Europeans Role in Transatlantic Security

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Europe's Role in Transatlantic Security: From Dependency to Strength

The NATO alliance, the cornerstone of transatlantic security, faces new challenges. Changes in the global balance of power, particularly the rise of China, have led the United States to increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Barack Obama referred to this as the "pivot to Asia" in November 2011. At the same time, Europe has faced tensions with Russia over its occupation of Crimea in 2014, which have intensified since the outbreak of the Ukrainian war on 24. February 2022. The big problem remains that Europe is highly dependent on U.S. support.

If Europe became strong enough in its own region, it could take load off the U.S. in a way that would allow the U.S. to focus on strategic competition with China. This international division of tasks is not only of great importance but also presents an opportunity to strengthen transatlantic relations and enhance the credibility of the principle of deterrence and defence.

Today, however, the European security structure is highly dependent on United States support. Recent examples include the U.S. European Deterrence Initiative (EDI),

aimed at securing NATO's eastern flank in response to the annexation of Crimea, as well as the notable fact that the U.S. provides the largest military assistance to Ukraine.

European nations must step up their own efforts to enhance collective defence capabilities. This includes increased investments in defence budgets, modernization of their armed forces, and enhanced cooperation within the European Union. The European Sky Shield Initiative, a project initiated by Germany to improve the European air defence system, is a very important step forward in this regard. So far, however, it is only a very imperfect approach unless strong military countries like France and Poland join in.

Moreover, the United States and Europe should maintain close political coordination to ensure their strategies and priorities align. Tensions between Europe and the USA, as with Nord Stream 2, are very damaging in this regard and must be prevented in the future. Identifying shared interests and working on a coordinated approach is imperative. The emergence of potential new conflict zones, such as in the Balkans, requires a firm and decisive response. The crisis in Ukraine and the recent coups d'état in West Africa, Central Africa, and the Sahel are just a few examples of the challenges Europe faces.

The first steps toward this have already been taken; Finland's membership and Sweden's imminent admission represent a significant strengthening of NATO. NATO itself reaffirmed at the Vilnius summit this year that member countries are committed to investing at least 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) in defence each year. The phrase "at least" requires a nuanced interpretation. It should not be perceived as a maximum threshold but rather as a minimum requirement. If anything, more should be invested.

Germany's role in this development should be a leading one. The special fund of 100 billion euros should only be understood as the start of a far-reaching rethinking of Germany, so that the announced "Zeitenwende" by Chancellor Olaf Scholz does not peter out. The renunciation of a National Security Council is more than problematic in this respect. Such a council could contribute to better coordination and effectiveness in security policy, ensuring an appropriate response to emerging threats. The decision to cancel is an expression of how long the road to a strong, self-reliant Europe still is.