



France-Led Security Balancing against NATO

El equilibrio de seguridad liderado por Francia frente a la OTAN

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Abstract

The much-discussed question of the relevance of NATO after the end of the Cold War is reappearing due to increasing disagreements between the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU). The search of strategic autonomy of European countries led by France leads to questioning of the trans-Atlantic alliance. This questioning has become visible especially after the election of U.S. President Donald Trump, who expressed his doubts about the relevance of NATO. While the USA is disengaging with security issues related with European security, European countries are searching ways to find a common security and defense policy. The French President Emmanuel Macron has laid out several initiatives such as Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO), which aims at coordinating and deepening defense cooperation among EU member countries and European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which shares the goals of PESCO but operates outside EU framework. Although these initiatives are referred officially as complementary structures to NATO, they reflect Europe's desire to break free from U.S. security umbrella and become an independent political body in world politics. France, which has traditionally been wary of U.S. security dominance over Europe, is taking the lead in structuring European security institutions and merging France's interest with European interests.

Keywords: PESCO, EI2, NATO, France, Macron, security, autonomy

Resumen

La tan debatida cuestión de la pertinencia de la OTAN tras el final de la Guerra Fría reaparece debido a los crecientes desacuerdos entre Estados Unidos de América (EE. UU.)

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y la Unión Europea (UE). La búsqueda de autonomía estratégica de los países europeos liderados por Francia lleva a cuestionar la alianza transatlántica. Este cuestionamiento se ha hecho visible especialmente tras la elección del presidente estadounidense Donald Trump, quien expresó sus dudas sobre la relevancia de la OTAN. Mientras Estados Unidos se desentiende de las cuestiones relacionadas con la seguridad europea, los países europeos buscan vías para encontrar una política común de seguridad y defensa. El presidente francés Emmanuel Macron ha presentado varias iniciativas, como la Estructura Permanente de Cooperación (PESCO), cuyo objetivo es coordinar y profundizar la cooperación en materia de defensa entre los países miembros de la UE, y la Iniciativa Europea de Intervención (EI2), que comparte los objetivos de la PESCO, pero opera fuera del marco de la UE. Aunque estas iniciativas se denominan oficialmente “estructuras complementarias de la OTAN”, reflejan el deseo de Europa de liberarse del paraguas de seguridad estadounidense y convertirse en un organismo independiente en la política mundial. Francia, que tradicionalmente ha recelado del dominio de la seguridad estadounidense sobre Europa, está tomando la iniciativa en la estructuración de las instituciones europeas de seguridad y en la fusión de los intereses franceses con los europeos.

Palabras clave: PESCO, EI2, OTAN, Francia, Macron, seguridad, autonomía

Introduction

This paper examines changing security environment in Europe in which the existence of NATO is being questioned. France under the leadership the President Emmanuel Macron activated Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO) and initiated European Intervention Initiative (EI2). Although these developments are not presented as direct challenges to NATO, this paper views them as Europe’s attempts to lessen its security dependency on the USA.

The article puts forward following research questions: What are the factors that contributed to France’s search of European autonomy in recent years in the field of security and defense? Do PESCO and EI2 pose a significant threat to NATO’s position in Europe? Finally, what are alternative alliances that France pursues outside EU structure to strengthen Europe’s defense?

The main argument of this paper is that although PESCO and EI2 have not reached to the level of capability and cooperation of NATO, they signify disintegration of trans-Atlantic alliance and Europe’s desire to achieve strategic autonomy in security and defense. France appears to be leading country in deepening security cooperation. The paper also argues that while coordinating Europe’s strategic autonomy, France looks for cooperation of the United Kingdom (UK) and Russia as partners from outside the EU in the framework of EI2. Especially, Russia’s involvement in EI2 will create disturbances in Baltic and Eastern European flanks of the EU.

On Method

This article applies process tracing methodology in tracing relevant factors which led to France's balancing behavior concerning NATO. Process tracing is defined as "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in the light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator".¹ Process tracing searches for intervening variables that link an independent variable with a dependent variable. It aims at uncovering the intervening steps to estimate the causal effect of an independent variable.²

The intervening steps manifest themselves as actors, organizations, structures which engage in activities which generate causes or changes.³ Process tracing, thus, analyzes trajectories of change and causation. The description of phenomena is critical in analyzing the processes that are being studied. In process tracing, characterization of process requires the researcher to identify key steps in the process.⁴

Based on methodological tools of process tracing, this article examines post-Cold War balancing initiatives of Europe in security area led by France. The article discusses the early initiatives such as Saint-Malo Declaration and European Security Defense Policy (ESDP) before analyzing in great detail the implications of Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO) and European Intervention Initiative (EI2).

Balancing

According to neorealism, great powers seek security in an anarchic international order. In such an environment, states are expected to consider capabilities, not the intentions while making their decisions.⁵ To increase their capabilities, states engage in balancing behavior. Balancing indicates states' efforts to develop military power in order to deter the aggression of other states. The-

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1. David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", *Political Science and Politics* 44, n.º 4 (2011): 823, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429>.
 2. James Mahoney, "After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research", *World Politics* 62, n.º 1 (2010): 123, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887109990220>.
 3. Derek Beach, "Process-Tracing Methods in Social Science", *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Politics*, January 25th, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.176>.
 4. Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", 823.
 5. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, US: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 74.

re are two types of balancing: Internal and external. Internal balancing refers to states' amassing military power with their own capabilities. External balancing occurs when states form alliances against common rivals.⁶

Following this neorealist argument, we should clarify which strategy that France adopted to balance U.S. security dominance in Europe. As an internal balancing strategy, France's military expenditure must be examined after the Cold War. In 1990, France's military expenditure amounted to 35 billion dollars. In 2020, France's military expenditure reached to 52 billion dollars.⁷ This military expenditure corresponds to only 2.073 percent of France's GDP.⁸ These numbers suggest that French endeavors alone are not sufficient to balance overwhelming U.S. military superiority in Europe. Instead, France has sought allies in balancing U.S. military presence in Europe. In accordance with this imperative, French official documents concerning security matters have started to emphasize 'European commitment' narrative rather than 'national sanctuary' narrative.⁹ France focused on balancing potentials of other European countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom.¹⁰ This indicates external balancing behavior on France.

Alliances and NATO

Snyder defines alliances as “formal associations of states for the use (or nonuse) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership”.¹¹ According to Stephen Waltz, “an alliance is a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states”.¹²

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6. Joseph Parent and Sebastian Rosato, “Balancing in Neorealism”, *International Security* 40, n.º 2 (2015): 56, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00216.
 7. World Bank, “Military Expenditure (Current USD) - France”, *World Bank*, accessed March 9th, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3ZTvEI5>.
 8. World Bank, “Military Expenditure (% of GDP) - France”, *World Bank*, accessed March 9th, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3yxzVyR>.
 9. Lorenzo Cladi and Andrea Locatelli, “Bandwagoning, Not Balancing: Why Europe Confounds Realism”, *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, n.º 2 (2012): 280, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2012.693792>.
 10. Jolyon Howorth, “France, NATO and European Security: Status Quo Unsustainable; New Balance Unattainable”, *Politique Étrangère* 4 (2002): 5, <https://bit.ly/3ZWkBHO>.
 11. Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4.
 12. Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 12.

The desire of states to avoid threat posed by superior states or coalition is the main driving force of alliance formation.¹³ In case of the formation of NATO, this threat was the Soviet Union. In the official website, the foremost reason behind the formation of NATO was stated as deterring Soviet threat. After the Second World War, the devastation of European countries left them open to Soviet expansionism. U.S. reversal of its policy of isolationism provided confidence to European countries in their defense against the Soviet Union. The famous Article 5 states in case of an attack of one member of NATO, the alliance will take “such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force”.¹⁴

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 deprived NATO of an enemy, leading to questioning survivability of NATO. According to Walt, the main motivating element which drives states to join to alliances is responding to a threat.¹⁵ In 1993, Kenneth Waltz predicted that: “NATO’s days are not numbered, but its years are”.¹⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski expressed that through NATO Western Europe became almost protectorate of the USA.¹⁷ Having no enemy is a significant loss for the alliance. Without the Soviet threat, it was expected that the European countries would balance against U.S. dominance in European security. Henry Kissinger noted that: “The sole remaining European motive for developing a capacity to act autonomously is to escape American tutelage and increase European bargaining power”.¹⁸ European’s balancing endeavors in 1990s can be considered soft balancing. Stephen Walt contends soft balancing as coordination of diplomatic efforts among European countries to create friction with the USA to obtain results contrary to US preferences.¹⁹ Soft balancing occurs if the hegemon’s behaviors

13. Stephen Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power”, *International Security* 9, n.º 4 (1985): 5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

14. Quoted in NATO, “A Short History of NATO”, NATO, accessed March 9th, 2023, parr. 6, <https://bit.ly/3LrgjnB>.

15. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power”, 4.

16. Kenneth Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics”, *International Security* 18, n.º 2 (1993): 76, <https://bit.ly/3T5MsmJ>.

17. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 6.

18. Henry Kissinger, “The End of NATO as We Know It?”, *The Washington Post*, August 15th, 1999, parr. 7, <https://wapo.st/3L7H1So>.

19. Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005), 126.

create concerns but do not pose serious challenges. Moreover, the hegemon's position as security and public goods provider simply cannot be replaced.²⁰

In 1998, Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of the UK, and Jacques Chirac, the President of France, signed Saint-Malo Declaration, which proposed the creation of credible military power to provide autonomous action.²¹ This declaration was the precursor of the formulation of European Security Defense Policy (ESPD) during Kosovo Crisis in 1999 to establish the concept of European common defense. Yet, the divergences among EU members prevented ESPD from becoming an effective instrument to challenge NATO. While France was keen on establishing a separate European defense, the UK was in favor of NATO's primary status in Europe.²² In a meeting held in Helsinki in 1999, the European Council agreed that the member states would create a force consisted of 60,000 troops, 100 ships, 100 ships, and 40 aircraft by 2003. The European Rapid Reactionary Force (ERRF) was viewed with suspicion by the USA. Yet, the lack of coordination among European countries prevented the effective use of the ERRF. France and Italy saw the ERRF as a combat force, which would carry out high-level military operations. On the other hand, Germany and Sweden considered it as peacekeeping force, leaving high-level security matters to NATO.²³ In this respect, those attempts can be evaluated as soft balancing within NATO instead of hard balancing against it.

In the post-Cold War era, NATO defined its goal is to promote democracy and enable defense coordination. Militarily, NATO is committed to resolutions of conflict peacefully and conduct crisis-management operations if the peaceful efforts fail.²⁴ These stated aims are compatible with liberal perception of international relations. Owen argues that European countries and the USA share common democratic and liberal economic values. These common values enable them to have common enemies, making European counterbalancing unnecessary.²⁵ On the other hand, Ikenberry contends that the USA is the leading country in organizing and shaping liberal order even if its actions

20. T. V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U. S. Primacy", *International Security* 30, n.º 1 (2005): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1162/0162288054894652>.

21. Howorth, "France, NATO and European Security", 5.

22. Jean-Yves Haine, *ESDP: An Overview* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2004), 1.

23. Cladi and Locatelli, "Bandwagoning, Not Balancing", 274.

24. NATO, "What Is NATO?", NATO, accessed March 9th, 2023, <https://bit.ly/2GwhNsD>.

25. John Owen, "Transnational Liberalism and U. S. Primacy", *International Security* 26, n.º 3 (2001): 149, <https://bit.ly/3J4A8ia>.

are not agreeable to other parties within the alliance.²⁶ This asserts that Europe has little influence on U.S. behavior, leaving U.S. behavior unchecked.

U.S. commitment to NATO and the coordination of interests within NATO have loosened last two decades. In 2003, the USA failed to convince France and Germany to consider Saddam Hussein was a threat to world security. Thus, it formed a coalition of the willing to conduct war in Iraq. The term coalition reflects a lesser degree than alliance. Coalition is formed when a group of states come together to respond a particular problem at a particular time frame without committing themselves into a durable relationship.²⁷ This difference was not unnoticed by Trump. In 2017, The President Donald Trump called NATO as an obsolete institution.²⁸ Although this description can be considered as vulgar, it reflects a process which eroded NATO as a security alliance. NATO's inability to cooperate on conducting such a big scale operation in Iraq and the establishment of ad hoc formation raised questions about not only the relevance of NATO, but also nature of alliances. Instead of a formal and long-term security organization, short term security coalitions emerge as new forms of security alignments.

In July 2016, before his election as the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump stated in an interview that the Article 5 of NATO would not automatically be applied in case of Baltic states are attacked by Russia. Before helping those states, the USA would review if these states fulfilled their obligations.²⁹ He constantly rebuked U.S. allies in Europe for not contributing to military spending of the alliance. In 2018, he reiterated U.S. lack of commitment to Article 5. Trump even considered U.S. withdrawal from NATO.³⁰ The weakening of U.S. security aid to Europe when Europe faced external threats eroded trust placed on NATO as an alliance in providing security of Europe. The French President Emmanuel Macron stated that: "Eu-

26. G. John Ikenberry, "Woodrow Wilson, the Bush Administration, and the Future of Liberal Internationalism", in *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. G. John Ikenberry, Thomas Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Tony Smith (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2009), 17.

27. Andrew Pierre, *Coalitions: Building and Maintenance. The Gulf War, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and the War on Terrorism* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 2002), 2.

28. Joyce Kaufman, "The US Perspective on NATO under Trump: Lessons of the Past and Prospects for the Future", *International Affairs* 93, n.º 2 (2017): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix009>.

29. *Ibid.*, 263.

30. Benjamin Schreer, "Trump, NATO and the Future of Europe's Defence", *RUSI Journal* 164, n.º 1 (2019): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1605011>.

rope cannot rely on the United States only for its security. It is up to us to meet our responsibilities and guarantee our security, and therefore European security”.³¹ The Foreign Minister of Germany Heiko Maas said that: “Old pillars of reliability are crumbling under the weight of new crises. Alliances dating back decades are being challenged in the time it takes to write a tweet”.³² U.S. disengagement, thus, drives Europe to self-help for its survival.

Besides this realist challenge to NATO, liberal order led by the USA is being challenged by the USA itself. Trump criticized the liberal international order and its institutions, urging European countries to follow U.S. leadership based on his ‘America First’ concept.³³ Trump’s other behaviors such as starting a trade war with China, U.S. withdrawal from Paris Agreement confirm his lack of commitment to liberal order. The USA and the EU are going separate ways. Thus, the liberal institutionalist thesis which explains the survival of NATO is also crumbling. Macron expressed this process as “what we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO” in an interview published in *The Economist*.³⁴ In this respect, the European countries are trying to find and set up alternative security institutions for the defense of the continent.

PESCO

The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009, referred Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO) as a framework to respond, “the most demanding missions”.³⁵ Yet, the EU failed to implement this framework. The then-President of European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker labels PESCO as the Sleeping Beauty of the Lisbon Treaty, calling for waking the Sleeping Beauty up.³⁶

31. Sylvie Corbet, “France’s Macron Urges Europe to Take Charge of Own Defense”, *AP News*, August 27th, 2018, parr. 2, <https://bit.ly/3kTSri4>.

32. Heiko Maas, “Speech by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas: ‘Courage to Stand Up for Europe#EuropeUnited’”, *Germany’s Federal Foreign Office*, June 13th, 2018, parr. 7, <https://bit.ly/2JQ9eh7>.

33. Schreer, “Trump, NATO and the Future of Europe’s Defence”, 12.

34. The Economist, “Emmanuel Macron Warns Europe: NATO Is Becoming Brain-Dead”, *The Economist*, November 7th, 2019, <https://econ.st/3mHrO0L>.

35. European Union, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, Official Journal of the European Communities, C 326/13, October 26th, 2012.

36. Jean-Claude Juncker, “Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the Defence and Security Conference Prague: In Defence of Europe”, *European Commission*, June 9th, 2017, <https://bit.ly/420UwJr>.

This call of the head of the executive organ of the EU is significant, but the main driving force of the reignition of PESCO was the victory of Emmanuel Macron in 2017 French Presidential Elections. Pro-European stance was the main differentiating factor, which distinguished Macron from other presidential candidates during the election campaign. In his foreign policy understanding, France's participation to the EU does not reduce its sovereignty, but it raises it.³⁷ According to Macron the French power rests on three tenets: "independent, humanist, and European".³⁸ These principles are in conformity with traditional French foreign policy tenets characterized as interventionist and autonomous.³⁹ With this formulation, Macron revived traditional French policy of balancing Europe against the USA. Since 1949 French diplomacy has sought to elevate the status of Europe at the international table, questing for balancing U.S. power in trans-Atlantic relations.⁴⁰ As any special relationship between Europe and the USA is not assured in the future, France seeks to ensure Europe's independence from North America in the security issues.⁴¹ Considering itself as the main political actor in the EU and European unity as a means to retain its world power status, France has taken the lead in political integration of the EU.⁴² Macron embraces this traditional French stance. He does not tie European security solely to NATO.⁴³

Thus, Macron's election to French presidency gave a new impetus rebuilding a common security project for Europe. Franco-German Ministerial Council, gathered in July 2017, announced a new generation of joint fighter jets, signifying the first materialization for this aspiration.⁴⁴ In November 2017, except Denmark, Malta, Ireland, Portugal, and the UK, 23 EU countries expressed their interest in joining PESCO. Then, Portugal

37. Manuel Lafont Rapnouil and Jeremy Shapiro, "Macron's Foreign Policy: Claiming the Tradition", *Brookings*, May 8th, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3T4WmF5>.

38. Frédéric Charillon, *Macron's France in the World: Strategic Challenges, and a Narrow Path* (Oslo: The Norwegian Atlantic Committee, 2018), 4.

39. Alice Pannier and Olivier Schmitt, "To Fight Another Day: France between the Fight against Terrorism and Future Warfare", *International Affairs* 95, n.° 4 (2019): 899, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz050>.

40. Howorth, "France, NATO and European Security", 2.

41. Lukáš Pachta, "France: Driving Force of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy?", *Europeum*, 2003, <https://bit.ly/3YAiNmT>.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Lafont Rapnouil and Shapiro, "Macron's Foreign Policy".

44. Alice Billon-Galland and Martin Quencez, "Can France and Germany Make PESCO Work as a Process Toward EU Defense?", *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, policy brief 33, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3Yz9kMz>.

and Ireland joined this group. PESCO was initiated in December 2017.⁴⁵ PESCO not only coordinates common policies but also offers “collaboration in the areas of investment, capability development and operational readiness – areas that have been underfunded in some EU countries in the past”.⁴⁶ PESCO provides both binding legal framework which guides EU members’ investments in security field and political framework for EU members’ improvement in security and defense capabilities. The binding nature of PESCO framework is reviewed by annual assessment by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The commitments are supported by various EU security missions such as the European Defense Agency (EDA), the European Union External Action (EEEA), the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), and the Common Security Defense Policy (CSDP). It offers opportunities for the participating states by setting up common security projects.⁴⁷ Within PESCO structure almost 50 projects are being implemented. The implementation of initial 17 project were decided in March 2018⁴⁸. Additional 17 projects materialized in November 2018.⁴⁹ In November 2019, 13 new projects were added⁵⁰.

PESCO projects cover areas of training, land, formations, systems, maritime, air, cyber, enabling, joint capabilities, medicine, and space. The projects are being carried out through bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral cooperation of member states.⁵¹ France is gradually becoming a leading power in PESCO by expanding its role in the projects enacted. Blockmans and Crosson observe that France, Spain, and Germany form the core of PESCO projects.⁵² Of

45. Niklas Nováky, “The EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence: Keeping Sleeping Beauty from Snoozing”, *European View* 17, n.º 1 (2018): 100, <https://bit.ly/422h1xA>.

46. Elena Lazarou and Alina Dobrova, “Security and Defence”, *European Parliament*, briefing, June 2019, 8, <https://bit.ly/40cXPfd>.

47. Council of the European Union, “Notification on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to the Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy”, *Council of the European Union*, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2FMILjj>.

48. Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/340 of 6 March 2018 Establishing the List of Projects to Be Developed under PESCO*, March 6th, 2018, L 65/24.

49. Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/1797 of 19 November 2018 Amending and Updating Decision (CFSP) 2018/340 Establishing the List of Projects to Be Developed under PESCO*, November 21st, 2018, L294/18.

50. Council of the European Union, “Defence Cooperation: Council Launches 13 New PESCO Projects”, *Council of the European Union*, November 12th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3LcMkja>.

51. Council of the European Union, “Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)’s Projects - Overview”, *Council of the European Union*, November 12th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3Fdj4W5>.

52. Steven Blockmans and Dylan Macchiarini Crosson, “Differentiated Integration within PESCO: Clusters and Convergence in EU Defence”, *CEPS*, December 2019, <https://bit.ly/3J4Gfd8>.

the new 13 projects, France assumed the lead in three projects, while participating 10 of 13. Germany and Poland only participate in two, Spain in seven, Italy in four.⁵³ France's participation into PESCO projects should be evaluated in the context of French endeavors to align France's interests with EU interests. PESCO projects share the similar goals of French security aims, which are dealing with terrorism, hybrid threats, human and arms trafficking, and organized crime. The projects that France is taking part involve upgrading of a modular unmanned ground system, MALE (Medium Altitude Long Endurance) drones, the development of a platform, which will deal with cyber-threats, and the production of Tiger attack helicopter.⁵⁴

Despite the initiation of projects, the implementation of PESCO is problematic. Two giant initiators, France and Germany have different visions regarding PESCO. France has sought to set high entry criteria, focusing on efficiency. On the other hand, Germany has opposed high standards for entry, emphasizing inclusiveness. This divergence clouded the operationalization of PESCO since its revival in 2017.⁵⁵ Germany also criticizes France for focusing on too much military side of PESCO and overlooking social and economic aspects of the disturbances in the troubled areas.⁵⁶

Besides hurdles with Germany, Macron found himself a hostile geopolitical environment both inside and outside Europe. Britain's exit from the EU deprived France a formidable military ally within the framework of the EU. The immigration crisis and rise of populism weakened Angela Merkel's position in Germany, creating a paralyzed ruling coalition. The southern and eastern flank of the EU has also been affected by the populism wave, placing Euro-skeptics in the executive branches.

As a result of these developments, PESCO is evolving into a less ambitious project. Sven Biscop argues that considering PESCO as a European army is a far-reaching goal. Instead, he advocates PESCO should focus on accelerating defense integration within EU members without rivalling with NATO.⁵⁷ The

53. Jacobo Barigazzi, "France Dominant in New Flurry of EU Military Projects", *Politico*, November 12th, 2019, <https://politi.co/3kVpHFD>.

54. Pannier and Schmitt, "To Fight Another Day", 914.

55. Billon-Galland and Quencez, "Can France and Germany Make PESCO Work".

56. Justyna Gotkowska, "European Strategic Autonomy or European Pillar in NATO?: Germany's Stance on French Initiatives", *OSW Commentary* 320 (2020), <https://bit.ly/3ZUk4GI>.

57. Sven Biscop, "Don't Be Too Shy about PESCO", *Egmont*, September 6th, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3T3x76c>.

lack of common strategic understanding and the lack of consensus on European autonomy lessen the effectiveness of PESCO.⁵⁸ According to Biscop, the absence of a defined purpose is the foremost reason why PESCO has not become effective.⁵⁹ Another problem is complicated processes that the decisions have to pass through. Too much bureaucracy spoils and dilutes the implementation of the projects.⁶⁰ All of these concerns have been expressed by French policymakers. Phillippe Errara, who is the Director General of International Relations and Strategy, Ministry of Armed, commented that France needs member states to make PESCO real by participating in the projects and delivering results⁶¹. The French Defense Minister called PESCO “club Med of bureaucracy”.⁶² Dissatisfied by PESCO, Emmanuel Macron initiated a parallel security institution in the EU, complementing deficiencies of PESCO.

European Intervention Initiative (EI2)

On 26 September 2017, the President Macron acknowledged his desire to set up a security organization called European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which would act as an intervention force materialized by the participation of European countries.⁶³ Macron’s speech mentions the inclusion of not only EU countries but also European countries. This distinction is important in that it opens up the possibility of participation of the UK and Russia. Another implication is that Macron specifies EI2’s mission as an intervention force. This initiative is intended to conduct specific military operations instead of being simply a coordination forum.

Three main factors drove the creation of EI2. Firstly, France wants to alleviate its military burden among European countries in its operations in

58. Simon Sweeney and Neil Winn, “EU Security and Defence Cooperation in Times of Dissent: Analysing PESCO, the European Defence Fund and the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) in the Shadow of Brexit”, *Defence Studies* 20, n.º 3 (2020): 233, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2020.1778472>.

59. Sven Biscop, “European Defence and PESCO: Don’t Waste the Chance”, *EUIDEA*, policy paper 1, May 2020, <https://bit.ly/3mDYHL9>.

60. Nick Witney, “EU Defence Efforts Miss the Open Goal Again”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, November 15th, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3kTX3oo>.

61. Philippe Errera, “We Need Coherent Projects Leading to Concrete Results”, *European Defence Agency*, accessed March 9th, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3L7b10J>.

62. Olivier de France, “The French Perspective”, *Armament Industry European Research Group*, policy paper 37, February 2019, <https://bit.ly/3YCQgNk>.

63. Emmanuel Macron, “Sorbonne Speech of Emmanuel Macron: Full Text / English Version”, *Ouest-France*, September 26th, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3JrJ2aF>.

Africa. Secondly, PESCO fell short of meeting France demands in helping its military operations. Thirdly, France is disappointed in PESCO's evolution as an over-inclusive and highly bureaucratic organization.⁶⁴ Indeed, French military was overstretched and needed to share its burden with partners which have operational capability. The chief of staff Francois Lecointre declared that "the French armed forces used at 130% of their capabilities and now need to regenerate".⁶⁵ France has been conducting counterterrorism operations in sub-Saharan especially in Mali. The burden of French deployment and lack of European participation necessitated the leading nation with a consensus organization.⁶⁶ Mölling and Major argue that what France needs is not another structure but an institution, which is capable and willing to act. PESCO proved to be slow, cumbersome, and less action oriented.⁶⁷

EI2 is designed to address France's concerns. The organization aims at bolstering European strategic autonomy, military credibility, and fairer burden sharing. The structure of EI2 is designed to be more flexible than PESCO. It will include limited number of countries. It has a permanent secretariat coordinated by France and liaisons of joining members. It holds annual ministerial meetings and biannual strategic military talks among members.⁶⁸ Controlling secretariat would ensure France's influence over EI2. Limiting the countries which would participate in EI2 would increase efficiency. Specifying the number of conferences in the charter is a good strategy for France to end countless conferences and meetings that PESCO proscribed.

As of September 2019, the number of EI2 reached 13 states.⁶⁹ Germany's participation into EI2 deserves a special attention. Although Germany eventually joined EI2, initially it considered EI2's materialization as a divisive issue in the EU. Germany worried EI2 would undermine PESCO, which is designed to be inclusive thanks to Germany's efforts to convince France. In this

64. Niklas Nováky, "France's European Intervention Initiative: Towards a Culture of Burden Sharing", *Wilfried Marten Centre for European Studies*, policy brief, October 2018, <https://bit.ly/3YF8CgK>.

65. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance: The Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defence Economics* (London: IISS, 2018), 74.

66. Pannier and Schmitt, "To Fight Another Day", 909.

67. Christian Mölling and Claudia Major, "Why Joining France's European Intervention Initiative Is the Right Decision for Germany", *Egmont*, June 15th, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3Yxtq9X>.

68. France Ministère des Armées, "European Intervention Initiative", *Ministère des Armées*, 2020, <https://bit.ly/407tUo0>.

69. Olivier-Rémy Bel, "Can Macron's European Intervention Initiative Make the Europeans Battle-Ready?", *War on the Rocks*, October 2nd, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3J6nRd0>.

sense, EI2 has an opposite structure in that it only accepts operationally capable states. This causes worry in Germany, which is generally wary of military operations. Finally, with some countries, Germany suspected EI2 is a vehicle for French foreign policy goals.⁷⁰ Germany's position about NATO's future is less ambitious than France. The Foreign Minister of Germany Haas labelled Macron's statements about NATO as "drastic", stressing that NATO is central to European security.⁷¹

Although Germany's reservations about EI2 may create problems for EI2, its 'flexible' characterization will enable France to overcome these problems. EI2 is more concerned on European defense than EU defense by opening the membership possibilities to non-EU members.⁷² The most important contribution can come from the UK. Despite its exit from the EU, the UK expressed its interest in joining EI2. The Ministry of Defense of the UK stated that:

...with France and other European partners to support the development of the proposed. European Intervention Initiative (EII). The EII will be a defense cooperation framework that aims to improve operational planning and coordination of military deployments among European partners with meaningful capabilities. The EII will be separate from the EU, and will be complementary to existing NATO, EU and JEF [Joint Expeditionary Force] military structures and initiatives.⁷³

After this statement, the UK officially became a member of EI2. Involvement of the UK is consistent with the priority of French foreign policy which is "to keep the UK on board in respect of European security".⁷⁴ The participation of the UK is important in that the UK constituted 20 percent of the EU28 force catalogue, being the most capable defense partner in Europe except France.⁷⁵ Being excluded from PESCO because of being a non-EU state, EI2 enables the UK to participate in military operations in an ad hoc manner.

70. Nováky, "France's European Intervention Initiative".

71. Sweeney and Winn, "EU Security and Defence Cooperation in Times of Dissent", 236.

72. Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, "France Moves From EU Defense to European Defense", *DGAP Standpunkt* 16 (2017), <https://bit.ly/41VLNIJ>.

73. Quoted in Claire Mills, "The European Intervention Initiative (EII/EI2)", *House of Commons Library*, briefing paper 8432, September 23rd, 2019, 3, <https://bit.ly/3J80U9f>.

74. Pannier and Schmitt, "To Fight Another Day", 914.

75. Sweeney and Winn, "EU Security and Defence Cooperation in Times of Dissent", 237.

Besides the UK and Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Norway, and Italy joined to E12.⁷⁶ The participation of middle and small states are significant in that most of these countries joined U.S. ad hoc coalition of willing in Iraq war in 2003 not sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council. Including these countries into E12 is an important diplomatic step for France to start to pull away these countries from U.S. orbit and mobilize their sources for European security.

Another participation, however, sounds improbable, might be Russia. Emmanuel Macron made an astonishing move by pivoting Russia, surprising foreign policy specialists. On ground, Russia has 11 combined armies, one tank army, and four army corps. In Navy, it has 12,000 and 15,000 troops. Its airborne forces consist of 45,000 troops. Its direct intervention in Syria and Ukraine demonstrated its formidable nature.⁷⁷ Its inclusion to European security apparatus would be a game changing move for Europe's search of strategic autonomy. In 2019, Macron stated that: "the European continent will never be stable, will never be secure, if we do not ease and clarify our relations with Russia".⁷⁸ In February 2020, at Munich Security Conference, Macron reiterated the necessity of engaging Russia, stating that: "we are demanding, we are giving no ground in our principles on frozen conflicts, but will re-engage in a strategic dialogue-which will take time".⁷⁹ In line with those statements, there are some signs that French-Russian security cooperation is materializing. In Central African Republic, Russian mercenaries are siding with President Faustin-Archange Touadera against Seleka rebels, helping French counter-terrorism efforts in the region. Russia also made arms deals with French allies in sub-Saharan Africa. Franco-Russian cooperation is also visible in Libya in support of Khalifa Haftar.⁸⁰ Thus, the security assistance much needed by French military in Africa is partially given by Russia. The same cooperation could be expanded in defense of Europe if these two governments bolster their ties.

76. Bel, "Can Macron's European Intervention Initiative Make the Europeans Battle-Ready?"

77. Andrew Bowen, "Russian Armed Forces: Capabilities", *Congressional Research Service*, June 30th, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3mJCgEe>.

78. Gustav Gressel et al., "Emmanuel Macron's Very Big Idea on Russia", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, September 25th, 2019, parr. 1, <https://bit.ly/3YANdWc>.

79. Geir Moulson, "France's Macron Urges Better Long-Term Relations With Russia", *USA News*, February 15th, 2020, parr. 2, <https://bit.ly/3ZD1YsC>.

80. Samuel Ramani, "Russia Takes Its Syrian Model of Counterinsurgency to Africa", *Rusi*, September 9th, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3Ju7hVP>.

The inclusion of Russia into European security institutions would have repercussions on NATO and the EU. The Eastern European, Southern European, and the Baltic states are wary of Russian expansion. Russia's participation of E12 would raise questions whether these states are expendable in exchange of greater Franco-Russian security cooperation.⁸¹ Vasili Tcherneva, who is the deputy director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, argued that: "there is a perception that Macron wants to change Europe via multiple integrations or introducing second-class EU members, and Central and Eastern Europeans are dead sure they are going to be the second-class members".⁸² The idea of building a security coalition with Russia is an attractive and bold diplomatic move, but it will have geopolitical consequences for France, NATO, and the EU.

Another bold diplomatic move would be the possible entry of Turkey. Turkey is the second largest NATO army after the USA. Recently, Turkey has been experiencing problems in NATO due to U.S. support to Kurdish militants in the northern Syria, the purchase of S-400 air defense systems from Russia, and differences between Erdoğan and U.S. administration.⁸³ Since Turkey's EU membership is a distinct possibility, its participation to PESCO is not attainable. However, its inclusion into E12 could be possible. Turkey could be emerged as a partner for France to balance NATO in providing European security under ideal circumstances.

Nevertheless, Turkey's relations with France have equally been strained because of Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics. France was among the countries which opposed Turkey's Maritime Deal with Libya, which delimited the exclusive zones of Turkey and Libya.⁸⁴ French and Turkish officials accused each other of playing a dangerous game in Libya. France's support to Cyprus and Greece in these countries clashes further exacerbated the rivalry between two countries.⁸⁵ Under these geopolitical circumstances, it is unlikely that Turkey

81. Gressel et al., "Emmanuel Macron's Very Big Idea on Russia".

82. Rym Momtaz, "Macron's Eastern Approach to EU Power", *Politico*, August 20th, 2019, parr. 13, <https://politi.co/2TQhAZ0>.

83. Francesco Bongiovanni, "Turkey: The NATO Alliance's Wild Card", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 17, n.° 2 (2018), <https://bit.ly/3mMhioc>.

84. Branislav Stanicek, "Turkey: Remodelling the Eastern Mediterranean Conflicting Exploration of Natural Gas Reserves", *European Parliament*, briefing, September 2020, <https://bit.ly/3YBBpmu>.

85. Rufat Ahmedzade, "The Battle for Libya: Growing French-Turkish Rivalry in the Mediterranean", *London School of Economics and Political Science*, June 26th, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3J6Mne7>.

will join to EI2 in short term. However, as it is shown in Russian case, Macron can initiate another opening for Turkey for the sake of European security. Turkey has also shown that it could act in the service of European security as the 2016 refugee deal between Turkey and the EU restricted the flow of migrants to Europe, enhancing European security.

To sum up, EI2 is designed to rectify deficiencies of PESCO, which are overly bureaucratic, inflexible, and less-operational. France prefers a militarily capable security organization than organizing conferences or forums. Flexible EI2 opened many options to France by including not only EU countries but also other European countries. The UK already became a member of EI2. Despite their problems with European countries, Russia and Turkey could theoretically join the initiative. However, Macron, who initiated EI2 for strategic autonomy for Europe, is also facing geopolitical dilemmas while trying to reach out other countries outside the EU.

Assessments and Conclusions

The article has examined France's endeavors of finding security alternatives to NATO. Since Macron's election, France stepped up its efforts to reach its traditional foreign goal of providing strategic autonomy of Europe. This process activated Permanent Security Cooperation (PESCO) and engendered European Intervention Initiative (EI2). The activation of PESCO, the sleeping beauty of the Lisbon treaty, raised the hopes concerning cooperation in security and defense but it falls short of meeting the expectations because of its inclusive and bureaucratic character. France, whose military has already overstretched, needs reliable security partners, which would share its burden. Therefore, it initiated EI2, whose membership is open to non-EU countries in Europe. EI2 also set a high standard for membership, emphasizing its operational capability.

With the new security institutions European security have become multi-layered. There are countries, which are members of NATO, PESCO, or EI2. NATO has 30 members; PESCO has 25 members; and EI2 has 13 participants. Although PESCO and EI2 offered alternatives to NATO in terms of providing common security and defense, they are far from replacing it. The same disagreements among the member states in NATO are being experienced in PESCO and EI2. Moreover, France's biggest partner in the EU, Germany, is not

enthusiastic about bringing NATO down. Germany's doubts about the scope of strategic autonomy of Europe and its reservations in conducting common military operations surely affect other EU members' behaviors towards common security and defense of Europe, weakening France's endeavors.

Macron's formulation of EI2 reflects the search of finding a capable European ally to conduct common military operations instead of a rigid alliance institution. In its search of strategic autonomy for Europe, France started to lean towards ad hoc coalitions rather than grand alliances. France pivoted non-European countries such as the UK and Russia. Its rapprochement with Russia is significant in that this security cooperation reflects realism instead of idealism. Although it is not officially part of EI2, Russia and France have already started security cooperation in Africa where France needs security aid most. This example of Russia could be expanded other non-EU members despite the geopolitical repercussions these coalitions may bring.

Yet, NATO's security and defense clout in Europe overwhelms PESCO and EI2. Macron's attempts could be considered as soft-balancing rather than hard-balancing against NATO. Nevertheless, U.S. disengagement from international institutions and increasing isolationism are widening political and security vacuum. Furthermore, Macron is perhaps the only leader in Europe, who is willing to assume leadership position by taking political risks. PESCO and EI2 have been operational for only a few years. Despite initial setbacks and geopolitical problems, with a strong leadership these institutions could reach institutional and operational capability. In this respect, France's political leadership in Europe is to be observed to achieve this goal.

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