

Essential Aspects of European Defence and Security Policy



European defence and security policy has evolved significantly since the end of the Cold War, shaped by geopolitical shifts, institutional developments, and changing threats. Understanding it requires an analysis of key structures, strategies, and challenges.



1. Institutional Frameworks: The EU and NATO

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

The EU's framework for crisis management operations, peacekeeping, and military-civilian cooperation. It operates under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and is supported by institutions such as the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Political and Security Committee (PSC), and the European Defence Agency (EDA).

NATO

A cornerstone of European defence, with 23 EU states also being NATO members. The EU-NATO relationship is central, as NATO provides collective defence (Article 5), while the EU focuses on crisis management and security cooperation. The US in 2025 considers that this relationship needs to be revised.

Strategic Autonomy Debate

Some EU leaders advocate for greater European self-reliance in defence, reducing dependence on the U.S. and NATO, while others prioritize transatlantic cooperation.



2. Key Policies and Initiatives

2017	Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)	Enables willing EU states to collaborate on military projects, enhancing capabilities and interoperability.
2021	European Defence Fund (EDF)	Supports research and development for joint defence projects, aiming to reduce fragmentation in the EU's defence industry.
2022	Strategic Compass	A roadmap to enhance the EU's security and defence role, focusing on crisis response, resilience, investment, and partnerships.

3. Geopolitical and Security Challenges

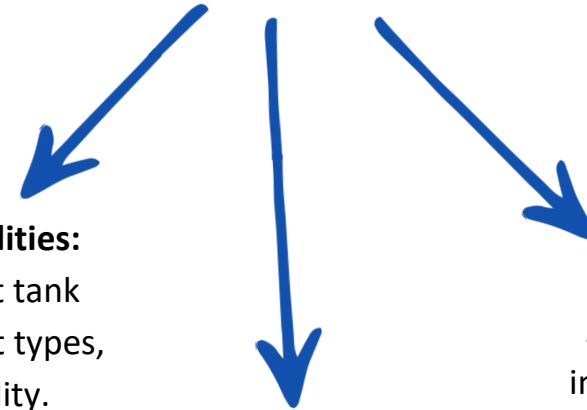
Hybrid Threats:
Cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and energy security threats from state and non-state actors pose growing risks.

Russia's Aggression:
Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has fundamentally reshaped European security, leading to increased defence spending, arms support for Ukraine, and NATO expansion (with Finland and Sweden joining).

Terrorism:
Security concerns related to terrorism remain key issues in EU policymaking.

4. Defence Spending and Capabilities

Fragmented Military Capabilities:
The EU has over 30 different tank models and numerous aircraft types, complicating interoperability.



Increasing Defence Budgets:
In response to new threats, EU states have pledged higher defence spending, with some aiming to meet NATO's 2% GDP target.

Dependency on the U.S.:
European forces still rely on American military assets (e.g., intelligence, airpower, logistics), raising questions about long-term self-sufficiency.

Regulation **VS** Innovation

AI is revolutionizing security operations, from cyber defence to autonomous weapons and intelligence analysis. E.g., Drones, robotic platforms, and AI-assisted decision-making are being explored within the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and European Defence Fund (EDF). The EU emphasizes an ethical and human-centric approach to AI, as reflected in the **EU AI Act**, which restricts high-risk AI applications and promotes transparency. This regulatory stance contrasts with the U.S. and China, where AI defence development is more aggressive. The EU faces a dilemma: balancing innovation in AI defence technologies while upholding democratic values and human oversight.



5. Future prospects

Deeper Integration or National Sovereignty?

The EU faces debates over whether to centralize defence policy further or respect national sovereignty in military decisions. The current discussions on a peace treaty between Russia and Ukraine, decided by the US and Russia, without the European Union or some European leaders at the negotiating table highlights the EU's weakness in this domain.

AI and Emerging Technologies

The future of European defence will also depend on investments in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and space security.

Strategic Partnerships

Cooperation with the U.K. (post-Brexit), and global partners like Japan and Australia is growing. The US, as a key member of NATO and a country with the largest defence budget in the world, remains an essential partner of the EU. However, there are clear signs that the EU needs to develop its own defence capacity as the US reduce their military involvement in Europe.

Conclusion:

European defence and security policy is at a crossroads, shaped by institutional evolution, external threats, and internal debates on strategic autonomy. While cooperation with NATO remains essential, the EU is striving to play a more independent and proactive role in global security. Whether it achieves genuine strategic autonomy or remains largely reliant on transatlantic partnerships will be a defining issue for the coming decades.

