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Transatlantic Defense Cooperation in the Era of Great Transformation and Its Implications for China

Abstract: *In the background of the great transformation of international situation, and with the purpose of jointly safeguarding the ‘liberal international order’, the defense cooperation between Europe and the US is developing rapidly. This includes improving the cooperation in bilateral and global levels. However, as the EU is pursuing strategic autonomy and defense independence, the transatlantic defense cooperation is facing structural challenges brought by gaps of willingness, goals, interests and capabilities between the two sides. Therefore, although the transatlantic defense cooperation will continue to deepen in the future, it will not develop smoothly. The transatlantic defense cooperation will have negative impacts on China, like the de-stabilizing of international and regional situation needed by Chinese economic prosperity. However, due to the differences in defense positions and capabilities between Europe and the US, the negative impacts of transatlantic defense cooperation on China are limited.*

Keywords: *Transatlantic defense cooperation, Great Transformation, NATO, EU, US, China*

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Introduction

Transatlantic defense cooperation has a long history, and Europe and the US have established strategic partnership and a strategic culture of mutual trust. Nowadays, with the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict, the international situation is undergoing great transformation, reshaping the perception of European and American leaders on the international order, and thus profoundly affecting the domestic and foreign policies of these countries, including the defense relations between the EU and the US. In view of this, this paper will try to summarize the basic situation of transatlantic defense cooperation under the great transformation of international situation, analyze the challenges that their cooperation will encounter, and explore the potential impacts of transatlantic defense cooperation on China.

It should be noted that NATO, as a security alliance mainly led or dominated by the US, is a special existence in the defense cooperation between Europe and the US. US This means that the defense relationship between Europe and the US is to a great extent reflected by the relationship between the EU and NATO. In view of this, the transatlantic defense cooperation mentioned in this paper also includes the cooperation between the EU and NATO.

Defense cooperation between Europe and the US in the era of great transformation

Generally, the strategic objective of defense cooperation between Europe and the US has not changed fundamentally so far, that is, to maintain the west-led 'rule-based liberal international order'. The approach of cooperation are also multilateral cooperation mainly within the NATO mechanism, and supplemented by cooperation at national and sub-national levels. However, after the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the defense cooperation between Europe and the US is rapidly strengthening. Although the strategic objectives have remained basically unchanged, there are some new adjustments.

(1) The strategic objective of Europe-US defense cooperation

Although the defense cooperation between Europe and the US has different priorities, it is committed to safeguard the so-called ‘liberal international order’ dominated by the West, especially maintaining and ensuring the global superiority of western values or ideologies has become the most important strategic goal.

The White House declared in a document that ‘The Transatlantic relationship is built on a foundation of shared democratic values. NATO’s strength comes not only from its military might, but also its unity and common purpose founded on respect for democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law...’⁹⁷ The National Security Strategy of the US in 2022 pointed out that the US must build the strongest alliance to safeguard its international status and values. The US will continue to make a defense commitment to NATO, regard the EU as a basic partner to meet international challenges, and support the EU to increase its defense expenditure and achieve energy independence for Russia.⁹⁸ In 2022, the European Union issued the ‘Strategic Compass’ document aimed at promoting European defense integration, which clearly stated that the European-American defense partnership is of great value for maintaining a ‘rules-based international order’ (that is, a ‘liberal international order’ led by the West), and placed NATO in the core to strengthen cooperation in the defense field, expecting to continuously increase the frequency of strategic dialogue between the EU and NATO and continue to deepen defense cooperation with the US.⁹⁹ In January 2023, the EU and NATO issued the third joint statement so far, which stated that ‘the NATO-EU strategic partnership is founded on our shared values, our determination to tackle common challenges and our unequivocal commitment to promote and safeguard peace, freedom and prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area’.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ “Fact Sheet: NATO Summit: Revitalizing the Transatlantic Alliance,” The White House, June 13, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/13/fact-sheet-nato-summit-revitalizing-the-transatlantic-alliance/>.

⁹⁸ “National Security Strategy,” The White House, October 2022, pp. 38-39.

⁹⁹ “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence,” Council of the European Union, March 21, 2022, pp. 53-61.

¹⁰⁰ “Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation, 10 January 2023,” European Council, January 10, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/01/10/eu-nato-joint-declaration-10-january-2023/>

Western scholars and policy analysts regard NATO as the key mechanism of European-American cooperation, and as the leading force to maintain the western liberal international order. Even during the Cold War, western scholars argued that NATO was an institutional platform of the ‘Western security community’ based on freedom and democracy, and the purpose of NATO was to prevent the ‘the others’, who were not free and democratic, from infringing on the ‘Western security community’.¹⁰¹ After the end of the Cold War, although NATO ostensibly tried to become a pan-European security cooperation mechanism, it still took the concept of freedom and democracy rather than the security needs of European countries as the core of accession standard, thus excluding countries such as Russia and Serbia, which were shaped as ‘the other’ during the Cold War.¹⁰² After the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, American and Western scholars further regard NATO’s military aid to Ukraine as a defense of the values of freedom and democracy. Francis Fukuyama, a famous American scholar, directly referred to the Russia-Ukraine war as “Russia’s war against the liberal international order” in his column for the *Financial Times*, and believed that NATO could play a key role in maintaining the liberal international order.¹⁰³ In recent years, Poland, Hungary and Turkey, which have joined NATO, have been accused of ‘democratic backlash’. Some scholars of the Council on Foreign Relations have pointed out that the US and NATO should actively intervene in the internal politics of the countries concerned, and push the countries back to the democratic path by supporting civil organizations and independent media, so as to safeguard the values of freedom and democracy as the root of NATO’s power.¹⁰⁴ The above remarks fully reflect that NATO’s responsibility is to maintain and consolidate the ‘liberal international order’ in Europe

¹⁰¹ Alexandra Gheciu, “NATO, Liberal Internationalism, and the Politics of Imagining the Western Security Community,” *International Journal*, Vol. 74, No. 1, 2019, pp. 32-46.

¹⁰² Michael W. Doyle, “A Liberal View: Preserving and Expanding the Liberal Pacific Order,” in T.V. Paul and John A. Hall eds., *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

¹⁰³ Francis Fukuyama, “Putin’s War on the Liberal Order,” *Financial Times*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/d0331b51-5d0e-4132-9f97-c3f41c7d75b3>.

¹⁰⁴ Matthias Matthijs, “Democracy and the NATO Alliance: Upholding Our Shared Democratic Values,” Council on Foreign Relations, November 13, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/report/democracy-and-nato-alliance-upholding-our-shared-democratic-values>.

and America, and this is also the strategic objective of long-term defense cooperation between Europe and America.

(2) Approaches of transatlantic defense cooperation

The institutionalization of transatlantic defense cooperation began with the ‘EU-NATO Declaration on ESDP’, jointly issued by NATO and the EU in 2002. After the ‘Berlin+’ advocated in 2003, the EU and NATO enhanced cooperation in specific fields and paved the legal basis for providing operational support to the EU from NATO. After Crimea was incorporated into Russia in 2014, NATO and the EU issued two joint statements in 2016 and 2018 respectively, which listed several proposals aimed at enhancing their capabilities and defense cooperation. In January 2023, the EU and NATO issued the third joint statement, vowing to further strengthen and expand the bilateral strategic partnership. Besides defense cooperation between NATO and the EU the transatlantic defense cooperation also includes defense cooperation US in regional and national levels.

First, NATO is the main platform of Europe-US defense cooperation.

As mentioned above, NATO is the core multilateral mechanism of transatlantic defense cooperation. On the one hand, the US military deployment in Europe is completed through the NATO. With the background of geopolitical competition such as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the US is moderately adjusting its military deployment in Europe through NATO. Up until now, the US has stationed troops or deployed weapons in many European countries. Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, the US Department of Defense has sent more than 20,000 military personnel to Europe, thus enhancing the military capabilities in Europe, and bringing the total number of US military personnel in Europe to more than 100,000.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, through NATO, Europe and the US jointly carry out a large number of projects and activities. These include border and refugee management (mainly to combat illegal

¹⁰⁵ “Act Sheet - U.S. Defense Contributions to Europe,” US Department of Defense, June 29, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3078056/fact-sheet-us-defense-contributions-to-europe/>.

human trafficking in the Mediterranean and Aegean regions); dealing with western Balkans affairs, including the coordination of peacekeeping and addressing civil actions in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, and so on. In recent years, the two sides have also strengthened cooperation in global governance and resilience, including joint commitment to fight terrorism and control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and exchange of information to protect civilians from chemical, biological and nuclear attacks. The two sides both joined the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) to jointly support the key work of the forum, including capacity building in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region.¹⁰⁶ The two sides also coordinated on solving the vulnerability of key infrastructure and improving military transportation and supervision. The resilience and protection of key infrastructure is a key part of NATO-EU cooperation at present.¹⁰⁷

Second, cooperation at the bilateral level is also important for transatlantic defense cooperation.

Apart from the NATO mechanism, the US also focuses on increasing bilateral defense cooperation with some European countries. For example, it actively sells weapons to Poland. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US provided Poland with advanced tanks. Because of the increased arms trade in military field, the US declares that ‘Poland has become our most important partner in continental Europe’.¹⁰⁸ In February 2022, the US and Slovakia signed a defense cooperation agreement. At the signing ceremony, US Secretary of State Blinken said that ‘as Slovakia seeks to upgrade its defense capabilities and infrastructure, the agreement paves the way for the United States to support those efforts’.¹⁰⁹ Apart from bilateral cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries, the US has recently strengthened its defense

¹⁰⁶ “Fact Sheet: U.S.-EU Counterterrorism Cooperation,” The White House, March 26, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/26/fact-sheet-us-eu-counterterrorism-cooperation>.

¹⁰⁷ “Relations with the European Union,” NATO, April 4, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49217.htm.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew Karnitschnig and Wojciech Kość, “Meet Europe’s Coming Military Superpower: Poland,” Politico, November 21, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-military-superpower-poland-army/>.

¹⁰⁹ “Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a Signing Ceremony with Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok and Slovak Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad’,” US Department of State, February 3, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-signing-ceremony-with-slovak-foreign-minister-ivan-korcok-and-slovak-defense-minister-jaroslav-nad/>.

cooperation with Nordic countries, including Finland which just joined NATO and Sweden, a quasi-NATO country. From 2021 to 2023, the US negotiated bilateral defense cooperation agreements with Norway, Finland, Denmark and Sweden respectively, in order to realize the extensive military activities of the US in the territories of these countries. For example, the defense cooperation agreement between the US and Norway in 2021 made Norway's four military bases areas that the US could enter and use without hindrance.

The US and some Central and Eastern European countries have also reached a sustained cooperative relationship on military training at the sub-national level. The national guards of different states of the US have reached agreements with some Central and Eastern European countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, to conduct routine military training for these European countries. For example, the National Guard of Ohio trains Serbian army, the National Guard of Minnesota trains Croatian army, and the National Guard of Maryland train is Bosnian and Herzegovina army, and so on. Although the scale of these sub-national cooperation is not large, it is still of great value to promote military mutual trust between the US and these countries.

(3) The focus of defense cooperation is to safeguard the security of Europe

From the short-term perspective, especially considering the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the focus of transatlantic defense cooperation is to pay attention to the security of Europe, rather than project military power overseas. For example, France is a European country with tradition of overseas intervention, but recently France has become more hesitant about overseas military actions and is more inclined to concentrate its resources on local defense. On the eve of the Vilnius NATO Summit in July 2023, French President Macron blocked NATO's proposal to set up an office in Japan, and pointed out that expanding NATO's scope of action to Asia might undermine NATO's defense commitment to Europe. He insisted that NATO should have limited geographical attributes and should not try to become a global organization.¹¹⁰ Traditionally,

¹¹⁰ Stuart Lau and Laura Kayali, "Macron Blocks NATO Outpost in Japan amid Chinese Complaints," Politico, July 7, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-block-nato-outpost-japan-china-complaints/>.

France has a strong military presence in West Africa and stationed troops in many countries in the Sahel. However, from the end of 2022 to the beginning of 2023, the military governments of Mali and Burkina Faso have successively asked France to withdraw its troops from their own countries. After the military coup in Niger in July 2023, France was also required to withdraw its troops from the country. Under this circumstance, President Macron put forward a new policy towards Africa in early 2023, pointing out that the number of troops stationed in Africa will be significantly reduced.¹¹¹ No matter whether it is of France's own accord or being forced, these facts have shown that European countries are paying more attention to the defense at home, while their interest in combating extremist forces in the Sahel is reduced. While European countries' interest in using troops overseas has decreased, Europe and the US have shown a strong willingness to cooperate in ensuring Ukraine's ability to fight against Russia. The two sides took similar or coordinated military actions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict to support Ukraine's resistance, and believe that military aid to Ukraine will fundamentally safeguard the security of Europe. As scholar pointed out, the US and Europe have sought to establish a 'democracy vs. autocracy' framework in the Ukraine crisis, and increase EU's capability in self-defense.¹¹²

The defense cooperation between Europe and the US is facing significant challenges

Although Europe and the US have conducted defense cooperation in various fields and levels, as well as in different forms and degrees, they still face significant challenges mainly in four aspects: the gaps of willingness, goals, interest, and ability between Europe and the US. These four major challenges are difficult to solve perfectly in the foreseeable future.

¹¹¹ "France will reorganize military bases in Africa, says Macron," DW, February 27, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/france-will-reorganize-military-bases-in-africa-says-macron/a-64836040>.

¹¹² Michael Singh, "US-Europe Security Cooperation at the Crossroads," The Washington Institute, November 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/us-europe-security-cooperation-crossroads>.

(1) The Gap of Willingness

Firstly, the willingness of the European Union to pursue strategic autonomy has raised high doubts from the US about the development of European defense capabilities.

Although the US government has historically tended to support most areas of European integration, except for defense integration. The US has always been skeptical about Europe's development of its own independent defense capabilities, and is overall unwilling to support the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) since the 1990s.¹¹³

Since the release of the latest 'EU Global Strategy' in 2016, an increasing call for European strategic autonomy has rising among major EU member states, with defense autonomy being one of its core contents. Nowadays, the autonomy of the EU's defense strategy is widely understood as including three main components: (1) establishing the EU decision-making structure to make independent and rapid decisions in crises; (2) Necessary civilian and military capabilities required for operations; and (3) competitive high-tech European military industrial production capabilities. European strategic autonomy is particularly supported by France. Some French strategists believe that Europe must not rely on the US and acquire stronger autonomous military action capabilities, especially in its southern neighbors and sub-Saharan Africa region, while building a stronger domestic defense industry should be another priority.¹¹⁴

However, European defense autonomy has caused the US to suspect that Europe will attempt to reduce security dependence on the US. In fact, although Europe hopes to be safeguarded by the US, it does not want this safeguard to hinder the future independence of European defense. Some scholars claim that the safeguard or protection of the US is sacrificing the competitiveness and the self-sustainability of European defense industry. "Every weapons sale to Europe weakens the European defense industrial base by depriving a European company of its core

¹¹³ "Transatlantic Defense Cooperation: Implications for U.S. and UK Industry," Covington, June 11, 2021, <https://www.cov.com/en/news-and-insights/insights/2021/06/transatlantic-defense-cooperation-implications-for-us-and-uk-industry>.

¹¹⁴ Erik Brattberg and Tomáš Valášek, "EU Defense Cooperation: Progress amid Transatlantic Concerns," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/11/21/eu-defense-cooperation-progress-amid-transatlantic-concerns-pub-80381>.

market.”¹¹⁵ For the US, it nominally expects Europe to acquire sufficient security defense capabilities at home, but in essence, this capability cannot undermine the authoritative position of the US and NATO in European security affairs.

Therefore, despite the seemingly shared consensus of both sides, there appears a willingness gap that is difficult to bridge-- the US does not support European defense independence from NATO, while Europe hopes to achieve defense independence without adding additional obligations to NATO . This willingness gap means that there are significant conflicts in the defense strategy between Europe and the US, which will seriously affect the further development of defense cooperation between the two sides.

Secondly, the willingness gap within the EU affects defense cooperation between Europe and the US.

Another issue challenging defense cooperation between Europe and the US is the lack of a unified defense strategic culture within the EU, which prevents the EU from reaching a solid and unified stance on its foreign defense policies (including those towards the US). The reason is that EU defense policy is different from economic and trade policy, it is based on intergovernmental coordination, negotiation, and consensus voting system, rather than supranational decision-making procedure. Therefore, EU defense policy is significantly influenced by the sovereignty requirements of member states. This sovereignty claim is referred to by scholars as a “strategic noise”, which means “the profound differences in defense policies across the entire continent, most notably the perception of threats”.¹¹⁶

The nuanced division between Paris and Berlin has blocked the deepening of EU defense cooperation. Paris is looking for new ways to maintain its autonomy in defense policies and fill the strategic vacuum caused by the reducing attention of the US in Europe and its surrounding areas. However, Berlin has issued a warning against this French proposal to make the European Union more independent from the US. Former German Defense Minister Karenbauer stressed

¹¹⁵ Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, “Why European Defense Still Depends on America,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 7, 2023.

¹¹⁶ Sean Monaghan, “Solving Europe’s Defense Dilemma: Overcoming the Challenges to European Defense Cooperation,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/solving-europes-defense-dilemma-overcoming-challenges-european-defense-cooperation>.

that Europe should take on more responsibility in defense affairs, but also emphasized that the US and the NATO remain crucial to European security.¹¹⁷

The significant divergence in security perceptions has led different preferences among EU member states on the extent, scope, and methods of defense cooperation between Europe and the US. The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict further exposed the different perceptions of threats within the European Union, and intensified the controversy on European defense policies and EU-US defense relations between the so-called “Eastern flank” countries, such as Poland and the Baltic States, and Western European countries such as France and Germany. The internal willingness gap will within EU greatly undermine the progress of defense cooperation between Europe and the US.

Thirdly, the relationship between Cyprus and Turkey has to some extent hindered the willingness of Europe and NATO to cooperate.

The territorial dispute between Cyprus and Turkey has been a fairly special challenge for the EU and NATO in defense arena. Cyprus is a member state of the EU while Turkey is a member of NATO. As their territorial disputes are difficult to resolve, there will be problems in the information sharing between EU and NATO. More importantly is that Turkey developed a pattern of systematic objection to NATO languages calling for cooperation with the European Union, while Greece and Cyprus is reluctant to allow Turkey to participate in EU projects.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the territorial dispute between Turkey and Cyprus has, to a certain extent, made it difficult for NATO projects to pass within the EU. Either Turkey would deny NATO cooperation that is beneficial to the EU, or Cyprus and Greece in the EU would veto NATO projects that Turkey participates. Any of the scenario will hinder further cooperation between the EU and NATO.

Recent cases have also shown that apart from the territorial dispute between Turkey and Cyprus, Turkey’s resent due to its long-term failure to make progress in EU accession will also impact the relationship between EU member states and NATO. As a retaliation to some extent,

¹¹⁷ Barbara Lippert et al eds., “European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests,” German Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP Research Paper 4, March 2019.

¹¹⁸ Mathieu Droin, “NATO and the European Union: The Burden of Sharing,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-european-union-burden-sharing>.

Turkey tried to block Finland and Sweden's application to join the NATO after Russia-Ukraine conflict, which complicated the process of the "Northern Enlargement" of NATO, and triggered disputes within the EU.¹¹⁹ This further proves that the Turkey factor will negatively impact the willingness and possibility of European and US defense cooperation.

(2) The Gap of Goals

Firstly, there is a gap between the US and Europe on the target of defense cooperation.

For a long time, there have been different strategic targets of their own defense development between the US and Europe. For the US, its biggest geopolitical threat currently comes from Asia, as evidenced by the 'Asia Pacific Rebalance' policy implemented during Obama's presidency. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict 2022, the US has even escalated its containment actions against China, including strengthening relations with its East Asian allies, investing more resource in the Taiwan issue, and getting more closely involved in the issue regarding South China Sea. Even facing the Russia-Ukraine conflict, most people in Washington still believe that China is the aim of the US' strategic priority, and the US has greater interests in Asia.¹²⁰

However, Europe is worried that as the US is shifting its defense capabilities from Europe to Asia, Europe will have to face the defense threats from Russia alone. Therefore, Europe's interest in responding to the so-called 'China threat' through transatlantic defense cooperation is not as strong as the US. There is a case that at the NATO summit in July 2023, some European countries, represented by France, firmly rejected the establishment of a NATO office in Japan. French President Emmanuel Macron clearly stated that NATO's activities should be limited in the geographical scope of North Atlantic, rather than expanding into the East Asia region.¹²¹ Although this can be seen as a conceptual divergence within NATO, it also represents a gap in goals between Europe and the US. This suggests that some European countries, such as France,

¹¹⁹ Natasha Turak, "Conflict, Politics and History: Why Turkey is Standing in the Way of Sweden and Finland's NATO Bids," CNBC, May 23, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/23/why-turkey-doesnt-want-sweden-finland-to-join-nato.html>.

¹²⁰ Michael Singh, "US-Europe Security Cooperation at the Crossroads," The Washington Institute, November 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/us-europe-security-cooperation-crossroads>.

¹²¹ Stuart Lau and Laura Kayali, "Macron Blocks NATO Outpost in Japan amid Chinese Complaints," Politico, July 7, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-block-nato-outpost-japan-china-complaints/>.

believes that NATO should focus on preventing the threat from Russia rather than responding to the so-called ‘challenge’ from China.

Secondly, there is a gap in the actions achieved through cooperation between the two parties.

Under the pursuit of strategic autonomy, Europe hopes to promote European defense integration through transatlantic defense cooperation, while the US hopes through the cooperation to reduce the burden on the US within the NATO framework or support the enhancement of its operational capabilities in other regions. Therefore, apart from the willingness gap in defense cooperation, there are also differences between the European and American sides in the specific goals achieved in defense cooperation.

For example, the EU has taken many measures to strengthen defense autonomy, including the development of plans such as the ‘Strategic Compass’, and the establishment of Permanent Structural Cooperation (PESCO) as well as the European Defense Fund (EDF). Although these measures are still in their infancy or initial stages, their advancement may substantially advance the integration of European defense.¹²² However, these measures are being questioned by the US. For example, the US Department of Defense officials once referred to PESCO as a ‘poison pill’ because non-EU defense enterprises (even their European subsidiaries) have been excluded from PESCO’s funding plan of the European military industry. The US government hopes that its military industries, as well as the military industries of non-EU NATO member countries such as Norway and UK, can be allowed to participate in the PESCO decision-making and execution process. Yet, EU member states have once refused to sign bilateral arrangements with the US due to concerns about the over-influence of the US military industry on Europe.¹²³ Although in the end, the EU and the US ultimately signed an agreement that permits the US to join the

¹²² Erik Brattberg and Tomáš Valášek, “EU Defense Cooperation: Progress Amid Transatlantic Concerns,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 21, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/11/21/eu-defense-cooperation-progress-amid-transatlantic-concerns-pub-80381>.

¹²³ Ibid.

operation of PESCO, the US is still excluded from the research and development field of Europe's military industry.¹²⁴

The above cases indicate that the goal of Europe in transatlantic defense is to promote strategic autonomy, especially in the field of defense capabilities, while continuing to ensure the security guarantee of the US. However, the US hopes to suppress the ability of European defense independence in their cooperation and gain relevant benefits from it.

(3) The gap of Interest

The potential development of defense capabilities of Europe creates a huge military industry market. With the development of European defense integration, the EU is leveraging a huge European military market. However, to some extent, there is significant competition between the defense industry in Europe and that in the US. This market competition will prevent further cooperation between the two sides in multiple fields such as weapons development, procurement, and deployment.

Firstly, the UE's restrict subsidies policy of military research and development, and competition for new markets will hinder further cooperation between the two sides.

The EU is promoting its military industry market through defense integration measures. One important case is the launch of the European Defense Fund. In 2021, the European Union launched the fund, which is part of the EU's medium to long-term budget. However, basically non-EU military enterprises (including US military enterprises) are excluded from getting the subsidy of the European Defense Fund. . Considering that France has never wished the US to interfere with the European defense integration process, the possibility of US companies receiving huge EU subsidies is low. In addition, non-EU enterprises to receive subsidies needs to report to the EU about its new weapon research and development plans. The strict conditions will restrict American companies from entering the European military research and development market.

¹²⁴ Jacopo Barigazzi, "UK and US Will be Allowed to Join Some EU Military Projects," Politico, October 1, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/pesco-military-uk-and-us-will-be-allowed-to-join-some-eu-military-projects/>.

Of course, the EU's strict restrictions for using the European Defense Fund is clearly opposed by the US. It clearly stated that it will oppose any attempts and actions by Europe to obstruct transatlantic defense industry connections. The US insists that the European Union should allow third countries to participate in the European Defense Fund, in order to ensure that American companies can 'freely and fairly enter (the European market) and maintain their competitiveness'.¹²⁵ Despite recent progress in negotiations between the two sides in this field, their conflicts on the issue still exist. In short, the competition for huge profits in the military industry market will hinder many cooperation opportunities between the two sides, from weapon research and development to military procurement and deployment.

Secondly, the US's import restrictions and export control policies hinder both sides from cooperation in weapons procurement and military research and development.

Based on the 'Buy American Act' passed during World War II, the US greatly restricted the opportunities for military products from non-US market to enter the US. The US has established strict domestic standards, which stopped European military products entering the US. However, the European Union currently does not have restrictions policy similar to those in the US on the procurement of military products. As was pointed out by the European Commission, American military companies have unobstructed access to Europe, and 80% of defense orders in Europe are obtained by American companies. On the contrary, European companies hold only 0.17% of the US procurement and research and development spending on weapons. Between 2014 and 2016, the US exported \$62.9 billion worth of weapons and equipment to the European Union, while the EU only exported \$7.6 billion worth of weapons to the US.¹²⁶ Therefore, the policy differences between the US and Europe in export controls and military procurement have led to significant imbalance in bilateral trade between Europe and the US in the field of military industry, which will prevent further development of the two sides in the field of military trade.

Apart from military trade, the EU and the US also conducted protectionist measures against each other in defense research and development. Given the existing export control measures in

¹²⁵ Rachel Ellehuus, "Avoiding Barriers to Greater Transatlantic Defense Cooperation," Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/avoiding-barriers-greater-transatlantic-defense-cooperation>.

¹²⁶ Daniel Fiott, "The Poison Pill: EU Defence on US Terms?" European Union Institute for Security Studies, June 2019, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/7%20US-EU%20defence%20industries.pdf>.

the US, higher levels of information sharing and cooperation between American and European industries are restricted. In converse, the US has lifted the restrictions on defense technology sharing among members of the AUKUS Group, making the issue of technology sharing between Europe and the US more prominent.¹²⁷ Faced with the sharing of defense technology between the US, Britain, and Australia, the European Union has the will to develop its own military industry system through strategic autonomy, which will enhance Europe's military technology research and development capabilities. However, it will lead to increasing technological differences between Europe and the US, and technical cooperation in the military industry between the two sides may encounter bottlenecks.

(4)The Gap of Capability

Firstly, the EU's defense capabilities are insufficient.

According to NATO requirements, the total defense expenditure of member states should reach 2% of national annual GDP. However, many NATO members in the EU could not demand this requirement for many years. Due to insufficient expenditures, the military capacity of European countries has decreased by 35% in the past two decades. Taking the year 2020 as an example, the total defense expenditure of European member states in NATO was \$225 billion, only approximately half of the US.¹²⁸ Therefore, Europe's limited defense spending is exacerbating the capacity gap between Europe and the US, making the EU dependent on the US' support in key areas such as air-to-air refueling, strategic air transportation, and reconnaissance and intelligence capabilities. In other words, due to insufficient defense spending by European countries, they are unable to match the US military in terms of weapons and equipment, intelligence collection, training, and combat capabilities, thereby constraining the depth of cooperation between them in the field of defense.

To make matters worse, Brexit has a fatal impact on European defense capabilities. After Brexit, Europe lost support from its second largest military power in terms of budget, military technology research and development capabilities, as well as operational capabilities. After

¹²⁷ Brian Burton, "Europe Should Not Try to Go It Alone on Defense," War on the Rocks, May 18, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/05/europe-should-not-try-to-go-it-alone-on-defense/>.

¹²⁸ "Funding NATO," NATO, June 1, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67655.htm.

Brexit, the EU lost about 40% of its defense research and development capabilities and about one-third of its air transportation capabilities. Military experts claimed that without the involvement of the UK, the EU's ability to undertake conflict prevention or peacekeeping missions, or respond to multiple crises simultaneously, is questionable.¹²⁹ The negative impact of Brexit on the EU's defense capabilities is evident, which will also hinder the potential for military cooperation between Europe and the US.

After the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the European Union and EU countries was not able to continue carrying out military operations in Afghanistan independently, which is the latest case of insufficient military capabilities of EU countries if compared to the US. Michael Hanlon, an expert at the Brookings Institution, pointed out that the operation in Afghanistan does not require high-tech equipment or sea resources, however, after the withdrawal of the US, European countries participating in the operation through NATO did not step forward and retain military presence in key areas related to European security, which indicates that they were not adequately prepared in terms of equipment reserves and were unable to carry out such operations.¹³⁰ In short, the defense capabilities of the European Union and its member states are generally unable to match those of the US, which limits the further improvement of cooperation between the two sides.

Secondly, there is a huge gap in military interoperability between Europe and the US.

Transatlantic defense cooperation requires high interoperability, which is also a prerequisite for the US to make strategic commitments to European defense. To some extent, NATO has laid the foundation for interoperability in European and American defense cooperation. However, according to a 2017 assessment, EU members have a total of 178 different types of weapons, 148 types more than the US. In terms of specific weapon types, EU member states have 29 different types of destroyers, 17 types of main battle tanks, and 20 types of fighter jets, while the US only has 4, 1, and 6 such weapons respectively. So far, the EU has been unable to overcome the

¹²⁹ Erik Brattberg and Tomáš Valášek, "EU Defense Cooperation: Progress Amid Transatlantic Concerns," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 21, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/11/21/eu-defense-cooperation-progress-amid-transatlantic-concerns-pub-80381>.

¹³⁰ Giovanna De Maio, "Opportunities to Deepen NATO-EU Cooperation," Brookings, December 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FP_20211203_nato_eu_cooperation_demaio.pdf.

fragmentation of the aforementioned weapons.¹³¹ Apart from the gap in armaments, the gap in artificial intelligence across the Atlantic is also widening, which is exacerbating the gap in military interoperability capabilities between Europe and the US.¹³²

Additionally, interoperability also relies on smooth information exchange. However, the information sharing between Europe and America are limited. The lack of secure communication systems between the European Union and NATO to share information can lead to an atmosphere of distrust in intelligence sharing when political tensions arise between the two sides. This will exacerbate communication difficulties in Europe and the US, thereby hindering their daily cooperation capabilities and their ability to coordinate and take joint response measures in real crisis situations.¹³³

A European think tank has pointed out that if the EU wants to become a reliable participant in crisis management (especially in neighboring countries' crisis management) in transatlantic relations, it should be able to operate across the spectrum in the fields of air, land, sea, cyberspace, and space. However, this cannot be achieved without larger investments in the European defense sector. It can be seen that there are gaps and diversities in the interoperability between Europe and the US in the field of defense, such as weapons, equipment, information, standards, etc. Before ensuring unified military procurement actions within the EU and establishing good communication channels between Europe and the US, this high-quality interoperability between Europe and the US will face great challenges.

Thirdly, the lack of institutional cooperation between Europe and the US.

There is a certain degree of military exchange mechanism between Europe and the US. The Trade and Technology Council (TTC) established in 2021 can indirectly address some of the challenges related to military technology and military industry trade between the two sides, but

¹³¹ Sean Monaghan, "Solving Europe's Defense Dilemma: Overcoming the Challenges to European Defense Cooperation," Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/solving-europes-defense-dilemma-overcoming-challenges-european-defense-cooperation>.

¹³² Ulrike Franke, "Artificial Divide: How Europe and America Could Clash over AI," European Council on Foreign Relations, January 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Artificial-divide-How-Europe-and-America-could-clash-over-AI.pdf>.

¹³³ Giovanna De Maio, "Opportunities to Deepen NATO-EU Cooperation," Brookings, December 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FP_20211203_nato_eu_cooperation_demaio.pdf.

this is not the main communication and coordination mechanism in the bilateral defense field. TTC mainly focuses on a wider range of civilian-related affairs.

Another important direct communication mechanism is the linkage mechanism established between the EU and NATO. At present, it has become normal for high-level EU and NATO officials to invite each other to attend summits and ministerial meetings. Due to the contradiction between Cyprus and Turkey within NATO, the EU and NATO heads of state and government can only hold informal meetings in the form of ‘transatlantic dinner’, rather than the potential higher level formal coordination mechanism that may be rejected by the two NATO members mentioned above. The mechanisms between the EU and NATO also include the permanent contact group between the EU Military Staff and NATO established in November 2005. At present, both sides have established an exchange meeting between NATO’s North Atlantic Council (NAC) and the European Union’s Political and Security Council (PSC), but the convening of this meeting is not very regular.¹³⁴ In addition, in April 2023, the European Defense Agency and the US Department of Defense officially established a cooperation framework by signing an Administrative Arrangement (AA), which will attempt to strengthen transatlantic defense cooperation in specific areas such as information exchange.

Despite the existence of various defense exchange mechanisms at different levels and institutions mentioned above, these mechanisms are either informal, non-standard, or at a lower level, which cannot replace high-level direct military exchange and cooperation mechanisms between transatlantic countries, and their exchange areas are limited. Taking the exchange between the European Defense Agency and the US Department of Defense as an example, this exchange mechanism excludes any possibility aimed at capacity development or research and technology cooperation, as the EU has not yet accepted requests from the US to participate in the research and development of European military technology.¹³⁵ In short, the cooperation mechanisms mentioned above are at the working level rather than the strategic level, therefore

¹³⁴ Mathieu Droin, “NATO and the European Union: The Burden of Sharing,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 17, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-european-union-burden-sharing>.

¹³⁵ “EU-US Defence Cooperation: Council Approves Administrative Arrangement between the European Defence Agency and the Department of Defence,” European Council, February 6, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/06/eu-us-defence-cooperation-council-approves-administrative-arrangement-between-the-european-defence-agency-and-the-department-of-defence/>.

they cannot fundamentally solve the institutional communication deficit in defense cooperation between them.

The impacts of Europe-US defense cooperation on China

Generally speaking, the strengthening of defense cooperation between Europe and the US has a negative impact on China. The enhanced policy coordination between Europe and the US in the field of defense could force Europe to pick sides, and to intensify the game with China in areas such as Indo-Pacific and export control in order to maintain the 'liberal international order'. However, the EU is not willing to fall into full-scale confrontation with China. The limitation of its own defense capability and the structural differences with the US also restrict the motivation for the EU to confront China. There is still room for cooperation between China and the EU in the field of defense and military.

(1)The deepening of defense cooperation between Europe and the US has a negative impact on China

This negative impact is mainly reflected in increasing the instability and insecurity of the international situation at the international and regional levels, and strengthening the restrictions or even containment of high technology in China at the bilateral level.

First, from a strategic point of view, the defense cooperation between Europe and the US is the most powerful pillar of the Western international order, which is not conducive to the construction of a fairer and opener international environment that China expects.

The fundamental purpose of transatlantic security cooperation is to ensure the consolidation and maintenance of the west-led 'liberal international order', which is equal to consolidating and maintaining the dominant position of the West. The nature of the western liberal international order includes promoting western rules, norms and ideology around the world. However, this dominant position of the West has a negative impact on the long-term development of China and even Global South countries in the world, and is not conducive to building a new international

order. Under the liberal international order, China has been portrayed as an undemocratic and illiberal ‘the other’. China’s domestic governance, The Belt and Road Initiative, and other international initiatives, and even the normal cooperation between China and EU member States like Hungary and Greece, have been criticized by European and American countries, while China's objective achievements in promoting global economic development, coping with climate change and South-South cooperation have been selectively ignored.¹³⁶ The strengthening of defense cooperation between Europe and the US will undoubtedly expand the negative aspects in the Europe-China relations.

One of the most obvious cases is that the cooperation and convergence between Europe and the US in the field of security and defense are causing the ‘pan-securitization’ of their China policies, which is not conducive to the formation of an international environment beneficial to a rising China, and will bring competition between China and the West for the right to shape the international order. In 2022, NATO's strategic concept named China a ‘systemic challenge’ for the first time, and attacked China for ‘subverting the rules-based international order’, which ‘challenges our interests, security and values’, highlighting the attempts of the US and Europe to stigmatize China as a challenger to the international order.¹³⁷

Furthermore, the impact of defense cooperation between Europe and the US on China is not limited to the security field, but is also worsening the cooperation between China and Europe in the economic and cultural fields. In its 2022 strategic concept, NATO attacked China for seeking to control key technologies and industries, key infrastructure, strategic raw materials and their supply chains will enhance its influence.¹³⁸ This reflects that Europe and America’s defense cooperation has a spill-over effect to the economic and trade fields. In recent years, Europe and the US have repeatedly imposed sanctions and boycotts on Huawei, a Chinese telecommunications company, and interfered with the normal business activities of Chinese

¹³⁶ Chris J. Dolan, *The Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy and NATO: Continuity and Change From The Cold War to the Rise of China*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. 165-174.

¹³⁷ “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, June 29, 2022.

¹³⁸ “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, June 29, 2022.

enterprises in building roads and upgrading ports in Europe to achieve their so-called ‘de-risking’ strategic goals, and these actions are mainly promoted by military of Europe and the US.

Second, the cooperation between Europe and America in Indo-Pacific region through NATO may increase, which will worsen the security situation around China.

In recent years, both Europe and the US have launched the Indo-Pacific strategy, and their strategic attention to the Indo-Pacific region has gradually increased. Although there are differences between the two sides in how to deal with China and other countries in Indo-Pacific, they share the same goal in terms of reducing their dependence on China, maintaining the superiority of western security forces in this region, and intervening in regional affairs to consolidate regional order beneficial to western interests, which makes it possible for Europe and the US to adopt joint or similar defense policies to China.

Under the background, Europe and the US actively promote cooperation in Indo-Pacific, the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept brought the Indo-Pacific region into the scope of attention for the first time, pointing out that the development of the situation in the Indo-Pacific region will have a direct impact on the security of Europe and the Atlantic. NATO will strengthen dialogue and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region to meet cross-regional security challenges and safeguard common security interests.¹³⁹ In 2022, the NATO Madrid Summit invited leaders of Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand for the first time to participate in order to emphasize the important value of cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region to NATO.¹⁴⁰ In addition to actively carrying out regional cooperation in Indo-Pacific within the framework of NATO, the EU and the US also established a high-level consultation mechanism on Indo-Pacific affairs in 2021, and actively engaged in dialogue on Indo-Pacific affairs and unified their positions on a semi-annual basis.¹⁴¹ In March 2023, the European Union and the US held the first joint military exercise in

¹³⁹ “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, June 29, 2022.

¹⁴⁰ “NATO Leaders Meet with Key Partners to Address Global Challenges, Indo-Pacific Partners Participate in a NATO Summit for the First Time,” NATO, June 29, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_197287.htm?selectedLocale=en.

¹⁴¹ “EU-U.S.: Consultations between the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and European External Action Service Secretary General Stefano Sannino,” European Union External Action, December 2, 2022,

the Indian Ocean, marking the further defense cooperation between the two sides in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁴²

Stimulated by geopolitical competition and confrontation, Europe and the US have carried out common or similar military actions in the neighboring areas of China, including the participation of European countries in the US-led joint military exercises in the Pacific in 2023, the freedom of navigation actions carried out by EU member countries in the Taiwan strait and South China Sea, and the initial actions taken by the EU to strengthen cooperation in the security field with Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia and other countries.

In addition, Europe and the US have also strengthened cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region in international regimes such as G7, within which the European countries and the US have reached many China-related consensuses in the field of security. In recent years, these consensuses include the so-called ‘commitment for peace’ on the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. They are also manifested in jointly strengthening defense cooperation with countries that have territorial disputes with China, especially Japan, particularly reflected in Hiroshima G7 Summit in 2023.¹⁴³ Europe and the US have extended their security tentacles around China through cooperation, which is undoubtedly aggravating the security tension in East Asia and worsening the security environment around China.

Third, at the bilateral level, Europe and the US are already strengthening restrictions on high-tech technology transfer towards China.

High technology is the foundation of the development of military capability in modern time. In response to the rise of China, Europe and the US jointly established the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) in 2019 to coordinate their policy in the fields of trade and high technology. The

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-us-consultations-between-us-deputy-secretary-state-wendy-sherman-and-european-external_en.

¹⁴² “US: First Ever Joint Naval Exercise Conducted between the EU and U.S.,” European Union External Action, March 24, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/us-first-ever-joint-naval-exercise-conducted-between-eu-and-us_en.

¹⁴³ “G7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communiqué,” The White House, May 20, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/g7-hiroshima-leaders-communique/>.

US has been trying to turn TTC into a tool for putting pressure on China, and to promote strategic export control to China under the TTC mechanism.¹⁴⁴

Both Europe and America have been paying special attention to the development and application of ‘civil-military integration’ technologies in China. In order to prevent China from acquiring high technology and using it in the military field, Europe and the US have taken joint or similar actions in the high-tech field. They continue to jointly maintain the arms embargo against China, and at the same time, it seems they will take similar actions in the field of education, adopting increasingly strict entry policies for Chinese students in the field of high technology. The recent focus of Europe and the US is to strengthen the restrictions on semiconductors and related technologies. In October 2022, the Bureau of Industry and Security of the US Department of Commerce issued a new export control regulation, the purpose of which was to cut off all possibilities for China to acquire high-end chips for artificial intelligence and supercomputers.¹⁴⁵ As the Dutch company ASML is an important producer of lithography machine for manufacturing high-end chips, the US actively lobbied the Netherlands to jointly implement export control to China. In June 2023, the Netherlands officially announced its export control policy to China, restricting the export of high-end lithography machine to China.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the current export control of high-end technologies has become a new hot spot for European and American cooperation to contain China.

(2)The severity of the impact of defense cooperation between Europe and the US should not be overstated

¹⁴⁴ Julian Ringhof, “Setting the Tone: The Value of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council,” European Council on Foreign Relations, December 9, 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/setting-the-tone-the-value-of-the-eu-us-trade-and-technology-council/>.

¹⁴⁵ “Implementation of Additional Export Controls: Certain Advanced Computing and Semiconductor Manufacturing Items; Supercomputer and Semiconductor End Use; Entity List Modification,” Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security, 15 CFR Parts 734, 736, 740, 742, 744, 762, 772, and 774.

¹⁴⁶ “Government Publishes Additional Export Measures for Advanced Semiconductor Manufacturing Equipment,” Government of the Netherlands, June 30, 2023, <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2023/06/30/government-publishes-additional-export-measures-for-advanced-semiconductor-manufacturing-equipment>.

Due to the gap between Europe and the US in the goal, willingness, interest and capability of defense cooperation, and the structural conflict in defense cooperation between Europe and the US, the severity of joint measures taken by Europe and the US against China is limited.

First, the EU has no strong desire to confront China in the field of security and defense.

As was mentioned above, at present, the EU has no strong interest well as capability to extend its military power to areas outside Europe. Although the EU and some of its member states have formulated their own Indo-Pacific strategy, these strategies does not focus on military intervention.¹⁴⁷ Even if the EU and its member states would increase their military involvement in the Indo-Pacific region in the future and partially cooperate with the US to carry out military operations, the EU's military involvement in Indo-Pacific will not be too deep. In the field of security and defense, the EU is more inclined to remain neutral between China and the US, so as to avoid falling into a high-cost, low-yield and unnecessary all-round military confrontation with China. A poll shows that the vast majority of EU people believe that China and the EU are indispensable partners, and there is no need for direct conflict between the two sides.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, the military cooperation between Europe and the US outside Europe, especially conventional military cooperation, will be relatively limited, and related cooperation may continue to focus on technical and non-traditional military fields, such as logistics, justice, training, peacekeeping and climate change, etc. This means that the military cooperation between Europe and the US outside Europe will still be restricted in the foreseeable future, based on the limited military capabilities of the EU and its limited interest in military intervention outside Europe.

¹⁴⁷ European Commission, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Jana Puglierin and Pawel Zerka, "Keeping America Close, Russia Down, and China Far Away: How Europeans Navigate a Competitive World," European Council on Foreign Relations, June 7, 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/keeping-america-close-russia-down-and-china-far-away-how-europeans-navigate-a-competitive-world/>.

Second, even if the EU has the will to project military forces around China, it will be difficult to form an effective military capability in a short time, and so will its member states.

As the EU's defense force has not been fully developed, so far the EU has no army capable of rapid response, and many military developments are still in paper or trapped in endless disputes. This means that even if the EU has the will to contain China militarily through security cooperation with the US, it still lacks sufficient capacity. For example, in recent years, the French have held 'La Perouse' joint maritime exercises in Indo-Pacific region,¹⁴⁹ and jointly held the 'Garuda' air force exercise with India.¹⁵⁰ Germany sent six fighter planes and 250 soldiers to Australia to participate in joint exercises in 2022.¹⁵¹ In 2019 and 2023, French warships also crossed the Taiwan Strait. These activities are regarded as major extraterritorial military actions by France and Germany. However, if we compare them with American military actions in Indo-Pacific region, we can find that French and German military actions cannot be compared with the US in terms of scale and intensity. In other words, the security threat brought by Europe is not significant in the current stage, and Europe's participation in the China-US strategic competition through cooperation with the US will not markedly change the power balance between China and the US.

Third, the structural challenges of Europe-American defense cooperation will also restrict the depth of cooperation between the two sides.

Some structural differences will limit the potential of cooperation between the two sides. The most important thing is the development of European strategic autonomy. Even if the two sides can find a basically acceptable situation in the future- for example, European defense integration becomes a supplement to NATO's capabilities- this still does not mean that the US will be fully

¹⁴⁹ "Indo-Pacific - Multilateral exercise La Perouse," France in Australia, March 14, 2023, <https://au.ambafrance.org/Indo-Pacific-Multilateral-exercise-La-Perouse>.

¹⁵⁰ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "India, France Conclude Garuda Exercise 2022," The Diplomat, November 18, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/11/india-france-conclude-garuda-exercise-2022/>.

¹⁵¹ Matthias von Hein, "German Military Ramps up Indo-Pacific Presence," DW, March 9, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-military-ramps-up-presence-in-indo-pacific/a-63005063>.

assured of the independence of European defense capabilities. The independent military capability of the EU may also provide an opportunity for Europe to break away from the military control of the US at a specific moment. This means that the development of European defense capability under the guidance of European strategic autonomy will always bring potential harm to the necessary mutual trust in European and American defense cooperation.

In addition, the interest gap between the two sides cannot be easily eliminated. France is a strong advocate of European defense autonomy, and the logic behind France's action is not only political will but also economic interests. As the most powerful military power in the EU after Brexit, France has the most advanced defense technology, R&D capability and manufacturing industry in European defense industry, and its domestic defense industry has more than 5,000 enterprises and 400,000 jobs, so it will benefit greatly from an independent European defense system.¹⁵² France and the US have fierce competition for interests in terms of R&D, procurement and deployment of military weapons. With the background of complex interest calculation, the military industry competition between Europe and the US will damage the military procurement cooperation and the development of weapons interoperability, and further hinder the ability of both sides to enhance extraterritorial defense operations.

Fourth, there is still room for security cooperation between China, Europe and the US.

Although the strengthened security cooperation between Europe and the US will pose a challenge to China, there is still room for possible tripartite cooperation between China, Europe and the US, especially in non-traditional security fields, including opportunities for cooperation in counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, non-proliferation, maritime governance. In the field of counter-terrorism and peacekeeping, Chinese navy have conducted dialogues and exchanges with NATO and European navy in the Horn of Africa anti-piracy operations, and have also conducted joint anti-piracy drills with NATO.¹⁵³ In the field of non-proliferation, in early 2022,

¹⁵² "Defence Industries and Technologies," France Diplomacy, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/economic-diplomacy-foreign-trade/supporting-french-businesses-abroad/strategic-sector-support/defence-industries-and/>.

¹⁵³ "China Navy Holds First Joint Anti-piracy Drill with NATO," Reuters, November 27, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-nato-idUSKBN0TG08H20151127>.

the leaders of the five permanent members of the United Nations jointly issued “Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races”, which established consensus on preventing nuclear war, nuclear proliferation, nuclear arms race and promoting nuclear disarmament. In the field of ocean governance, China and Europe have established a ‘blue partnership’ to promote dialogue and cooperation between the two sides. In September 2023, the second China-EU Blue Partnership Forum was held again after four years, and the two sides reached broad consensus on dealing climate change, establishing early warning mechanism of marine disasters, and developing ecological fisheries. In the same year, during French President Macron’s state visit to China, the joint statement signed by the two sides mentioned that China and France agreed to deepen exchanges on strategic issues, especially the dialogue between the Southern Theatre Command of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and the Command of French Forces in the Asia-Pacific Zone (ALPACI).¹⁵⁴ This kind of dialogue is rare in the relations between China and other countries, which shows that the cooperation between China and France in ocean governance has the potential to extend from low politics to high politics.

Conclusion

Based on the above analysis, the article would draw the following basic conclusions. First, under the background of great transformation in the current international situation, the defense cooperation between Europe and the US will continue to deepen. However, considering the existence of structural challenges, the cooperation between the two sides will reach a limit and then difficult to move forward, and may even stimulate some contradictions between the two sides in the field of defense. Second, the defense cooperation between Europe and the US is strategically based on the fundamental need to maintain the Western-led international order, so it will hinder the role of “Global South” countries in building a new international order from a macro perspective. The deepened cooperation between Europe and the US in the security and

¹⁵⁴ “Joint Statement by the French Republic and the People’s Republic of China,” France in Hong Kong, <https://hongkong.consulfrance.org/Joint-statement-by-the-French-Republic-and-the-People-s-Republic-of-China>.

defense field will bring more challenges to the efforts of ‘Global South’ countries to establish a new international political and economic order, and will add more instability to the international community. Third, although the defense cooperation between Europe and the US will bring about negative effects to China, China still has the opportunity to seek cooperation with Europe and the US in the defense field, especially the possibility of cooperation in global governance and non-traditional security fields.

Typically, in consideration of that China and Europe do not have direct conflict of geopolitical interests, and their leaders address to their “partnership for peace”,¹⁵⁵ it is in the interest of both China and Europe to maintain a peaceful international situation and to avoid camp confrontation, they should work together to make sure that the development of transatlantic defense cooperation will not do harm to the cooperation between them. For that, both should understand the security concerns of each other, especially, it’s a constructive idea that the EU tries to avoid expanding the transatlantic security cooperation into East Asia or Indo-Pacific. The ‘Asianization’ of NATO is not only beyond Europe’s defense capability at the current stage, but also against Europe’s security interest, causing unnecessary security standoff between China and Europe and instability in Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the Chinese government should pay greater attention to the EU’s pursuit of defense autonomy, and support the EU’s endeavor towards multi-polarization. If the EU could become more autonomic in defense affairs, it will be easier for the EU to be independent in its relationship with China, and there will be higher possibility for China and EU to pursue mutually beneficial bilateral relation. Furthermore, at the current stage, as several wars and conflicts with global significance have broken out on the Eurasia continent, China, the EU and the US should set aside their differences and debates to seek common ground on the peaceful resolution of Russia-Ukraine conflict, Israel-Palestine conflict, and other regional hotspots. These complex and intense conflicts can only be settled with help of multilateral endeavor, and the three powers have the responsibility to work together on peacekeeping for the common good of the human kind, by which the whole world would be benefited from the possible triangular defense and strategic cooperation among China, the EU and the US.

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