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Great expectations: The Brexit moment in EU security and defence and the return of the capabilities–expectations gap

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Abstract

This article re-examines the capability–expectations gap in the European Union’s foreign policy in light of recent developments in this field. Our point of departure is the observation that the expectations being placed on the EU’s foreign and security capabilities in recent years have been steadily increasing, in response to a number of external and internal developments, including the Arab Spring, the Ukraine crisis and America’s ‘pivot’ to Asia, as well as the Brexit vote. We argue, however, that the institutional changes introduced as a result have not succeeded in fulfilling the lofty ambitions held of the Union either by itself or by other actors since they suffer from many of the same failings that have persistently bedevilled EU security initiatives. The result is a mismatch between the EU’s ambitions and its ability to deliver on these, which threatens to reopen the capabilities–expectations gap, which has been steadily declining since the late 1990s. Existing scholarly approaches have missed this problematic dynamic since they have focused more on the institutional changes (the supply side) rather than the increasing expectations (the demand side). While pronouncements regarding Europe’s ‘strategic autonomy’ and such like offer clear gains for European leaders in the short term, they may come back to haunt them in the years to come.

Keywords: Brexit; CFSP; CSDP; capability–expectations gap; PESCO

1. Introduction

In this article we re-examine the extent of the capabilities–expectations gap¹ in light of recent developments in EU security and defence policy. The most significant of these include the release of the EU’s *Global Strategy* (EUGS), the establishment of a permanent military headquarters for missions and operations (MPCC), the launch of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the creation of a European Defence Fund (EDF), the initiation of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), and the proposal by Emmanuel Macron to establish a European Intervention Initiative (EI2).² These reforms are all part of the EU’s ‘Brexit moment’ insofar as they have been created partially as a response to British withdrawal (as was the case with EI2), heavily shaped by the prospect of Brexit (the EUGS), or established owing to the removal of the British veto (including over the MPCC and the EDF). But they also reflect broader priorities for the Union in the field of foreign and security policy, including the rise of non-liberal powers,³ growing insecurity in the neighbourhood,⁴ fears of American isolationism in the wake of Donald Trump’s election to the presidency,⁵ and financial pressures incentivising more burden-sharing in this area.⁶

While some have come to portray these developments as significant moves towards reducing the capabilities–expectations gap,⁷ we argue that the gap has actually widened as a result of these latest initiatives. This is down to a number of factors on both the supply and demand sides of the capabilities–expectations equation. On the demand side, expectations of the Union’s role in world politics have increased markedly: externally, the EU is seen by many as the last defender of multilateralism as well as a distinct pole in the new, multipolar international order. Internally, the Union’s latest initiatives are sold as reinvigorating the European project and providing much-needed evidence of workable integration in light of the Brexit vote. On the supply side, meanwhile, these initiatives remain underdeveloped and subject to considerable disagreement between the Member States; moreover, they are prone to the same problems that have bedevilled collaboration in European security and defence for decades, plus a few new ones introduced by the Brexit vote. Existing approaches have failed to acknowledge these limitations because they have been focused on the supply side rather than the demand side. From this perspective, movement towards further integration in security and defence cannot but be seen in a positive light since it will fix important issues and facilitate significant savings and greater efficiencies. But a focus on the demand side illustrates a dangerous mismatch between ambition and ability which threatens to reopen the capabilities–expectations gap and may come back to haunt EU policymakers in the years to come.

Our argument proceeds as follows. First, we reflect on Hill’s initial diagnosis of a capabilities–expectations gap in the EU’s foreign relations⁸ and chart the significant narrowing of the gap in the decades hence, as knowledge of the Union’s limitations spread and as institutional changes aimed at addressing the gap were introduced. We then take stock of recent changes to the EU’s external environment and its internal constitution, focusing on the increase in regional insecurity from around 2013 and the fallout from the Brexit vote in 2016. Both of these trends, we argue, served to increase the expectations placed on the EU

¹Christopher Hill, ‘The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe’s International Role’ (1993) 31 *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 305.

²While this is not a Union initiative per se, it merits inclusion owing to the possibility it may be folded into an EU framework in the future and because it represents another important proposal in the EU’s post-Brexit moment.

³Nathalie Tocci and Riccardo Alcaro, ‘Rethinking Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Era’ (2014) 51 *International Politics* 366.

⁴Michael E Smith, ‘Beyond the Comfort Zone: Internal Crisis and External Challenge in the European Union’s Response to Rising Powers’ (2013) 89 *International Affairs* 653; Tobias Bunde and Wolfgang Ischinger, ‘European Security Policy at the End of the Post-Cold War Era’ (2017) 8 *Global Policy* 27.

⁵Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich, ‘Does Donald Trump Have a Grand Strategy?’ (2017) 93 *International Affairs* 1013; Michael H Smith and Richard Youngs, ‘The EU and the Global Order: Contingent Liberalism’ (2018) 53 *International Spectator* 45 <<http://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1409024>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁶Daniela Schwarzer, ‘Europe, the End of the West and Global Power Shifts’ (2017) 8 *Global Policy* 18 <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.12437>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁷Sven Biscop, ‘European Defence: Give PESCO a Chance’ (2018) 60 *Survival* 161; European Parliament, ‘Report on the European Defence Union’ (2016); European Commission, ‘Press Release; EU Budget: Stepping up the EU’s Role as a Security’ (2018).

⁸Hill (n 1).

to take responsibility for its own security and for managing events in its near abroad. We then examine the comprehensive programme of discursive and institutional renewal from 2016 onwards, during which time a number of initiatives were launched, including the EUGS, CARD, PESCO, and the EDF, MPCC and Macron's EI2, noting some of the practical limitations of these initiatives. We conclude by arguing that the mismatch between the lofty goal of 'strategic autonomy'⁹ and the reality of efforts at security and defence reform hint at the reopening of the capabilities–expectations gap. We argue that policymakers need to be cautious in their pronouncements if the EU is to remain a credible foreign and security actor in the longer term, and that scholars should pay greater attention to the demand side of the capabilities–expectations equation and remain open to the conceptual possibility that the gap may widen as well as narrow in the future.

2. The capabilities–expectations gap in European foreign affairs

Christopher Hill first spoke in 1993 of a capabilities–expectations gap afflicting the European Community (EC) – as it then was – when it became clear the organisation could not live up to the lofty role the organisation was increasingly being held to in world politics. His article claimed that 'recent dramas over the Gulf, the Uruguay Round and Yugoslavia seem to show that the Community is not an effective international actor, in terms both of its capacity to produce collective decisions and its impact on events'.¹⁰ In his argument, Hill examined both 'the functions which the Community (EC) might be fulfilling in the international system' as well as 'the perceptions which are held of its role by third parties', noting a mismatch between those functions the Community had performed – stabilising Western Europe, co-managing world trade, communicating with the global south, providing a second 'Western' diplomatic voice – and the more onerous tasks others had come to associate the organisation with. Those functions which the Community did not have the capabilities to perform, but was expected to do so by external partners, included the EC acting as a replacement to the USSR as American balancer, a regional pacifier, a global intervening state, a bridge between the global north and the global south, and a co-manager of the world economy.¹¹

The fact that the EC did not have the resources to take on such roles led Hill to conclude that 'the Community's capabilities have been talked up, to the point where a significant *capability–expectations gap* exists, and that this is already presenting the EC with difficult choices and experiences that are the more painful for not being fully comprehended'.¹² Three deficiencies in the Community's capabilities in particular prevented it from taking on these more onerous roles: the first was that the organisation lacked actorness; that is, it lacked decision-making structures that could enable (or force) the members to act in harmony, unlike sovereign states in which foreign policy decision-making is wielded by the executive.¹³ The second was that the EC lacked the resources to act on collective decisions, for while its members were wealthy industrialised democracies, this wealth was neither pooled at the European level, nor was it made available for foreign policy tasks.¹⁴ The third deficiency was in those instruments at the Community's disposal, since it lacked procedures and structures in the foreign policy domain that would be capable of serving these more substantial functions, with decision-making remaining firmly under the control of the respective Member States.¹⁵

The capabilities–expectations gap has become a popular framework for analysing the EU's role in the world, mainly because of the parsimony of the concept and the analytical leverage it nonetheless affords. The concept is, as Hill himself is clear, not a theory per se: rather, it is for analysts a helpful and succinct metaphor that neatly conceptualises some of the key (and continuing) problems associated with the limitations of the EU in world politics and the difficulties of studying such an actor using established

⁹European External Action Service, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (Brussels 2016).

¹⁰Hill (n 1) 306.

¹¹*ibid* 312–14.

¹²*ibid* 306.

¹³*ibid* 314–18.

¹⁴*ibid* 318–20.

¹⁵*ibid*.

categories. For this reason, Hill's piece has become one of the most widely cited texts in the field, spawning a host of applications,¹⁶ extensions and re-specifications,¹⁷ and updates, many of which have come from the author's own efforts to reconsider the theoretical framework in light of ongoing empirical developments.¹⁸ In short, the capabilities–expectations gap has become a powerful and well-established tool for the analysis of the development of EU foreign and security policy, and as a result the narrowing of the gap has become something of an empirical yardstick for those keen to see a more integrated role for the EU in this field. Interestingly, most audits of EU foreign and security policy within the capabilities–expectations gap framework have occurred during a period (1998–2013) when the gap itself could convincingly be said to be narrowing.

The gap was narrowed during this period by a number of factors on both the supply and demand sides of the equation. First, on the supply side, the EU developed structures to facilitate coordination in a host of areas of external action.¹⁹ The Amsterdam Treaty introduced several revisions of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) provisions, among others adding a new instrument 'common strategies' to the already existing (and tried-and-tested) 'joint actions' and 'common positions'.²⁰ One of the essential changes introduced by the Treaty was the appointment of the secretary general of the Council to the office of High Representative for the CFSP. Javier Solana, former secretary general of NATO, took over the post in 1999 and gave the EU's foreign and security policy a well-known face, and substantial authority. Under Solana's auspices, the first overarching strategic document – the *European Security Strategy* – was published in 2003, aimed at serving as a guiding document for EU external action.²¹ A year later the European Defence Agency (EDA) was created. Moreover, within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) – facilitated by the Anglo-French agreement at St Malo in 1998²² – the Union successfully deployed a number of military and civilian operations in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.²³ Between 2003 – the launch of the first mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina – and 2009, 23 missions have been put together.²⁴ In this way, the EU was able to meet a number of security challenges, primarily in the Western Balkans and North Africa. The Lisbon Treaty in 2009, which emerged from the ashes of the failed EU Constitution, further institutionalised the EU foreign and security policy, not only giving the

¹⁶Robert Dover, 'The EU and the Bosnian Civil War 1992–5: The Capabilities–Expectations Gap at the Heart of EU Foreign Policy' (2005) 14 *European Security* 297; Niklas Helwig, 'EU Foreign Policy and the High Representative's Capability–Expectations Gap: A Question of Political Will' (2013) 18 *European Foreign Affairs Review* 235; M Holland, 'Bridging the Capability–Expectations Gap: A Case Study of the CFSP Joint Action on South Africa' (1995) 33 *Journal of Common Market Studies* 555; Richard Lappin, 'Bridging the Capabilities–Expectations Gap: Lessons Learned from Post-Conflict Democracy Assistance to Liberia' (2019) 15 *Democracy and Security* 248.

¹⁷Roy H Ginsberg, 'Conceptualizing the European Union as an International Actor: Narrowing the Theoretical Capability-Expectations Gap' (1999) 3 *Journal of Common Market Studies* 429; Henrik Larsen, 'The External Perceptions Literature and the Construction of Gaps in European Union Foreign Policy' (2014) 2 *International Politics Reviews* 11; Li Zhang, "'Reflexive Expectations" in EU–China Relations: A Media Analysis Approach' (2016) 54 *Journal of Common Market Studies* 463.

¹⁸Christopher Hill, 'Closing the Capabilities-Expectations Gap' in Helene Sjursen and John Peterson (eds), *A Common Foreign Policy for Europe* (Routledge 1998); Christopher Hill, 'Renationalizing or Regrouping? EU Foreign Policy Since 11 September 2001' (2004) 42 *Journal of Common Market Studies* 143.

¹⁹Simon Duke, 'From Amsterdam to Kosovo: Lessons for the Future of CFSP' (1999) 2 *Eipascope* 2.

²⁰John Peterson and Elizabeth Bomberg, *Decision-Making in the European Union* (Macmillan 1999) 228–51.

²¹Sven Biscop, 'Odd Couple or Dynamic Duo? The EU and Strategy in Times of Crisis' (2009) 14 *European Foreign Affairs Review* 367.

²²Federiga Bindi, 'European Union Foreign Policy: A Historical Overview' in Irina Angelescu and Federiga Bindi (eds), *The Foreign Policy of the European Union: Assessing Europe's Role in the World* (Brookings Institution Press 2012) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt12618t.5>> accessed 2 December 2019.

²³Chris Bickerton, Bastien Irondelle and Anand Menon, 'Security Co-operation beyond the Nation-State: The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy' (2011) 49(1) *Journal of Common Market Studies* 1, 3.

²⁴Giovanni Grevi, Damien Helly and Daniel Keohane (eds), *European Security and Defence Policy. The First 10 Years (1999–2009)* (EUISS 2009) 13. Finn Laursen, *The EU's Lisbon Treaty: Institutional Choices and Implementation* (Ashgate 2012); Anand Menon, 'European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya' (2011) 53 *Survival* 75; Richard G Whitman and Ana E Juncos, 'The Lisbon Treaty and the Foreign, Security and Defence Policy: Reforms, Implementation and the Consequences of (Non-)Ratification' (2009) 14 *European Foreign Affairs Review* 25.

High Representative a ‘double-hat’ as Vice-President of the European Commission, but also placing a diplomatic service – the European External Action Service (EEAS) – at their disposal.²⁵

Second, on the demand side, the expectations on the EU decreased as the limitations of the Union’s actorness and coherence became more widely known. In the United States, the growth of neo-conservatism and the decline of the Clinton-era emphasis on economic interdependence contributed to a more sceptical view of the EU’s role in global politics. The administration of George W. Bush regarded the EU as something of a paper tiger. Academics associated with American neo-conservatism, a worldview ascendant in the Bush administration, seemed to concur: Robert Kagan famously argued that Americans were from Mars and Europeans from Venus, the insinuation being that the EU’s more benign posture in international affairs was a product of its strategic weakness and its dependence on the US.²⁶ American disillusion with the EU’s ability to fulfil a global role increased during the Obama era, as Member State commitments to Afghanistan failed to materialise at the anticipated levels – Member States could only muster an additional 5,000 troops – and as last-minute German opposition killed off prospects of intervention in Libya under an EU flag.²⁷ Far from undermining the EU’s ability as an international actor, these deficiencies surprised nobody and contributed to the then dominant belief that the EU could at most play second fiddle in a supporting role to the US efforts to promote regional stability.

Internally, and also on the demand side, the EU moderated its own expectations in the years following European inaction in the Balkans, which had greatly damaged the Union’s credibility as a foreign and security actor and brought the expectations of policymakers down to earth after the heady days of the Maastricht Treaty, when the possibilities of the relaunched European project seemed limitless. Hopes for EU security and defence initiatives were understandably high at the time of the Anglo-French St Malo summit of 1998, but began to fade within a few years of the declaration. Although the agreement paved the way for the Member States to launch the ESDP, its stature was undermined politically as a result of the diminishing British interest in EU-led operations, owing in part to the rupture caused by the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. From this moment, it has been argued, Britain has ‘ceased to invest politically or militarily in the CSDP in any substantial manner’.²⁸ This experience led the EU to moderate its own expectations of what could be achieved through integration in foreign and security policy, and to scale back a number of the loftier ambitions aired in the 1990s. The result was to further reduce expectations and contribute to the narrowing of the gap during this period.

A further case in point was offered by failure of the EU Constitution in 2005 following its rejection by French and Dutch voters in referendums. The Constitution aimed, among other things, to instigate a number of innovations and adjustments to the EU’s foreign and security policy framework, the most controversial of these being the creation of a Union Minister for Foreign Affairs. The veto of the Constitution forced European leaders to slow up the pace of reform and contributed to moderating the expectations regarding the coherence of its politics. The trend continued in the following years. In spite of the institutional innovations introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon,²⁹ EU policymakers had still sought cautious change from these reforms, rather than wholesale renewal of the Union’s global role, and changes to foreign and security policy were not as central to the broader narrative of integration as they would be in later years. The appointment of Catherine Ashton – a capable but little-known hand – as the first High Representative following the entering into force of the Treaty demonstrated widespread cognisance of the limitations of EU foreign and security policy. During this period, then, the conceptual limitations regarding EU’s ability to become a coherent and capable security actor were well established,³⁰ and

²⁵ Whitman and Juncos (n 24).

²⁶ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (Vintage 2004).

²⁷ Menon (n 24).

²⁸ Francois Heisbourg, ‘Brexit and European Security’ (2016) 58 *Survival* 13.

²⁹ Menon (n 24).

³⁰ Ulrich Krotz, ‘Momentum and Impediments: Why Europe Won’t Emerge as a Full Political Actor on the World Stage Soon’ (2009) 47 *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 555 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2009.01815.x>> accessed 2 December 2019; G Edwards, ‘The EU’s Foreign Policy and the Search for Effect’ (2013) 27 *International Relations* 276 <<http://ire.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/0047117813497304>> accessed 2 December 2019; Kyriakos Mousmoutzis, ‘Why Mogherini’s Appointment as the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs Matters Little’ (2014) <<http://europeonthestrand.ideasonurope.eu/2014/09/03/why-mogherinis-appointment-as-the-eus-high-representative->

expectations suitably moderate as a result. To quote Menon, the thinking was that ‘reasonable ambitions are the best starting point. It is unlikely that the EU will ever become the kind of high-profile and effective international security actor that some seem to think it should be.’³¹

3. Great expectations: Systemic change and the Brexit moment

The situation began to gradually change after 2013 as a result of a number of internal and external challenges for the Union which began to build up during this period. These led, somewhat counter-intuitively, to greater expectations being placed on the Union from its own policymakers and external observers, both directly, through the increasing pressure to take greater responsibility for its own security, and indirectly, as a result of the increasing need for a renewed political role for a Union in crisis. In this section we examine a number of these challenges, as well as the implications of these for the capabilities–expectations gap.

3.1. *The EU in an insecure world*

Peering beyond Europe’s boundaries, the EU’s place in the world has become more uncertain in recent years. The rise of non-Western powers – China pre-eminent among them – has occasioned talk of a new, more diffuse ‘multipolar’ order in which established norms of international conduct and strategic relations may not have the currency they once did.³² Of course, a multipolar world is not necessarily more unstable, and much will depend on the extent to which collaborative relations become embedded in the new order and whether reasonable accommodation can be reached between the major powers on a number of contentious issues.³³ But so far the EU’s experience of multipolarity has not been all that benign.

The unfolding geostrategic competition between the US and China beckons the return of a geopolitics for which the EU, and its ‘normative power’ aspirations,³⁴ appears poorly suited. Although scholars are divided on whether China will supplant the US as hegemon³⁵ or be perpetually constrained by America’s vast ‘structural power’,³⁶ it is clear that China’s rise (relative or otherwise) presents complex problems for the Union. For one thing, China’s rise presents a challenge to the EU’s ability to promote liberalism abroad since there is only a certain extent to which the Union can push its human rights agenda in dealings with Beijing, especially given the levels of Chinese investment in Europe at present.³⁷ China’s growing geopolitical and economic ambitions in Europe, including hi-tech takeovers and cyber-operations, have

for-foreign-affairs-matters-little/> accessed 3 July 2018; Monika Sus, ‘Inventors and Gatekeepers? The EU Member States and the European External Action Service 1’ (2016) 11 *Journal of Regional Security* 55; Nicola Chelotti, ‘Analysing the Links between National Capitals and Brussels in EU Foreign Policy’ (2013) 36 *West European Politics* 1052.

³¹Menon (n 24).

³²Trine Flockhart, ‘The Coming Multi-Order World’ (2016) 37 *Contemporary Security Policy* 3; Katja Creutz, Tuomas Iso-Markku, Kristi Raik and Teija Tiilikainen (eds), *The Changing Global Order and Its Implications for the EU* (Helsinki: Prime Minister’s Office 2019) 59 <<http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/161429>> accessed 2 December 2019; Matthew D Stephen, ‘Will International Institutions Fail Again? International Power Shifts and the Future of Global Cooperation’, FIIA Briefing Paper No. 249 (2018) <<https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/will-international-institutions-fail-again>> accessed 2 December 2019.

³³Richard N Haass, ‘The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow U.S. Dominance’ (2008) 87 *Foreign Affairs* 44; Nathalie Tocci, ‘Towards a European Security and Defence Union: Was 2017 a Watershed?’ (2018) *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 1 <<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/jcms.12752>> accessed 2 December 2019.

³⁴Sarah J Cormack Patton, ‘The EU as a Normative Power: The Cases of the European Neighborhood Policy and the European Energy Policy’ (2008); Ian Manners, ‘Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?’ (2002) 40 *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 235 <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>> accessed 2 December 2019; Vicki Birchfield, ‘A Normative Power Europe Framework of Transnational Policy Formation’ (2013) 20 *Journal of European Public Policy* 907 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2013.781829>> accessed 2 December 2019.

³⁵Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2017); M Huotari, Jan Gaspers, Thomas Eder, Helena Legarda and Sabine Mokry, ‘China’s Emergence as a Global Security Actor. Strategies for Europe’ (2017) 4 *Merics Papers on China* <<https://www.merics.org/en/papers-on-china/chinas-emergence-global-security-actor-1>> accessed 2 December 2019; Stephen M Walt, ‘Europe’s Future Is as China’s Enemy’ (2019) *Foreign Policy* <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/22/europes-future-is-as-chinas-enemy/#>> accessed 2 December 2019.

³⁶Thomas Christiansen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (WW Norton & Company 2016).

³⁷Angela Stanzel, ‘China’s Investment in Influence: The Future of 16+1 Cooperation’ (2016) <https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/China_Analysis_Sixteen_Plus_One.pdf> accessed 2 December 2019.

also caused concern,³⁸ while its activities in other regions – notably in Africa – have served to undercut European efforts to attach good governance conditions to development aid.³⁹ Moreover, the rise of China has raised concerns about the credibility of the American security commitment to Europe, and since 2013 the US has arguably been more preoccupied with checking China’s rise than with nurturing its intra-Western alliance relationships.⁴⁰

Moscow, meanwhile, turned from a ‘thorn in the side’ in the EU’s external relations to outright strategic adversary in the decade following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which in Russia precipitated ever-growing concern about its demise as a ‘great power’.⁴¹ This resulted in a marked shift in Russian foreign policy in 2006 towards the ‘new realism’ which precipitated a more aggressive global presence, culminating in the interventions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008.⁴² In the years since, Moscow has invested massively in defence and has undertaken frequent and consistent efforts to destabilise the European neighbourhood.⁴³ Russian troops intervened against the Ukrainian government in February 2014 after the Maidan Square protests toppled a pro-Russian government, and the following month Moscow annexed the Crimea region.⁴⁴ Within the EU itself, Russia has been providing active assistance to anti-system populist parties and disseminating misinformation and ‘fake news’ across the continent, and is widely believed to have been behind a number of high-profile cyber attacks and politically motivated assassinations.⁴⁵

In the Middle East and North Africa, initial hopes of a more stable and democratic future following the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 were dashed as the extent of instability precipitated by the collapse of previously authoritarian states became clear. Syria has been in a state of civil war since 2011 and the subsequent intervention of the US and Russia in the conflict – the latter with mere hours’ notice in 2015 – has turned the country into a battleground between major powers: both Iran and Russia play a crucial role in the ongoing conflict, alongside the US and Turkey. NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 resulted in the downfall of the Gaddafi regime but failed to produce a government capable of controlling the vast territory or obtaining support from armed groups, and since 2014 the country has been in a state of civil war.⁴⁶ Elsewhere in the region, Iran poses a further challenge, and the country’s keenness to proceed with its allegedly civilian nuclear programme alarmed the international community and triggered multilateral measures aimed at preventing the development of an Iranian nuclear capability. These have recently become the cause of serious disagreement between the EU and the US, the latter having decided to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) due to alleged Iranian violations of the agreement, while the former has defended the deal,⁴⁷ exacerbating discord in transatlantic relations.⁴⁸

Furthermore, today’s challenges go beyond the activities of individual powers and involve also global systemic risks. One is the growing concern resulting from cyber security threats. The number of countries

³⁸Huotari et al. (n 35).

³⁹Benjamin Barton and Jing Men, *China and the European Union in Africa: Partners or Competitors?* (Ashgate 2011).

⁴⁰Georg Löffmann, ‘The Pivot between Containment, Engagement, and Restraint: President Obama’s Conflicted Grand Strategy in Asia’ (2016) 12 *Asian Security* 92 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2016.1190338>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁴¹Cristian Nitoiu and Monika Sus, ‘Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU’s Approach in Its Eastern Neighbourhood’ (2018) 24 *Geopolitics* 1 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14650045.2019.1544396>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁴²Richard Sakwa, ‘The Death of Europe? Continental Fates after Ukraine’ (2015) 91 *International Affairs* 553; Daniel R Coats, ‘Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community’ (2018) <<https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/2018-ATA---Unclassified-SSCI.pdf>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁴³Edward Hunter Christie, ‘Does Russia Have the Financial Means for Its Military Ambitions?’ (*NATO Review*, 21 October 2016).

⁴⁴Mark Galeotti, ‘Russian “Hybrid Warfare”: Resurgence and Politicisation’ (2018) 94 *International Affairs* 1197 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iij160>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁴⁵Stefan Meister, ‘The “Lisa Case”: Germany as a Target of Russian Disinformation’ (*NATO Review*, 25 July 2016); Coats (n 42) 5.

⁴⁶Dan Smith, ‘Armed Conflicts and Peace Processes’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2018: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press 2018).

⁴⁷Federica Mogherini, Jean-Yves Le Drian, Heiko Maas and Jeremy Hunt, ‘Joint Statement on the Re-Imposition of US Sanctions Due to Its Withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)’ <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/49141/joint-statement-re-imposition-us-sanctions-due-its-withdrawal-joint-comprehensive-plan-action_en> accessed 3 April 2019.

⁴⁸Christina Pazzanese, ‘A Spirited Defense of NATO as Bulwark’ (*The Harvard Gazette*, 14 February 2019).

capable of initiating a cyber attack has grown from 10 in 2011 to over 30 in 2017, and Russia, Iran and North Korea have been testing aggressive means of cyber attack that pose growing threats to the West. Another systemic threat is that presented by weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical weapons used in Iraq and Syria, and the increasing risk of proliferation of these kinds of weapon. Terrorism also continues to be a major security risk and is treated as such by states and the public alike, notwithstanding a decrease in the number of terrorist attacks worldwide.⁴⁹ In short, Europe's security has become increasingly imperilled in the years since 2013, even if many of the risks began to emerge long before then. As the chairman of the Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Ischinger, recently put it: 'No matter where you look, there are countless conflicts and crises – crises that greatly affect us Europeans.'⁵⁰

3.2. *The Brexit moment*

The Brexit vote in June 2016 contributed to the momentum in EU security and defence policy that has been developing since 2013⁵¹ and which had become especially visible with the preparation of the EUGS.⁵² Indeed, it was in 2013 that then Prime Minister David Cameron made the fateful announcement that, if re-elected as the head of a majority Conservative government, he would put the UK's membership of the EU to a nationwide referendum. Subsequently, as is now well known, the awarding of a slim majority to the Conservatives in the 2015 election forced Cameron to deliver on his in-out referendum, which was held on 23 June 2016 and – after fierce competition from the Leave and Remain camps – resulted in a small majority (51.9 per cent) in favour of Britain leaving the EU. This unprecedented decision, the first time a Member State had taken the decision to withdraw from the Union, has resulted in an ongoing political crisis in the UK, as successive governments have grappled with the difficult task of practically implementing the mandate from the referendum.

But the effect of the vote in Europe was profound also. Brexit resulted in an existential crisis for the Union and fostered a perceived need in Brussels to counter talk of disintegration by demonstrating that the engine of integration was still working. Brexit shook the EU to its core, at least initially. As Mogherini put it: 'The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned.'⁵³ The prospect of one of the Union's largest countries leaving contributed to the sense of crisis gripping Brussels. Talk among the remaining Member States in the days and weeks after Brexit emphasised the risk of contagion and even of wholesale collapse. In this context, there was considerable demand for a renewed sense of purpose for the European project, and for the EU to demonstrate it was moving forwards rather than backwards or not at all. Foreign and security policy offered a promising domain in which to demonstrate this since it was the area least touched by integration, a key component of statehood and international actorness, and possibly the last area in which a major crisis had not been blamed on Union policies. This context proved critical for the messages emanating from the EU on security and defence. The release of EUGS, for instance, although in gestation for a long time, took place in the week of the Brexit vote alongside carefully crafted rhetoric pushing for greater unity at a time of dangerous uncertainty.⁵⁴

The Brexit vote also foreshadowed a number of related political changes that came to have important geopolitical consequences. The election of Donald Trump as US president in November 2016, hot on the heels of the Brexit vote and redolent of similar domestic trends,⁵⁵ did much to reinforce concerns

⁴⁹Adam Taylor, 'Terrorist Attacks Are Quietly Declining around the World' (*The Washington Post*, 2018) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/08/15/terrorist-attacks-are-quietly-declining-around-world/?utm_term=.fb5ec4c6b401> accessed 3 April 2019.

⁵⁰Wolfgang Ischinger, 'The Great Puzzle: Who Will Pick Up the Pieces?' Munich Security Report, 2019 <<https://globalinitiative.net/munich-security-report-2019/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁵¹Monika Sus, 'Institutional Innovation of EU's Foreign and Security Policy: Big Leap for EU's Strategic Actorness or Much Ado about Nothing?' (2017) 56 *International Politics* 411.

⁵²Nathalie Tocci, 'From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy: Explaining the Journey' (2017) 54 *International Politics* 487 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1057/s41311-017-0045-9>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁵³European External Action Service (n 9) 3.

⁵⁴ibid.

⁵⁵Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge University Press 2019); Graham K Wilson, 'Brexit, Trump and the Special Relationship' (2017) 19 *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 543 <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1369148117713719>> accessed 2 December 2019.

about the EU's insecure position in the world. Trump's election was seen as deleterious for the Union in a number of respects, given the president's outspoken criticism of NATO allies, his opposition to a number of key EU foreign policy goals – among them the Iran deal and the Paris climate agreement – as well as his seeming ambivalence towards the liberal international order, the preservation of which the EU has championed.⁵⁶ Brexit was also seen as contributing to the spread of populism across Europe and the Western world more generally⁵⁷ and this reinforced perceptions in Brussels that the EU should do more to protect citizens – in economic and strategic terms – and that European integration needed to be galvanised in order to head off the resurgent nativism across the continent. Moreover, the Russian threat became all the more salient in the weeks after Brexit owing to mounting evidence that Russian cyber activity was involved in both the Brexit and Trump campaigns.⁵⁸

And yet from an institutional perspective Brexit also offered an opportunity to obtain movement on a number of projects which the UK would surely have vetoed as a member but which – since it was on the way out – it would no longer be in a position to stop.⁵⁹ Preventing EU-led challenges to NATO had been a long-standing concern of Britain's European policy, and the UK consistently vetoed initiatives it regarded as undermining the supremacy of the Atlantic alliance in matters of defence. Without the British veto in the background, a common view holds, the EU will be able to move towards a more autonomous posture in security and defence. For example, the UK opposed the increase of the EDA's budget for five consecutive years owing to concerns it would undermine NATO's role,⁶⁰ and blocked the establishment of the EU military headquarters,⁶¹ reckoning it to be redundant given that NATO already has headquarters in Belgium.⁶² The British decision to leave thus provided greater impetus for reforms that were already under way and also made it more likely that a number of them would come to fruition.

3.3. Changing institutions and expectations

Recent years have thus witnessed increasing pressures – both external and internal – for the Union to take on a greater security and defence role, forcing European leaders to focus on foreign and security policy, and to outline how the EU will sit in the emerging – and potentially post-liberal – international order. Policymakers' responses have indicated that the EU would reply by seeking to augment its own capabilities as a stepping stone towards achieving 'strategic autonomy'⁶³ such that the EU is able to defend itself and its values on the global stage without American assistance as 'the vanguard of a new liberal order'.⁶⁴ As Commission President Juncker claimed in his State of the Union speech: 'The geopolitical situation makes this Europe's hour: the time for European sovereignty has come. It is time Europe took its destiny into its own hands. It is time Europe developed ... the capacity to play a role, as a Union, in shaping global affairs.'⁶⁵ Juncker's view was echoed by key European leaders, including German

⁵⁶Dombrowski and Reich (n 5); Doug Stokes, 'Trump, American Hegemony and the Future of the Liberal International Order' (2018) 94 *International Affairs* 133 <<http://academic.oup.com/ia/article/94/1/133/4762689>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁵⁷Benjamin Martill and Jose Feio, 'Is There a Populist Wave in Europe?' (Dahrendorf Forum, 2019) <<https://www.dahrendorf-forum.eu/publications/is-there-a-populist-wave-in-europe/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁵⁸Martin Matishak, 'What We Know about Russia's Election Hacking' (*Politico*, 18 July 2018).

⁵⁹Benjamin Martill and Monika Sus, 'Post-Brexit EU/UK Security Cooperation: NATO, CSDP+, or "French Connection"?' (2018) 20 *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 846, 852.

⁶⁰Claudia Major and Alicia von Voß, 'European Defence in View of Brexit' (2017) 10 *SWP Comments*, 2.

⁶¹Euractive, 'UK Blocks Bid for Permanent EU Security Headquarters', Euractive <<http://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/uk-blocks-bid-for-permanent-eu-security-headquarters/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁶²Armelle Ripart, 'Brexit and EU Defence Cooperation – Seizing an Opportunity?' (*Nouvelle Europe*, 2017) <<http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/node/1976>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁶³European External Action Service (n 9).

⁶⁴Stefan Lehne, 'Is There Hope for EU Foreign Policy?' (*Carnegie Europe*, 5 December 2017) 4.

⁶⁵Jean-Claude Juncker, 'State of the Union Address', September 2018 <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-5683_en.htm> accessed 2 December 2019.

Chancellor Angela Merkel,⁶⁶ French President Emmanuel Macron⁶⁷ and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.⁶⁸ Moreover, Juncker claimed that by 2025 the Union needs to work towards establishing a ‘fully-fledged European Defence Union’.⁶⁹ Proposals championed by France and supported by Juncker and by German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen to create a European army that ‘would convey to Russia that we are serious about defending the values of the European Union’ also indicate renewed enthusiasm for the EU taking on a more active role in the world.⁷⁰

In consequence, expectations of the Union’s role in world politics have increased markedly. Externally, the EU is seen by many as the last defender of multilateralism,⁷¹ which is now viewed as a key component of the EU’s identity as a global actor.⁷² Indeed, the EUGS confirms the EU’s own commitment to safeguarding multilateralism,⁷³ and leaders of the European institutions⁷⁴ and of the Member States have made similar statements in recent years.⁷⁵ European policymakers also increasingly stress the need for the EU to undertake a greater role in defending the interests of its citizens against external threats. Meanwhile, citizens’ expectations reinforce these trends: support for the CSDP, one indicator of citizen preferences on EU security, rose by 7 per cent in the 15 years from 2003 to 2018.⁷⁶ Public opinion in key Member States – especially Germany – appears to be coming around to the idea of a more active presence in European security. And, crucially, the expectations placed on the EU by external actors have also increased. To a certain extent this is commensurate with the changes charted above in the international environment, since it is these factors motivating the Americans to demand the Europeans take greater responsibility for their own security, and convincing many middle-powers that the EU remains the last potential defender of the multilateral international order. But the changing expectations are also a response to the EU’s own rhetoric on these questions and the priority it has afforded such concepts as ‘strategic autonomy’ and ‘defence union’ in its own pronouncements. Outside observers increasingly speak of an EU bent on taking greater responsibility for these problems than ever before.

Recent institutional changes at the EU level reflect these external pressures, and EU desires.⁷⁷ They include a number of new initiatives spelled out in the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence.⁷⁸ PESCO – the ‘Sleeping beauty of the Lisbon Treaty’⁷⁹ – was launched in December 2017, permitting

⁶⁶Angela Merkel, ‘Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 13 November 2018’ <<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/speech-by-federal-chancellor-angela-merkel-to-the-european-parliament-strasbourg-13-november-2018-1550688>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁶⁷Emmanuel Macron, ‘Le Président de la République à Berlin pour la Commémoration du 18 Novembre’ (Élysée, 18 November 2018) <<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/11/18/le-president-de-la-republique-a-berlin-pour-la-commemoration-du-18-novembre>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁶⁸Pedro Sanchez, ‘Debate on the Future of Europe: Opening Statement by Pedro Sanchez’ (2019) <https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/debate-on-the-future-of-europe-opening-statement-by-pedro-sanchez-spanish-prime-minister_I166569-V_rv> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁶⁹Jean-Claude Juncker, ‘State of the Union Address’ (*European Commission*, 13 September 2017).

⁷⁰Dave Keating, ‘Juncker Calls for an EU Army’ (*Politico*, 2015) <<http://www.dw.com/en/juncker-calls-for-an-eu-army/a-36337676>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁷¹Simon Duke, *Europe as a Stronger Global Actor* (Springer 2017) 127.

⁷²Smith and Youngs (n 5).

⁷³Nathalie Tocci, ‘From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy: Explaining the Journey’ (2017) 54 *International Politics* 487 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1057/s41311-017-0045-9>> accessed 2 December 2019; *European External Action Service* (n 9).

⁷⁴Council of the European Union, ‘The Rome Declaration’ (2017).

⁷⁵Paul Carrel, ‘Defending Liberalism. Merkel Sets out as West’s Standard Bearer’ (*Reuters*, 2016) <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-merkel-idUSKBN1311AZ>> accessed 18 April 2019.

⁷⁶‘European Views: Clear Support for a Common Security and Defence Policy’ (2018) <<https://medium.com/the-latest-eurobarometer/european-views-a-clear-support-for-common-security-and-defence-policy-56bab0ac31fb>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁷⁷We do not discuss each of these in detail here as this has been done elsewhere; see, for example: Sus (n 51); Daniel Fiott, Antonio Missiroli and Thierry Tardy, ‘Permanent Structured Cooperation: What’s in a Name?’ (2017) *Chaillot Papers*, 142 <<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/permanent-structured-cooperation-what%27s-in-a-name>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁷⁸Council of the European Union, ‘Implementation Plan on Security and Defence’ (2016) 1.

⁷⁹Jean-Claude Juncker, ‘In Defence of Europe’, Speech at the Defence and Security Conference, Prague, 9 June 2017 <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-1581_en.htm> accessed 2 December 2019.

groups of like-minded Member States to take further collaborative steps towards more advanced projects, 34 of which have so far been adopted by the Council. Next, the EDF was established by the European Commission to inject financing into joint defence projects, with the aim of acting as a multiplier in this regard by stimulating and incentivising cooperation. The Commission will allocate Community funds (€600 million yearly until 2020 and €1.5 billion thereafter) for technological innovation, defence research, and technology, with the aim to overcome the insufficient and incoherent defence spending in the EU. Proposals for a CARD to assess Member State capabilities and identify shortcomings and possibilities for pooling resources were announced in 2017, with the first full CARD Report to be delivered in November 2020.⁸⁰ Finally, the EU military headquarters – or the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) to give its full title – was established in summer 2017 and has assumed command of EU non-executive military missions, with the intention of this remit being expanded to include executive missions in the near future. Meanwhile, in addition to EU-led initiatives, in 2017 France announced a decision to establish EI2, a joint military project between 10 European countries aimed at enhancing the ability of its members to act together on missions as part of NATO, the EU, the UN or other ad hoc coalitions.⁸¹ The Initiative, put forward by Macron in his *Revue stratégique*, lies outside EU structures although Germany, in particular, is keen to see the EI2 folded into the Union apparatus at a future date.

4. Mind the gap: The limits of EU security and defence

The recent developments in EU security and defence reinforced the belief, held by many on the continent and globally, that the EU is finally getting its house in order. The EU's capabilities, however, have yet to catch up with the increased expectations placed on the EU's role in security and defence by policymakers in Brussels, London and Washington. This is for a number of reasons, some of which are long standing. This section examines a number of pre-existing limitations to the establishment of effective security and defence policies at the European level, the most important of which are: a lack of resources, divergent interests and cultures, and lowest-common-denominator decision-making.

4.1. Resources

One recurring theme is the unwillingness of the Member States to commit sufficient resources to fund security and defence initiatives widely viewed as necessitated by existing developments. One aspect concerns limitations in the resources made available by Member States for EU operations. In the decade since the Lisbon Treaty came into force Member States have contributed fewer human resources to civilian CSDP missions than in the decade before – in 2019, for instance, they deployed 700 personnel, compared to nearly 2,000 in 2010.⁸² Similarly problematic is the commitment of military hardware, and CSDP military operations often suffer from insufficient equipment. Operation Sophia, for example, has at times had no ships at its disposal owing to disputes over disembarkation.⁸³ Brexit also risks leaving some key gaps here: significant contributions to EU naval missions often came from the British, which is also one of the few Member States able to supply the requisite strategic airlift capability for EU missions. And the pursuit of European strategic autonomy itself would be very costly indeed, since many of the capabilities provided by the US would be very difficult to replicate.⁸⁴ Moreover, although defence spending across the

⁸⁰Daniel Fiott, 'The CARD on the EU Defence Table' (2017) EUISS Alert No 10, 1.

⁸¹'Letter of Intent between the Defence Ministers of Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom Concerning the Development of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2)' <<https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/dgris/international-action/l-iei/l-initiative-europeenne-d-intervention>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁸²Timo Smit, 'Towards a More Capable European Union Civilian CSDP' (2019) SIPRI Policy Brief 4 <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/pb_1911_towards_a_more_capable_eu_civilian_csdp.pdf> accessed 22 November 2019.

⁸³Jacopo Barigazzi, 'EU Extends Operation Sophia for 6 months, Still Without Ships' (*Politico*, 12 September 2019) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-extends-operation-sophia-for-6-months-still-without-ships/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁸⁴Lee Turpin, 'UK–EU Military Cooperation and Brexit from a Neoclassical Realist Perspective: No Big Deal?' in Cornelia-Adriana Baciu and John Doyle (eds), *Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: Risks and Opportunities* (Springer 2019) 3–27; Ben Barry, Douglas Barrie, Lucie Bérard-Sudreau, Henry Boyd, Nick Childs and Bastian Giegerich, 'Defending Europe: scenario-based capability requirements for NATO's European members' (2019) IISS Research Paper <<https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2019/05/defending-europe>> accessed 12 December 2019.

continent is rising, it is not increasing sufficiently rapidly to plug the many identified gaps in capabilities.⁸⁵ This has been a recurrent problem with regard to both the CSDP and defence spending more generally. The average defence expenditure as a share of GDP of the 22 countries that are NATO and EU members decreased from 2.01 per cent in 2000 to 1.47 per cent in 2016.⁸⁶ Only four countries – Poland, Estonia, Greece and the UK – meet the 2 per cent rule for defence spending established at the Wales NATO summit in 2014. Germany is often singled out as the worst offender in this regard since its defence spending (1.2 per cent of GDP in 2016) is far below what it ought to be able to contribute based on the size of its economy and population – albeit for well-understood historical reasons.⁸⁷ Chancellor Merkel promised a gradual increase of defence spending, and indeed spending increased from 1.18 per cent of GDP in 2014 to 1.24 per cent in 2018, but the 2 per cent goal is still far away.⁸⁸ While analysts speak of a turnabout in opinion at both the elite and popular levels regarding the willingness for Germany to play a more active role in the security field, here again there is a sizable mismatch between expectations and reality since the identified shift is gradual, marginal, and may even be subject to reversal in the future, depending on the evolving German political landscape. Moreover, the defence spending question is often formulated in a misleading way. It is not only a question how much EU Member States spend, but how the money is spent. Currently 80 per cent of defence procurement is purely national, with the opportunity cost of defence market fragmentation and lack of interoperability estimated at €30 billion. While the EDF is targeting the right problem in this respect, overcoming the issue will take decades, not years.

4.2. Interests

Then there is the familiar problem of the divergent interests of the Member States and differences in strategic culture.⁸⁹ The strategic culture of Britain and France, for instance, is built around the desire of both countries to play a major role globally and to be able to deploy expeditionary forces, while their defence posture is based on conventional theories of nuclear deterrence.⁹⁰ Germany regards itself as more of a ‘civilian power’ and is more wary of projecting force abroad, and German strategic culture is deeply rooted in multilateral approaches to continental defence, although there are signs this is changing somewhat.⁹¹ A number of other fault lines cut through European security and defence debates: geographically, for instance, many of the Scandinavian and central and east European Member States focus more on the problems of territorial defence and see the threat from Russia as the most significant, while Member States on the Mediterranean are more concerned with managing the Union’s near abroad and the perceived threat from migration.⁹² There is also a significant divide between Europeanist and Atlanticist frameworks, with France best representing the first of these views, which stresses the need for European autonomy in security and defence, and a number of other Member States – including Britain, Spain and central European countries – adherents of the latter approach, focused on strong support for the

⁸⁵Janosch Delcker, ‘Europe Faces Defense Spending Challenge: New Plans Meet Old Obstacles’ (*Politico*, 14 December 2017) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-defense-spending-challenge-new-transatlantic-order/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁸⁶NATO, ‘Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2010–2017)’ (2017) <https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_06/20170629_170629-pr2017-111-en.pdf> accessed 25 February 2019.

⁸⁷*ibid.*

⁸⁸Brooks Tigner, ‘Can Germany Stay the Course on Defense Spending?’ (*Atlantic Council*, 2019) <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/can-germany-stay-the-course-on-defense-spending>> accessed 19 April 2019.

⁸⁹Thierry Tardy, ‘Does European Defence Really Matter? Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Common Security and Defence Policy’ (2018) 27 *European Security* 1 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09662839.2018.1454434>> accessed 2 December 2019; Nicole Koenig and Marie Walter-Franke, ‘France and Germany: Spearheading a European Security and Defence Union?’ (2017) <http://www.delorsinstitut.de/2015/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/20170719_FR-D-EU-Security_Koenig-Walter.pdf> 202, accessed 2 December 2019.

⁹⁰Martill and Sus (n 59).

⁹¹Nicholas Wright, ‘No Longer the Elephant Outside the Room: Why the Ukraine Crisis Reflects a Deeper Shift Towards German Leadership of European Foreign Policy’ (2018) 27 *German Politics* 479 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1458094>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁹²Julia Himmrich, ‘A “Hybrid Threat”? European Militaries and Migration’ (Dahrendorf Forum Working Paper, 2018) <https://www.dahrendorf-forum.eu/publications/europe_military_migration/> accessed 2 December 2019.

Atlantic alliance.⁹³ A good illustration of divergent interests is provided by the current Polish government, which is reluctant when it comes to security and defence initiatives at the EU level, but does everything in its power to secure an American permanent base on Polish territory. Indeed, the idea of Fort Trump, originally met with great scepticism,⁹⁴ might in fact materialise in the not-too-distant future.⁹⁵

4.3. Decision-making

There is also the question of how an effective security and defence policy can be fashioned from forms of decision-making that remain intergovernmental. Security and defence policy differs from many other policy domains in that decision-making is not subject to qualified majority voting (QMV) but requires all Member States to agree to a common position or deployment. Of course, it is well known that EU foreign and security policy is not wholly lowest-common-denominator since elements of informal supranationalism have crept into the policymaking process.⁹⁶ Moreover, the Member States have, over the years, implemented a number of mechanisms to help overcome the veto potential held by individual Member States, including procedures for constructive abstention.⁹⁷ But to all intents and purposes, the domain is characterised by intergovernmentalism. This means individual Member States have the power to block decisions they are not comfortable with and ensures outcomes remain close to the common baseline. This is one reason why the EU's choice of deployments can appear so conservative, limited to low-risk missions in the neighbourhood where individual Member States are keen to proceed and commit resources.⁹⁸ The voices suggesting that the EU should move towards QMV in this policy area are getting louder since the threat of a British veto is no longer an issue,⁹⁹ but many countries still oppose this measure, a number of whom were happy to hide behind the assumed British veto. President Juncker presented in September 2018 a proposal to introduce QMV in three areas of foreign policy: EU positions in the field of human rights issues in international forums, decisions on sanctions regimes, and on CSDP civilian missions.¹⁰⁰ His proposal is so far backed mainly by Germany, and many other countries, as well as Greece and Italy, are staunchly opposed. A broad political backing for this change therefore still seems to be lacking.

These perennial difficulties associated with establishing workable EU security and defence capabilities continue to overshadow recent initiatives. While the projects are expected to contribute to greater interoperability of national armed forces in the EU, they do not challenge the fundamental premise of national control over militaries or the intergovernmental nature of CSDP decision-making.

Looking at the projects adopted within PESCO,¹⁰¹ for instance, one sees very clearly the mismatch between ambitions and realities; many of the projects are relatively small scale, and a number of them reflect existing initiatives of the participating Member States, meaning they would likely have gone ahead in one form or another even without PESCO. Certainly, in its present form, it is 'unlikely to make a

⁹³Bernhard Stahl, Henning Boekle, Jörg Nadoll and Anna Jóhannesdóttir, 'Understanding the Atlanticist–Europeanist Divide in the CFSP: Comparing Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands' (2004) 9 *European Foreign Affairs Review* 417.

⁹⁴Paul Taylor, "'Fort Trump' or Bust? Poland and the Future of European Defence' (2018) Friends of Europe Report <<https://www.friendsofeurope.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/FORT-TRUMP-OR-BUST-Poland-and-the-future-of-European-defence.pdf>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁹⁵Katie Bo Williams, 'Toward "Fort Trump": US Makes Poland a "Serious Robust Offer"' (*DefenceOne*, 13 March 2019).

⁹⁶Jolyon Howorth, 'Decision-Making in Security and Defense Policy: Towards Supranational Inter-Governmentalism?' (2012) 47 *Cooperation and Conflict* 433.

⁹⁷Evangelos Fanoulis, 'Understanding the Social Construction of the Democratic Deficit in CSDP: A Foucauldian Approach' (2014) 23 *European Security* 466 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2014.911176>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁹⁸Danilo di Mauro, Ulrich Krotz and Katerina Wright, 'EU's Global Engagement: A Database of CSDP Military Operations and Civilian Missions Worldwide, Version 2.0' <<https://globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu/research-project/eu-global-engagement-database/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

⁹⁹Steven Blockmans, 'Differentiation in CFSP: Potential and Limits' (2017) Istituto Affari Internazionale Report.

¹⁰⁰Juncker (n 65).

¹⁰¹Council of the European Union, 'Permanent Structured Cooperation – PESCO' (2017) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32081/qa_pesco.pdf> accessed 2 December 2019.

significant impact on meeting the Union's requirements' as regards the Capability Development Plan.¹⁰² One of the reasons beyond the rather low profile of many projects might be the reluctance some of the Member States had while going into this initiative. For example, France wanted PESCO to be a much more exclusive affair and opposed the German idea of inclusiveness on the grounds that too broad a membership would render the eventual structure inefficient,¹⁰³ and the final PESCO format motivated France to launch the EI2 as a more pragmatic, alternative framework comprising like-minded states. Poland, in turn, joined PESCO only at the very last minute owing to its own fear of potential duplication with NATO and may be considered one of the scheme's more reluctant participants – a position it has stated explicitly.¹⁰⁴ Thus, PESCO's success is not preordained and will depend upon willingness of the Member States to make significant contributions to the implementation of crucial projects.¹⁰⁵ Yet, as already mentioned above, the EU members are divided along a variety of lines regarding their preferred foreign policy and defence philosophies, such as Atlanticists, Europeanists, neutral states, interventionists and non-interventionists. Different interests and strategic cultures thus complicate the process of PESCO implementation.

The EDF faces a similar challenge. The idea of supporting defence research and joint capability development is supported by all Member States and EU institutions but the devil is in the detail. As Besch argues, 'beyond initial support, agreeing on the details of the EDF will be difficult. Questions will arise over what types of capabilities they aim to develop, over the distribution of the EU's funds, and over how exactly EU member states will finance joint capabilities'.¹⁰⁶ To really make a difference, and to develop initiatives that will fulfil the high expectations of EU security and defence, the Member States would have to coordinate their defence priorities to an as yet unprecedented extent. Another problem faced by both schemes is budgetary. If most EU Member States have been unwilling to contribute 2 per cent of GDP to NATO over the past 18 years, there is little evidence to suggest an increase in motivation to spend on defence just because it is not NATO. There are some anxieties that engaging in PESCO could in fact mean decreased engagement (also in budgetary terms) for NATO missions and projects.¹⁰⁷ There are also questions of the added value associated with a number of recent initiatives. Taking CARD as an example, a number of observers have argued the process adds little to the existing NATO Defence Planning Process since it fulfils the same function on much the same terms (it is voluntary, and its aim is to share information, building on existing planning tools and procedures).¹⁰⁸ Sharing information is of course important but it begs the question whether the crucial next step – de facto coordination of defence expenditures among the Member States – will ever actually occur.

In short, despite much fanfare in the context of international insecurity and Brexit, the wealth of new initiatives launched at the EU level in recent years suffer from many of the same problems which have bedevilled EU security and defence cooperation in recent decades, such as limited resources, divergent interests and inefficient decision-making structures. Moreover, some of the initiatives – especially EI2 and PESCO – may actively compete against one another as formats, even though they are often mentioned in the same breath as examples of Europe's institutional development. And this is before we take into account the limitations introduced by the Brexit process itself.

¹⁰²Alice Billon-Galland and Yvonne-Stefania Efstathiou, 'Are PESCO Projects Fit for Purpose?' (European Defence Policy Brief, February 2019) <<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Final-PESCO-policy-brief-ELN-IISS-20-Feb-2019-ilovepdf-compressed.pdf>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹⁰³Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, 'Franco-German Differences Over Defense Make Europe Vulnerable' (Carnegie Europe, 29 March 2018) <<https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/75937>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹⁰⁴Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'We Joined PESCO but with Doubts' (2017) <https://msz.gov.pl/en/news/they_wrote_about_us/minister_witold_waszczykowski_we_joined_pesco_but_with_doubts_pap_dispatch_from_13_november_2017_> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹⁰⁵Monika Sus, 'The Future of European Defence Depends on the Commitment of Member States' (Dahrendorf Forum, 2017) <<http://www.dahrendorf-forum.eu/the-future-of-european-defence-depends-on-the-commitment-of-member-states/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹⁰⁶Sophia Besch, 'What Future for the European Defence Fund?' (Centre for European Reform Briefing, 2017) <<https://www.cer.eu/insights/what-future-european-defence-fund>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹⁰⁷Tomas Valasek, 'The EU's New Defense Pact: Marginal Gains' (Carnegie Europe Briefing, 2017) <<https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/74760>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹⁰⁸Koenig and Walter-Franke (n 89).

5. The Brexit effect: Resources, interests and institutions after British withdrawal

In spite of much optimistic rhetoric about recent changes in EU security and defence, many of which are seen as having been facilitated, or motivated, by Brexit itself, it is also not clear that British withdrawal will do much to mitigate the effects of the pre-existing factors limiting enhanced collaboration. Indeed, in some instances it is clear that Brexit further exacerbates these problems.

It is on the question of capabilities and financial resources that the effects of Brexit are perhaps going to be most discernible. The UK is a major player in EU security and defence and the Union will no longer be able to count on Britain's considerable military capabilities, economic resources or diplomatic networks after Brexit. CSDP missions were dependent in a number of crucial respects upon British contributions, including the provision of strategic airlift capabilities, the use of Northwood as the operational headquarters for Operation Atalanta, and the leveraging of British diplomatic support in service of interventions outside Europe. The EU will no longer be able to draw on these capabilities as easily as it has done previously, although given the degree of voluntarism involved in CSDP missions and the UK's keenness to stay 'plugged in', contributions of some form or another may indeed be possible.¹⁰⁹ At any rate, the withdrawal of such a sizable Member State leaves the remaining EU27 in a situation in which they must do 'more with less', contributing to the drive for increased efficiency and interoperability while also animating concerns that the Union's enthusiasm for security and defence reform post Brexit is unviable. The problem for the EU is that, when it comes to Brexit, there is a trade-off between improvements in the Union's 'actorness' promised by the latest reforms (especially PESCO and the EDF) and the credibility afforded by drawing upon British capabilities. If the UK is excluded from these initiatives – or excludes itself owing to concerns about becoming a rule-taker – then the initiatives will lack credibility.¹¹⁰

In terms of Member State interests, it is often held that Brexit has increased the resolve of the EU27 to safeguard the European project. To a certain extent this is true. The unity of the 27 on the question of Brexit – in public at least – is suggestive of greater unity, and pro-European movements have arguably been galvanised by the Brexit vote and the spectre of growing populist support. But the present show of unity belies deeper divergence in national positions, and the most fundamental disagreements remain. Germany's newfound interest in becoming a leader in security and defence cannot undo decades of civilian identity over night. Other countries, such as the Netherlands, have a fresh enthusiasm for the European project but they continue parallel efforts to safeguard their own vision of Europe, which is nowhere near as integrationist as that of Germany or Belgium.¹¹¹ And the continent remains divided between Member States who occupy different sides of key strategic dichotomies: Atlanticist/Europeanist; nationalist/internationalist; territorial defence/expeditionary forces; unilateral/multilateral. Post-Brexit developments will still fall along these divides: more Atlanticist countries, especially in Eastern Europe, are notably more spooked by British withdrawal than those seeking greater European autonomy. Existing divisions, meanwhile, continue to play out in debates over new formats, most notably between France and Germany over the inclusiveness of PESCO¹¹² and the extent to which Macron's EI2 initiative can – or should – be folded into the broader EU framework.¹¹³ One could argue to a certain extent that the proof is in the pudding since sufficient unity was ultimately found to reach broad agreement on PESCO. Yet this consensus was only forged (precariously) from divergent views of how PESCO would evolve and itself represented the partial victory of the German approach over the French one.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹Sophia Besch, 'Plugging in the British EU Defence Policy', Centre for European Reform Policy Brief, 26 April 2018 <<https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2018/plugging-british-eu-defence-policy>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹¹⁰ibid.

¹¹¹Lisa ten Brinke, 'From Cautious Member to Bold Leader? The Netherlands in the EU after Brexit' (Dahrendorf Forum Comment, 2019) <<https://www.dahrendorf-forum.eu/from-cautious-member-to-bold-leader-the-netherlands-in-the-eu-after-brexit/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹¹²Alice Billon-Galland and Martin Quencez, 'Can France and Germany Make PESCO Work as a Process toward EU Defence?' (2017) 33 German Marshall Fund Policy Brief <<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/can-france-and-germany-make-pesco-work-as-a-process-toward-eu-defence/>> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹¹³Nick Witney, 'Macron and the European Intervention Initiative: Erasmus for Soldiers?' (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2018) <https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_macron_and_the_european_intervention_initiative_erasmus_for_sold> accessed 2 December 2019.

¹¹⁴Sven Biscop, 'European Defence: What's in the CARDS for PESCO?' (2017) Egmont Security Policy Brief No 91.

Institutional changes post Brexit are not insignificant. The EDF, for instance, sees the first incursions for the Commission and the Community budget into the defence market, in sums that are considerable enough to encourage Member States to work together. PESCO, meanwhile, envisages commitments that are binding on the Member States taking part, and some of the projects will result in significant efficiencies. Moreover, the absence of the UK from the decision-making apparatus puts an end to the British veto, which has ceaselessly sought to block EU security and defence initiatives thought to undermine the supremacy of NATO, including the move to establish a permanent operational headquarters. But, while these changes are significant, they are also easily overblown. Once appropriately caveated, it is clear that post-Brexit changes do not fundamentally alter the intergovernmental basis of the Union's policymaking in this domain. To begin with, the forays into supranationalism represented by PESCO and the EDF are minimal and cannot substitute for the ability – through QMV – to overcome individual vetoes. The Commission's role in the EDF, for instance, is as an enabler, and the jealously guarded nature of national defence industries means that the Member States will not allow the Commission to move beyond this coordinating role. Meanwhile, the binding commitments in PESCO apply only to those members who signed up to the admittedly small-scale projects, and it is not clear how – or whether – non-complying Member States will be sanctioned.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, it is worth noting that while the prospect of a UK veto has receded on account of Brexit, Britain was not the only Member State with objections to further Europeanisation of security and defence. Indeed, other Member States sceptical of further security and defence integration have long hidden behind the automatic UK veto of such initiatives, and will now be forced to openly diverge from these positions.

6. Conclusion

Recent years have seen a two-fold push for a greater EU role as a credible security and defence actor, motivated by fears of a more insecure international environment and the perceived opportunities presented by Brexit for galvanising the European project. The result has been a flurry of new EU- and national-level initiatives in this field which aim, together, to establish a more assertive, more efficient and more credible EU presence in the field of security and defence. Expectations of these projects have been high in Europe, in the soon-to-be-leaving UK, and in the rest of the world, with much talk of the EU finally getting its act together as a security and defence actor. Political incentives on both sides of the channel reinforce this enthusiasm to see the EU moving on in this respect. But recent EU initiatives continue to be afflicted by a host of problems which have bedevilled EU security and defence cooperation since its inception, including a marked reluctance on behalf of Member States to commit adequate capabilities and funds, diversity in interests and strategic cultures, and lowest-common-denominator decision-making structures. Moreover, recent EU initiatives are also affected by British withdrawal, which threatens to undermine the credibility of these projects if they are launched without UK involvement. The end result of these changes, we argue, is that EU capabilities will markedly fail to live up to the lofty expectations which have been set for them in recent years, leading to a reopening of the capabilities–expectations gap diagnosed by Hill in the early 1990s.¹¹⁶

There are two principal implications of our argument. The first is theoretical. Our argument suggests that the capabilities–expectations framework elaborated by Hill remains a useful way of understanding the limitations of EU foreign and security policy, not least because it tempers optimistic assessments of minor improvements in capabilities through a careful calculation of how these compare with the expectations of relevant stakeholders. Existing analyses tend to focus unduly on the supply side, looking at how institutional changes have contributed to specific needs, but overlooking important changes on the demand side, which can be subject – as we have shown – to significant variation. Since expectations are also subject to change, we argue that assessments need to take account of both sides of this equation before drawing any conclusions. The second implication of our argument is the importance – for the policy community – of managing expectations, especially in the longer term. The prospect of reopening the

¹¹⁵Niklas Nováky, 'The EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence: Keeping Sleeping Beauty from Snoozing' (2018) 17 *European View* 97, 102.

¹¹⁶Hill (n 1).

capabilities–expectations gap brings with it the risk of future harm to the credibility of the Union as a global actor, which may undermine the (many) achievements of EU security and defence policy to date. The Union and the Member States should take care not to exaggerate the impact of current reforms since this will create more damage in the long run if it turns out to be an over-optimistic assessment, which is highly likely. Better would be to play the long game and work on establishing realistic expectations and workable policies, while acknowledging existing problems in order to find ways of overcoming them. Although developments such as PESCO, CARD and EDF are potentially revolutionary, they must be furnished with the necessary resources by the Member States in order for real-world changes to be brought about, overcoming a number of challenges on the way.

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