or naturally-occurring pandemics may lead to conditions which give rise to such issues, they should not be seen as “security issues”, *stricto sensu*, in themselves. Confusion over the nature of different sorts of “security” problem will lead to confusion over the appropriate means to deal with them.

⁸ See Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, *The Spectre of a multipolar Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations, October 2010, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/the_spectre_of_a_multipolar_europe_publication.

⁹ “Future of transatlantic alliance and global security presentation”, Gallup, available at <http://eu.gallup.com/Brussels/141263/Future-transatlantic-alliance-global-security-presentation.aspx>.

¹⁰ Robert M. Gates, “A Rebalanced Strategy”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2009, available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63717/robert-m-gates/a-balanced-strategy>.

victorious West to fare forth and make the rest of the world more like them – seems to most Europeans like a distant dream. So, too, does another prized European illusion – that, mahout-like, they could guide the elephant of American power if they chose to climb aboard. In the event, Europeans have found themselves simply taken for a ride – implicated in debilitating campaigns that have not only cost them lives and money but have, most of them believe, been entirely counter-productive in terms of combating the threat of terrorism.

It remains, of course, to be seen how far the Libya campaign may mitigate or reverse this “intervention fatigue”. There is still plenty of time, during the inevitably precarious transition to a stable post-Gaddafi democracy, for things to go badly wrong. But at the time of writing, in the aftermath of the rebels’ military victory, the NATO operation looks like a gratifying success. Those who stood aside from the intervention, notably Germans and Poles, have the demeanour of men who must now accept that they made the wrong call – encouraging the hope that, next time, a more muscular and united European response will be forthcoming.

This hope is fanned by the reflection that in Libya (as also perhaps in Ivory Coast earlier in the year), Europeans may have found a new and more realistic model for such operations. In contrast with the protracted nation-building-through-occupation efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Libya campaign was more limited in scope, more closely matched to what Europeans could actually deliver (the tipping of a military balance), and clearly left the “ownership” – and the main risks – of the conflict with the indigenous forces. So perhaps Europeans will be readier to repeat this kind of “intervention lite” in future, persuaded that a successful, and relatively inexpensive, formula has at last been found.

Perhaps. But before generalising from the specific it is worth recalling just how specific the circumstances of Libya were: a revolution legitimated by the wider Arab Awakening; a dictator who had contrived to alienate each and every one of his brother Arab leaders; and a uniquely accessible theatre of operations. No-one is talking of now applying the “Libya model” to, say, Syria.

Moreover, after Iraq, Europeans have been allergic to the idea of taking military action without explicit UN backing. The Libya campaign, for all the talk of its restorative effect on the concept of “Responsibility to Protect”, will in actuality make the obtaining of such backing even harder in future. The manner in which Europe and America stretched the mandate to “protect civilians” to encompass regime change has left most of the other major international players – including Brazil, India and, particularly, South Africa – feeling they were duped. Russia, indeed, allowed the resolution through only after Medvedev overruled Putin – something, we can now be certain, he will not be doing in future.¹¹ China, too,

is likely to revert for the foreseeable future to its traditional unwillingness to sanction interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign state. Thus for all its success, Libya was, in terms of the willingness of the international community to back military interventions, less a new precedent than an aberration.

All of this leaves European defence establishments (that is, armed forces and the powerful industries which both support and depend upon them) struggling to justify their existence – or, to be more accurate, their continued existence to the tune of nearly €200 billion of expenditure per annum. The dilemma was neatly encapsulated by the 2010 UK defence review – which was broadly applauded for diagnosing the principal threats to national security as terrorism and cyber-attack and then ridiculed for prescribing aircraft carriers as the remedy. Huffing and puffing about a “dangerous and unpredictable world” does not carry conviction if people feel safe – economically insecure to be sure, but safe from military threat.

Despite dark American talk of European casualty aversion and even pacifism, very few Europeans would want to see their militaries disbanded. People understand the need for air- and sea-policing. They admire their Special Forces. They want their governments to retain the ability to pluck fellow-citizens off a beach in the midst of some African civil war, and realise that that sort of capability is not as cheap as it might sound. The case for a degree of generalised “insurance” against the unpredictable future is accepted, with the need to maintain a strong defence research effort as part of that. Many Europeans would agree that their long-term security depends upon the development of space-based capabilities – some would even add the maintenance of a nuclear deterrent. And, yes, many would also be ready to pay to safeguard a European ability to repeat an intervention operation on the scale of Libya – and even to do it better another time. But – as tumbling defence budgets across the continent testify – the European taxpayer is simply unprepared to accept that preserving a prudent level of core defence capability requires spending anything near 31 percent of non-US global defence expenditure, or keeping 1.6 million personnel in uniform.

Nor does it help when defence proponents attempt to invent new missions for the military. Like other large organisations, armed forces need to protect themselves against the threat of cyber-attack on their information and communication systems. But they are not natural candidates for the role of protecting societies against electronic assault on their power distribution or telecommunications systems. NATO has flirted with a new “energy security” rationale, but has failed to offer anything more plausible than the evident absurdity of guarding pipelines. Not even the catchy-sounding “protection of the global commons” has gained popular traction – perhaps because operations against Somali pirates are manifestly a policing rather than a serious military effort, and perhaps because the argument that “we live by global trade and so must keep the sea-lanes open” clearly applies as much (or more) to the producers of flat-screen televisions as it does

¹¹ See Richard Gowan and Franziska Brantner, “The EU and Human Rights at the UN: 2011 Review”, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2011, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR39_UN_UPDATE_2011_MEMO_AW.pdf.

to their importers. To the limited extent that the “global commons” need policing, there is no obvious contemporary reason why Europeans should hurry to “take up the White Man’s burden”.

Thus the dilemma remains: what is actually wrong with a dose of “demilitarisation” in a time of austerity? If the threat of armed invasion can truly be discounted for the foreseeable future, and if we are now older and wiser about the moral and the prudential calculus of overseas interventions, then is it not just common sense to cut right back on the military? On the basis of the analysis so far, the answer must be “yes”. But this analysis is incomplete. It reflects, like all European strategic discourse, a threat-oriented approach to considering military needs. What it misses is something with which the prevailing strategic culture in Europe is uncomfortable, and therefore tends to ignore: the dimension of power.

Armed force, power and influence

Europeans are still struggling to take fully on board the scale of the changes that have transformed the global environment over the past decade. They entered the new millennium as junior partners in a Western ascendancy that dominated the world economically, technologically, culturally and, of course, militarily. Yet, in a few short years, power has dramatically flowed away from the north and west to the south and east, with the global financial crisis both manifestation and accelerant of this trend. In an historic reversal of Europe’s nineteenth-century “scramble for Africa”, Indian conglomerates have acquired some of Europe’s industrial crown jewels and European governments have pleaded with the Chinese, themselves transformed from developing country to global economic behemoth, to pick up their distressed debt.¹²

Europe’s diplomatic heft has diminished no less markedly, as the G20 has superseded the G7 and the G8; Europeans have been forced to give up voting weight in the International Monetary Fund (IMF); China and the US have combined to kick the European climate change agenda into touch; and the newly powerful sovereigntist states have handed reverse after reverse to Western positions at the UN Human Rights Council. Nor is the usual comfortable ride on American coat tails so readily available: Uncle Sam himself is wrestling with his own decline in global status, and likely to have less time in future for importunate but non-contributing Europeans. Having “reset” relations with Russia and in the process of pulling out of two disastrous wars in Asia, the US is refocusing on the challenge of China and on “nation-building” at home. American reluctance to do more than “lead from behind” on Libya suggests that, in future, Europeans will have to do more fending for themselves.

¹² See François Godement and Jonas Parelo-Plesner with Alice Richard, *The Scramble for Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2011, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR37_Scramble_For_Europe_AW_v4.pdf.

Unsurprisingly, Europeans in all their diversity are finding it difficult to come to terms with these dramatic changes. The British, to judge by their 2010 National Security Strategy, have plumped for denial as the easiest response.¹³ This may be partly to avoid the unpalatable conclusion that the only way to protect European interests and values in the new environment is to harness the combined weights of the different European member states in more coherent EU action. As Javier Solana so succinctly put it: “It really is that simple; either Europe works together or it becomes strategically irrelevant.”¹⁴

Not everyone, of course, finds the prospect of strategic irrelevance unattractive – for example, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán welcomed the Chinese leadership in Budapest in July with a remarkable speech of obeisance.¹⁵ But the prevailing attitude in Europe, certainly among the larger member states, is to accept that times have got a lot tougher; that globalisation has ushered in a new and much more competitive era in which Europeans are going to have to try a lot harder to preserve their accustomed prosperity and influence in the wider world; and that, difficult though it is, combining their weight is the only way forward. They have grasped that the future will require them to compete more effectively and cohesively in a multipolar world – one in which the United States will increasingly function as a separate, albeit closely aligned, pole.

However, Europeans have not yet fully understood that the competition is about something more than just trade balances and comparative growth rates. For, though the advocates of “geo-economics” may be right to identify the competition as pre-eminently economic in nature – a race for prosperity in which all should win – the fact is that those who prosper more than others will have the louder voices in determining how the world is to be run and the rules by which it should work. So the competition is about wealth but also about values – individual versus community, democracy versus authoritarianism, interdependence and mutual accountability versus sovereignty.

Of course, such considerations are not lost on those who think about Europe’s place in the world, not least in the EU institutions in Brussels. But there is, nevertheless, a predisposition to believe that Europe, endowed with the economic clout of what is still the largest market in the world, and with a special commitment to multilateralism and a rules-based world, should confine itself to the exercise of “soft

¹³ “Britain’s national interest requires us to reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence.” See *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an interdependent world*, available at http://interactive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/documents/security/national_security_strategy.pdf.

¹⁴ Javier Solana, “Europe’s global role – what next steps?”, Ditchley Foundation Annual Lecture XLV, 11 July 2009, available at <http://www.ditchley.co.uk/page/352/ditchley-lecture-xlv.htm>.

¹⁵ Orbán said that “during the past two, two and a half decades China opened up the possibility for millions of Chinese people to rise from poverty. This performance, this moral and human achievement, is something in front of which we Hungarians bow with respect.” Speech by Viktor Orbán at the China – Central and Eastern European Countries Economic and Trade Forum, 26 July 2011, available at <http://hungaryvoternews.wordpress.com/2011/07/26/speech-by-viktor-orban-at-the-china-%E2%80%93-central-and-eastern-european-countries-economic-and-trade-forum/>.

power”. Europeans like to believe they have learned the hard way that attempting to secure the prosperity and security of their peoples by military means is self-defeating – and that in their European project, however imperfect it may be, they have evolved a “post-modern” model of how states should interact, in which co-operation and interdependence replace the exercise of “hard power”.

Yet such a determined preference for soft over hard power is to take a useful analytical distinction and distort it into a false antithesis. Power, after all, is at bottom simply the ability to induce others to conform to one’s own wishes; and there are many ways of skinning a cat. Much depends, as Joseph Nye (who first coined the hard/soft distinction) points out in his latest book, on context.¹⁶ So, as the fable recalls, the Sun’s heat may be more effective than the North Wind’s force in separating a man from his cloak. But only a fool would conclude that the power of the gale can be discounted. As Nye summarises: “In the twenty-first century, military power will not have the same utility for states that it had in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but it will remain a crucial component of power in world politics”.¹⁷

Certainly, Europeans’ own booming arms exports should remind them that the rest of the world has not yet embraced their post-modern view that armed force has had its day. The Chinese example is particularly instructive. They have evolved the concept of Comprehensive National Power, according to which a nation’s heft is viewed as a product rather than the sum of its military, economic and political power.¹⁸ Thus, those who aim to shape the future need a balanced power portfolio, comprising hard as well as soft. In Chinese eyes, therefore, the European doctrine of “speak softly and carry a big carrot” does not impress.¹⁹ (China’s impressive military build-up cannot, however, fairly be adduced as an argument for Europeans to take defence more seriously. It is focused on those capabilities – aircraft carriers and combat aircraft, surveillance satellites, and missiles – which will support their ambition of driving the US out of the Western Pacific. This is, appropriately, the main new focus of American geostrategic concerns. But Europeans, situated by a happy accident of geography on exactly the opposite side of the world, will prove highly resistant to any US attempt to involve them in Asian confrontations, for example by reheating the “global NATO” idea.)

Nonetheless, the soft-power advocate will counter, how exactly is it that military power is meant to weigh in the modern world? In the old days you could send a gunboat – there was probably no need to bombard the waterfront to secure the trading privileges you wanted (or “Capitulations”, as they were expressively termed). Frederick the Great may have observed that “diplomacy without arms is like music

without instruments” – but, then, he was an eighteenth-century Prussian who had already demonstrated the volume of his orchestra by smashing the Habsburg army at Leuthen. But a world of modern communications, and nuclear weapons, no longer permits that kind of behaviour. Anyone wishing to base a case for maintaining strong armed forces in Europe on the demands of the post-Western competition for power and influence will have to do better than historical allusion and clichés such as “power projection”. Just how is it that armed forces are meant to contribute to a nation’s – or a group of nations’ – strategic aims in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

The answer is perhaps threefold. First is the unpredictability of events. Britain did not foresee the Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands. No-one foresaw Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait. The Arab Spring caught all international analysts – not to mention Arab autocrats – by surprise. It may be right that an activist policy of liberal interventionism as set out in the European Security Strategy has had its day – and that Libya, as an internationally sanctioned intervention, is highly unlikely to be repeated in the foreseeable future. But that does not affect the probability that in coming years European forces will find themselves engaged in conflicts that no-one has predicted. Foreign-affairs experts may hate this kind of argument, and rightly accuse defence establishments of deploying it in support of their own vested interests. But it is valid nonetheless.

The second argument derives from the very nature of military power itself. Despite a European propensity to obscure the issue, the point of armed forces is basically to kill people and destroy things. Their defining characteristic is the use of disciplined violence. As organised and disciplined bodies, they may be useful for many other things as well; but if what you want is basically a humanitarian relief force, you would do better to disband your military and constitute a force of *sapeurs-pompier*s. Yet even the toughest practitioners of the application of state-sanctioned violence know that killing and destroying is only a means to an end. Armed force is ultimately about achieving an effect in the mind of the antagonist – breaking his will to resist; convincing him that the pain of pressing on with his aggression will outweigh any conceivable gain, and thus inducing him to back off; or deterring him from aggression in the first place. The epitome of this type of hard power is the nuclear bomb. An entire literature has been devoted to the concept of nuclear deterrence and how it affects the calculations of the antagonist – in the right context not only deterring him from his own nuclear use but actually persuading him to keep the peace in the first place.

So, in the new global multiplayer game in which all parties seek to promote their own interests and their own values, a key function of hard power, as ever, is to work on the perceptions of the other competitors – whether by persuading the Chinese leadership that Europeans are not so decadent that they will not at some point be prepared to stand up for their own interests; or in emboldening a people, as in Libya, to revolt against their dictator. There are, of course, other

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

¹⁷ Joseph S. Nye, “Has Economic Power Replaced Military Might?”, Project Syndicate, 6 June 2011, available at <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/nye95/> English.

¹⁸ See Mark Leonard, *What Does China Think?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008).

¹⁹ Acknowledgments to Robert Cooper.

ways to signal determination: the EU's readiness to raid Gazprom's offices impressed Prime Minister Putin. But, in the not-yet-post-modern world, nothing conveys resolve so clearly as a willingness to make the sacrifices involved in maintaining armed forces and, from time to time, employing them. Such demonstrations of hard power do not have to be frequent, provided they are effective. British Special Forces earned decades of prestige from their successful operation to free hostages from the Iranian embassy in London in 1980. Despite the heavy reliance on American assistance, the European willingness to prosecute the Libya campaign will have powerfully reinforced the relevant nations' standing in the region and further afield.

The third argument is that the language of armed force remains a prevalent global lingua franca. Again, this requires Europeans to understand that the rest of the world is not so fortunate as to live in the unprecedentedly secure environment which is to be found at the Western end of the Eurasian landmass in the early years of the twenty-first century. Elsewhere, military matters are not confined to periodic wars of discretion; they are day-to-day preoccupations, and often matters of state, or at least regime, survival. One need only look at the Arab Spring to understand the crucial role played by national armies in the Middle East, whether positive (as in Tunisia and Egypt) or negative (as in Libya and Syria). Europeans may look at the Arab Gulf states primarily as sources of energy, sovereign investment or lucrative export orders, but they cannot expect to exercise real influence with the Gulf Arabs, to "win their hearts and minds", unless they understand and engage with their constant preoccupation with the threat posed by Iran. Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa the leaders are either military men themselves, or at least preoccupied on a day-to-day basis with the reality of rebellion or ethnic conflict.

Europeans also need to understand that their competition with the new powers of the multipolar world has to be waged not only directly, in terms of the bilateral balance of trade or the race to stay ahead in technological innovation, but across the globe – among the substantial majority of the world's countries which are in effect "in play" between the major powers. The game is to persuade Abu Dhabi to award the nuclear reactor contract to a European rather than a South Korean company; or to persuade the African dictator to pay more attention to human rights, or grant the mining concession, in recognition of EU development aid, rather than go with the Chinese offer of no-strings-attached infrastructure investment. Even in what Europeans like to call their "neighbourhood", they need to grasp that the countries to their east and south are no longer supplicants with nowhere else to go, who can be allowed to move closer to Europe at whatever pace Brussels sees fit. As post-revolution Egypt demonstrated in rejecting IMF loans, countries on Europe's periphery welcome the growing presence of the new powers and now feel that they have real alternatives.

Given their attachment to multilateralism and the rules-based world, Europeans should have no difficulty in grasping that the multilateral rules are ultimately set by the 200-odd states which comprise the United Nations – and that the countries "in play" in commercial and economic terms are also the "swing voters" in multilateral forums.

If Europeans want to induce the rest of the world to act in conformity with their preferences – that is, if they want to exercise international power and influence – then they must be able to engage with the rest of the world on the issues that really matter to them and to offer them things they really want. And, as argued above, military affairs and military capabilities are high up the list in this regard. The most prized inducement (as European states themselves demonstrate in clinging to NATO) is the security guarantee. But, today, only the US is in the business of providing those. Less ambitiously, few countries in the world are uninterested in acquiring the best modern arms; or military training and other forms of advice and assistance; or intelligence, from friendly powers with a global reach who can help them interpret the currents of regional affairs and determine what threats they are facing. Assistance with security sector reform may be in particular demand in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions. Simple presence, too, is often reassuring – whether in the form of a military base, or units conducting exercises, or even a ship visit.

Naturally, in matters bearing on national or regime survival, people want the best. They want their military assistance from experienced, professional and successful armed forces: there is no advertisement so compelling for military equipment as "combat-proven". European nations that maintain strong armed forces, and are ready when the need arises to use them, have in their hands powerful instruments of international influence.

In sum, the prevailing European disposition to downplay the importance of defence, while not irrational, is dangerously short-sighted. Europe may indeed be unprecedentedly free from any plausible threat of armed aggression. Liberal interventionism may have lost its allure. But the real challenge to the security and prosperity of Europe's peoples is to continue to count – to avoid being marginalised in a world where newer and more hard-nosed powers make the rules and assert their interests and values while Europe retreats into retirement. The end of the Western ascendancy requires Europeans to compete, as they have not had to do for many decades, in the new multiplayer global environment – and to compete with all the assets at their disposal.

Seen in this light, European armed forces should be viewed less as counters to implausible "threats" than as instruments of statecraft. The point is difficult to articulate in a European climate of preoccupation with soft power – and a clumsy recent attempt to do so cost the German president his job.²⁰

²⁰ "German President Horst Köhler Resigns", *Spiegel Online*, 31 May 2010, available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,697785,00.html>.

But a major effort is now required to get Europeans to reassess their strategic environment; reconsider the role that hard power should play in it; and re-energise their efforts to co-operate through their common defence and security policy.

A European Defence Review

If the argument so far is right – that the European predilection for “soft power” is jeopardising the continent’s ability to compete effectively in the post-Western world, with dangerous long-term implications for its security and prosperity (the traditional twin goods of modern defence policies) – then what is to be done?

The obvious answer is for Europeans to renew their investment in their common defence efforts. (This is certainly the answer that Americans now press upon them, consigning to history the old concerns about incompatibility between CSDP and NATO.) Since they are all in the same boat (the same fiscal problems, the same geostrategic situation), Europeans should address their defence crisis together – that is, they should make the choice for decisive further defence integration. In practice, this would amount to little more than properly implementing policies already agreed, and utilising institutions already created – a proposition both simple and, as the lack of progress over the past decade has demonstrated, deeply intractable.

Some aspects of the current crisis are encouraging. Suddenly, everyone is talking about “pooling and sharing” – that is, saving costs through co-operation. Thus, a logic that was previously acknowledged intellectually, but assigned to the “too difficult” tray, has become mainstream. Yet behind this flush of talk and activity, the hard fact remains that, in the latter half of 2011, the idea of reinvesting in CSDP would be privately regarded by many European elites as about as plausible as buying Greek sovereign debt.

The British will “pool and share”, but not under the auspices of “Brussels”, and only with those whom London judges to be “serious” about defence. The implied mindset – that the virtuous north should shake off the free-riders of the periphery – mirrors the tensions within the eurozone community, along much the same cultural fault-line. And such centrifugal tendencies have yet to be offset by any more positive leadership from the new foreign and security policy institutions in Brussels.

Perhaps, however, the principal factor hollowing out the European defence project is a sort of collective “loss of faith”. So much rhetorical effort and so much staff time have been expended over the past dozen or more years, with so little to show for it, or so it now seems, that a growing fatalism is increasingly detectable whenever the idea of some new effort to advance the policy is broached. The European Security Strategy remains the litany: but little real belief in its confident and activist creed is any longer apparent. The imperative to pool efforts and resources is universally

acknowledged: but ministers and officials seldom act as though they in practice expect anything very much to change. Everyone subscribes to the need to move away from outdated legacy structures and equipments towards modern, relevant capabilities. There is even a good consensus, confirmed by the Libya campaign, about what “modern, relevant capabilities” means – communications, intelligence, mobility, protection and precision being the main components. Yet years of disappointed expectation have eroded confidence that Europe’s combined efforts can do anything very much about it – and eroded the sense that it matters much anyway.

To fix this – to avoid the imminent final downgrade of European defence ambitions to junk status – requires two things. First, as this Policy Brief has argued, Europeans must wake up to the realities of their new geostrategic situation, and rethink the role that their armed forces must play if they wish to retain power and influence in the new multipolar world. They need, in other words, to accept that their 2003 European Security Strategy belongs to a bygone age, and to agree a new one. This is a generational as well as a strategic issue. The leaders of 2003 are gone, and their replacements need to take ownership of the European defence project for themselves – or decide to drop it. Unless today’s leaders buy in as individuals, any new effort will be in vain.

Second, since a new strategic consensus will be valuable only if translated into action (that is, into thoroughgoing and co-ordinated defence reform), today’s leaders need to understand the nature of the beast with which they are dealing. Defence reform in any context, national as much as international, is a desperately intractable business.

Defence culture is deeply conservative and risk-averse, and so inimical to change; innovation is crushed by discipline. Inertia and resistance are built into the machine. In addition, defence is besieged by vested interests – the contractors who make their living from it, the armed forces whose individual careers, rewards and prestige depend upon it, the politicians who see it as the last accessible pork barrel in the government of advanced democracies.

Then there is the sheer complexity of the business, the way in which almost anything you want to do involves all manner of human, political, financial and technical complications, often pulling against each other. As just one example, the civil war within the defence ministry between the chief of defence staff (the top man in uniform) and the national armaments director (the man who spends much of the money) is a near-universal feature across Europe. In short, defence is not a self-healing system – reform depends on decisive intervention by forces (finance ministers, for example) from outside the system. Add the European context, and political momentum becomes even more important – the sort of impulse that really only heads of government can provide, to get things moving and then overpower the machine’s braking capacity.

Finally, assuming the necessary political horsepower is generated, there is a real transmission difficulty: how do you connect that power to the drive-wheels? In defence, this

problem is exacerbated by the divide between those who want and those who know. Ministers may (on their good days, at least) have the strategic grasp and the will to make the necessary changes; but they will seldom have the confidence to drive the “experts” – the military men who allude darkly to the ultimate price being paid on the front line, or the scientists who have graphs to prove the hugely superior performance of the vastly more expensive option. Conversely, the experts – see above – have no sympathy with doing things differently.

No wonder, then, that the time-honoured model of defence integration in Europe – ministers declare that the logic is impeccable and that “something must be done”; they then invite “the staffs” to report back on what that something might be – is demonstrably broken. The “bottom-up” approach failed when it was adopted, as the European Capabilities Action Plan, after the Anglo-French summit at St. Malo in 1998. It has achieved only partial successes – in no way commensurate with the size of today’s financial and strategic challenges – since then. It is unlikely to fare much better in the “pooling and sharing” conversations currently occupying staff officers across Europe.

If, then, there is any serious will in Europe to move forward decisively on European defence, the lesson must be of the importance of harnessing political energy and technocratic expertise together. An impulse is needed which simultaneously renews the strategic case, and enables European leaders to commit their countries to the key practical steps needed to convert the strategic case into reality. Convinced European leaders must be enabled to take specific, game-changing decisions. The right technical responses to the strategic requirements must be formulated and offered up for their decision – and a mechanism must be put in place so they can ensure that those decisions are carried out. The familiar trap of “commissioning further work on ...” must be avoided – if European leaders decide that they want common European air-policing (as a step towards smaller but more capable air forces), or a secure voice-communications network for deployed operations covering all in-theatre actors including NGOs, or a European capability to suppress enemy air defences, or a 50 percent reduction of the costs of all the duplicative test and evaluation facilities across Europe, then they must take just such decisions, specify deadlines, and check to ensure that implementation is actually happening.

Such an attempt to combine renewed strategic vision with key managerial decisions sounds remarkably like what, in a national context, is termed a Defence Review. Thus what is now needed is a European Defence Review. This is hardly a piece of intellectual parthenogenesis: calls for a “European White Book on defence” have been made almost from the first emergence of the European Security Strategy, and were recently renewed in the report of Felipe Gonzales’s Reflection Group on the Future of Europe.²¹

The point is not so much that the time is now right for such an effort. Rather it is that, without it, CSDP will soon be a dead letter. European defence, like economic and monetary union,

has arrived at a place where Europe’s leaders must now decide whether they want to take it forward – or else watch it break up. If they decide that their preference, even provisional, is for decisively tighter integration, then they must establish a heavyweight European Defence Review Commission to propose a redefined and rearticulated common strategy and an initial set of the decisions needed to make a reality of it.

Such a commission should be charged with examining both strategy and the key steps needed to implement it – and to make recommendations to the European Council (i.e. national leaders, not just defence ministers). Clearly, it would require high quality technocratic advice – but it would need to be led by political heavyweights. “Big beasts” are needed to command access to the top political levels across Europe; to secure co-operation from reluctant bureaucracies (such an exercise would, for example, be hugely dependent on the speed and comprehensiveness, or otherwise, with which requests for data were met); to conceive of truly ambitious change (identifying 10 to 15 major joint initiatives); and to sell their conclusions to national leaders who will naturally prefer, like St. Augustine of Hippo, to defer good behaviour to another day.

Two other points are vital. First, for reasons argued above, the temptation must be resisted to set up a security-and-defence review – the focus must be kept sharply on the question of armed force and armed forces. Second, the work must involve examination of the national defence plans of the individual member states. New capabilities will be affordable only if redundant ones are identified and cut. And a coherent European defence structure will emerge – whether in NATO or on an EU basis – only if national decisions are made with the mutual visibility and co-ordination that has so far been completely absent. Eurozone governments have accepted the idea of a “European semester” before finalising their national budgetary plans; defence needs the same.

Who can launch such an effort? Not today’s Brussels: quite apart from the prevailing distrust of hard power, the new institutions are too preoccupied with establishing themselves. Not the EU’s leading military power, either: Britain has effectively opted out of the CSDP. The next EU Presidency, Denmark, has literally opted out; and nothing can be expected of its successor, Cyprus.

This leaves the so-called Weimar Triangle. France, Poland and Germany have been working hard over the past year –

²¹ “See Project Europe 2030: Challenges and Opportunities. A report to the European Council by the Reflection Group on the Future of the EU 2030, May 2010, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/librairie/PDF/QC3210249ENC.pdf. The report states: “However, whether one talks about increasing common funding for CSDP missions, encouraging Member States to volunteer more troops or fill the vacuum in EU strategic planning, the main shortcoming facing the EU in the defence field is the divergent strategic outlooks which exist among and between Member States. There is still no consensus in European capitals about the overall purpose of increasing EU defence capabilities. The EU needs to agree on a long-term vision of EU defence, which could be laid out in a White Paper with clearly defined priorities in terms of threats, engagement criteria and earmarked resources ... Unless EU Member States are able to agree on a workable strategic concept for the EU, the latter will be unable to fill the existing gap between the expectations of CSDP and its operational capabilities and resources.”

with intermittent support from Italy and Spain – to promote a number of incremental improvements to European defence. It has been a frustrating experience for them.²² The threads of their initiative are to be drawn together in the coming weeks, at the conclusion of the Polish Presidency. The final accounting will naturally accentuate the positive. It should also be honest enough to admit that something more than incrementalism is now needed, and urgently needed, if European defence is to remain a remotely credible enterprise. In concluding their current agenda, the Weimar Triangle should propose a more radical follow-up in the shape of the European Defence Review proposed here.

If this chance is missed, it will be no exaggeration to predict that the CSDP will by the end of 2012 be ready for its final obsequies. Nor will NATO, and Europe's chances of shaping the twenty-first century, be far behind. In Constantine P. Cavafy's 1904 poem "Waiting for the Barbarians", the exhausted empire has become so reconciled to yielding to younger, ruder powers that it can scarcely wait for their arrival. Europeans need to shake this mood before it is too late.

²² The Weimar proposal to establish a European Operational Headquarters has run into a British veto, while their push for greater EU/NATO co-operation has stuck on Turkish and Cypriot obduracy. Some improvements to EU battle groups may be secured, and some degree of progress made with "pooling and sharing" – but nothing in any way commensurate with the scale and urgency of the objective challenge.

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