

Making Europe Defend Again: The Relaunch of European Defense Cooperation from a Neoclassical Realist Perspective

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Abstract: This article examines the relaunch of European defense cooperation since 2016 from the perspective of neoclassical realism, a theoretical approach to the study of foreign policy which explores how domestic political and ideational factors shape national foreign policy responses to international systemic pressures. It argues that while Europe's changing geostrategic and security environment has created incentives for increased defense cooperation, explaining the form and content of this cooperation requires understanding the preferences of key European states, especially France and Germany. The article focuses on two new forms of European defense cooperation: PESCO and the E21, the former inside the EU institutional framework and the latter outside of it. The article argues that these initiatives are explained by the contrast between French and German preferences on defense cooperation, which in turn reflect their divergent national security priorities but also their different strategic cultures, including their differing perspectives on European integration.

Keywords: European defense cooperation, neoclassical realism, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), European Intervention Initiative (E21), Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), European Union (EU).

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The past several years have witnessed renewed progress on European defense cooperation. Key steps taken include the creation of a European Defense Fund (EDF), which for the first time will use money from the EU budget to support member state investment in joint research and development of military equipment and technologies, and the launching of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which allows willing member states meeting certain defense-related commitments to more closely cooperate in such areas as

military training, capability development, operational readiness, and cyber defense. Ten European states, including Britain, have also agreed to a French government plan – the European Intervention Initiative (E2I) – to create, outside of the EU framework, a joint military force that could rapidly deploy to crisis situations near Europe’s borders. Reflecting on these and other initiatives, one European expert opined that “[a]ll in all, there is [now] more energy and interest in European defense cooperation than at any time since 1999–2004, when the present institutional architecture of [the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy, CSDP] was established” (Bentinck 2017). Going even further, in a speech in November 2018 French President Emmanuel Macron proclaimed that when it comes to European defense cooperation, “*We have done more in a year and a half than what has been done since the 1950s*” (Brzozowski 2018).

What explains the “relaunch” (Howorth 2017a: 193) of European defense cooperation? Why is it happening now, and why has it taken the institutional form that it has? This article attempts to answer these questions from the perspective of neoclassical realism, a theoretical approach to the study of foreign policy which explores the interaction of international systemic pressures and domestic political and ideational factors, examining how the latter shape national foreign policy responses to the former. In particular, it focuses on PESCO and the E2I, which along with the EDF are arguably the most significant recent initiatives in this area because they entail the creation of new operational capabilities which have the potential to enhance Europe’s strategic autonomy. The article argues that these new initiatives stem from the interplay of two key factors: 1) significant changes in Europe’s geostrategic and security environment which have created incentives for increased European defense cooperation; and 2) the different preferences concerning defense cooperation of France and Germany, the EU’s most powerful and important member states. These different preferences, in turn, reflect divergent national security priorities but also different strategic cultures, including differing perspectives on European integration. Also influencing developments is the EU institutional system, which affects intergovernmental bargaining outcomes and the possibilities for defense cooperation within the EU framework, and thus the attractiveness of defense cooperation outside the EU.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section briefly reviews various theoretical approaches to explaining the creation and development of CSDP since the late 1990s, and makes the case for neoclassical realism as the most appropriate model for analyzing and explaining European defense cooperation. This is followed by an analytical section on the relaunch of European defense cooperation that contains three sub-sections. The first presents an overview of recent international systemic developments, both global and regional, which have created incentives for increased European defense cooperation. The second examines new defense cooperation initiatives in response to these systemic pressures, focusing on PESCO and the E2I. The third analytical sub-section shows how the intergovernmental agreement on PESCO represents a compromise between French and German preferences, which are shaped by different national security priorities and strategic cultures. The final section summarizes the paper’s main findings regarding the usefulness of the neoclassical realist framework for explaining European defense cooperation.

NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND EUROPEAN DEFENSE COOPERATION

European defense cooperation poses something of a challenge for students of European politics and international relations. Traditional or mainstream theories of European integration generally excluded security and defense from those areas in which integration could be expected, and thus did not predict the creation of CSDP (initially European Security and Defense Policy) in 1999. For traditional intergovernmentalists, security and defense belonged to the realm of *high politics* as core elements of national sovereignty

and power which states were unlikely to bargain away or cede to supranational authority (Hoffmann 1966). Likewise, neofunctionalists assumed the *spillover* dynamic, the main driver of integration, would operate chiefly and most effectively in less sovereignty-sensitive *low politics* areas like economic or transportation policy and would be largely absent from the security and defense realm (Bickerton – Irondelle – Menon 2011: 8-9; although see Haroche 2019). Other prominent theoretical or analytical approaches to studying European integration and the EU – federalism, transactionalism, supranational governance, multilevel governance – also largely neglected security and defense issues (Krotz – Maher 2011: 556).

To explain the emergence and development of CSDP, therefore, many scholars have turned to broader theories of international relations. These have tended to emphasize the primary role of either internal or external (to the EU) factors and dynamics. Among the former, liberal theories explain CSDP as resulting from the aggregation of (domestically-generated) national preferences at the EU level (Pohl – van Willigen – van Vonnno 2016; Pohl 2013; Richter 2016), while constructivist theories emphasize socialization processes within the EU and the gradual convergence of national strategic cultures (Monteleone 2016; Mérand 2008; Meyer 2006; Giegerich 2006). By neglecting or downplaying the role of international factors, however, “*bottom-up*” (Moravcsik 1997: 517) liberal theories ignore an important source of national preferences on security and defense cooperation, while both liberal and constructivist theories are unable to explain the timing of CSDP developments, especially its creation in 1999 and the renewed progress on defense cooperation since 2016. By contrast, neorealist theories, especially structural realism, have explained CSDP as a logical response by European states to changes in the global distribution of power, with CSDP representing an EU attempt to balance, even if only in a *soft* manner, against unchecked US power in a new unipolar order (Posen 2006; Art 2004; Pape 2005; Paul 2005). Not much evidence of such balancing exists, however, and structural realists appear to have misread the intentions of European states and overestimated the capacity of the EU to engage in balancing, in part because of their neglect of internal EU and national-level factors (Brooks – Wohlforth 2005; Lieber – Alexander 2005; Howorth – Menon 2009).

This article advances a different theoretical approach for explaining European defense cooperation based on the paradigm of neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism is a theory of foreign policy which explores the interaction of international systemic and domestic political and ideational factors, examining how the latter shape national foreign policy responses to the former. It thus combines the insights of neorealism with those of *Innenpolitik* theories, which focus on the domestic sources of foreign policy. By doing so, neoclassical realism incorporates the analytical richness of classical or traditional realism but attempts to place it within a more theoretically rigorous framework (Schweller 2003: 316). For explaining European defense cooperation, however, neoclassical realism must also take into account the role of the EU as a factor influencing both the formation of national preferences on defense cooperation and the outcomes of intergovernmental bargaining on CSDP.

The basic proposition of neorealism is that the international system, defined as the distribution of power capabilities among its main units, or states (that is, the system’s *structure*) under conditions of anarchy (no central government or common power), affects the behavior of states and international outcomes. Beyond this basic starting point, different versions of neorealism posit different effects of the international system on state behavior. *Structural realism*, the original variant developed by Kenneth Waltz (1979), asserts that states tend to respond to unfavorable shifts in the distribution of power (the increased relative power capabilities of others) by engaging in *balancing*, either internally, by building up their own capabilities, or externally, by forming alliances with other states. Waltz does not claim that this will always happen, but only that it should, and that states

choosing not to engage in balancing will be punished. International structure, according to Waltz, rather than strictly determining the behavior of states, only provides “*a set of constraining conditions*” for them to act within; it exerts pressures and creates possibilities, but it cannot tell us how states will respond to these. Instead, “*each state arrives at policies and decides on actions according to its own internal processes, but its decisions are shaped by the very presence of other states as well as interactions with them*” (Waltz 1979: 73, 65). However, as Schweller (2003: 319) points out, “*Waltzian neorealism makes no assertions about what domestic processes look like, where they come from, and how they influence the way nations assess and adapt to changes in their environment.*” Indeed, by refusing to do so, and by declining to derive a theory of foreign policy from his systemic theory of international relations, Waltz opened the door to, and even created the need for, the eventual emergence of neoclassical realism (Rathbun 2008).

The two other main variants of neorealism have more to say about how states respond to systemic pressures and thus do constitute distinct theories of foreign policy. *Offensive* (or *aggressive*) realism asserts that under conditions of anarchy security is scarce, leading states to think and act offensively. States thus seek to maximize their relative power and ultimately strive for regional dominance or hegemony (Mearsheimer 2001). *Defensive* realism, by contrast, assumes that states seek to maximize security rather than power, and that security is more plentiful in a more benign or less Hobbesian version of anarchy. For the most part, therefore, security-seeking states can afford to be relaxed, responding only to relatively rare external threats by taking action to balance against them (Walt 1987; Snyder 1991; Van Evera 1999). Unlike offensive realism, therefore, which asserts the continual dominance of systemic pressures in state behavior, defensive realism asserts that systemic factors can often be safely ignored, or that they are not always the main factors driving foreign policy.

In contrast to neorealism, *Innenpolitik* theories assert that domestic factors are the main drivers of foreign policy. Such factors can include electoral or partisan politics, the organizational structure of governing institutions, the ideological character of national political systems, and the values, beliefs, and psychological characteristics of individual decision-makers. Prominent examples of *Innenpolitik* theories include democratic peace theory, which claims that democracies behave differently than non-democracies, especially in dealing with each other (Doyle 1986), and the *new liberalism*, which views state-society relations as the fundamental source of state preferences and determinant of state behavior in world politics (Moravcsik 1997). According to Rose (1998: 148), while “[*t*]here are many variants of [*the Innenpolitik*] approach, each favoring a different specific domestic independent variable [...] they all share a common assumption: that foreign policy is best understood as the product of a country’s internal dynamics.” *Innenpolitik* theories thus privilege first (individual-level) and second image (national-level) variables in explaining foreign policy, as opposed to the third image (international system-level) explanations offered by neorealism (Waltz 1959).

Neoclassical realism is a theory of foreign policy (and also international politics, according to some proponents, as discussed below) that “*explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables*” (Rose 1998: 146). It begins “*with the fundamental assumption of neorealists that the international system structures and constrains the policy choices of states*” (Taliaferro – Lobell – Ripsman 2009: 19), and that “*the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities*” (Rose 1998: 146). Both neorealism and neoclassical realism, in other words, “*assign causal primacy to systemic independent variables*” (Taliaferro – Lobell – Ripsman 2009: 19). However, while not abandoning the insights of neorealism “*about international structure and its consequences, neoclassical realists have added first and second image variables [...] to explain foreign policy decision making*” (Schweller 2003: 317). For neoclassical

realists, such unit-level variables play an important role in mediating the impact of systemic factors and shaping national responses to them. According to Rose (1998: 146), for example, the impact of a state's structural position (relative material power) on its foreign policy *"is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level."* Thus, while relative power is the *"chief independent variable"* of neoclassical realism (Rose 1998: 151), neoclassical realism *"locates causal properties at both the structural and unit levels,"* with *"unit-level factors [helping] to explain state external behavior"* (Taliaferro – Lobell – Ripsman 2009: 21). According to Schweller (2004: 164), *"states assess and adapt to changes in their external environment partly as a result of their peculiar domestic structures and political situations."* Indeed, he continues, *"states often react differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities, and their responses may be less motivated by systemic-level factors than domestic ones"* (Schweller 2004: 164).

Beyond these common basic assumptions and propositions, neoclassical realist studies have emphasized the role of different unit-level intervening variables in shaping national responses to international systemic pressures. In their sweeping overview of neoclassical realist literature, Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016: 58–79) seek to organize this wide-ranging list of variables by grouping them into four distinct categories: the images (beliefs and worldviews) of national leaders, national strategic culture, the nature of state-society relations, and domestic political institutions. These intervening variables, they assert, affect three key intervening-level processes – perception of the international system, decision making, and resource mobilization or policy implementation – leading to specific policy outcomes. They also argue that the relative impact of these domestic factors is dependent on the nature of systemic pressures and conditions. When systemic clarity is low, meaning the international system provides limited information about the nature of threats or opportunities and guidance on how to respond to them, and the international strategic environment relatively permissive, meaning threats or opportunities are more remote and less intense, unit-level intervening variables play a greater role. When the opposite is true and systemic clarity is high, meaning the nature of threats or opportunities is clear, as are the optimal policy responses, and the strategic environment more restrictive, meaning threats or opportunities are more imminent and dangerous/enticing, the policy choices of states are more constrained and domestic factors play less of a role in determining them (Ripsman – Taliaferro – Lobell 2016: 46–56). Moreover, specific types of intervening variables are likely to have more of an impact in certain systemic conditions than others. In situations of high systemic clarity and a restrictive strategic environment, with a relatively short time frame for making decisions, leader images and strategic culture are likely to have a more important impact on foreign policy choices, while as the nature of threats or opportunities becomes less clear and the strategic environment more permissive, and the time horizon for decision-making correspondingly lengthens, the impact of domestic political institutions and state-society relations becomes more significant, although strategic culture should also continue exerting an important influence over foreign policy planning (Ripsman – Taliaferro – Lobell 2016: 91–95).

Neoclassical realists also differ in how they define their primary independent variable, the international system. In general, neoclassical realism has a more nuanced and richer conceptualization of the international system than Waltzian neorealism, for which the system is essentially its structure, or the distribution of material capabilities among its main units (states), a definition which *"must leave aside, or abstract from, the characteristics of units, their behavior, and their interactions"* (Waltz 1979: 79). For classical and neoclassical realists, however, the international system is also composed of the interactions between units, without the inclusion of which *"the term system has no meaning"* (Buzan – Jones – Little 1993: 29). According to Schweller (2003: 332), *"The inclusion of interaction in the definition of system allows process variables (such as*

institutions, norms, or rules) as well as structural variables to define the nature of world politics and to have an effect on their operation and dynamics.” Ripsman et al. (2016: 40–56), on the other hand, exclude such process variables from their definition of system and focus instead on certain material factors which can modify international structure (*structural modifiers*) such as geography, rates of technological diffusion, and the offense-defense balance in military technologies, as well as the variables of systemic clarity and the nature of the strategic environment mentioned above. Moreover, as discussed below, by arguing that the foreign policies and grand strategies of great powers can affect systemic outcomes and international structure, they also imply that the behavior of such states should be considered a key element of the international system.

As a research paradigm neoclassical realism has evolved since being first introduced in the late 1990s. According to Ripsman et al. (2016: 12), there have been three distinct phases of neoclassical realism: the initial wave of studies, or Type I neoclassical realism, “*which sought merely to fix structural realism by using domestic-level intervening variables to explain away empirical anomalies for structural realist theories*”; a second wave, or Type II neoclassical realism, which “*uses systemic stimuli, moderated by domestic-level intervening variables, to inform an approach to foreign policy more generally*”; and Type III neoclassical realism, launched by their 2016 book, which seeks to develop neoclassical realism as a broader theory of international politics. In Type III neoclassical realism the dependent variable is not just national foreign policy choices and longer-term strategic adjustment but can also include international systemic outcomes and even structural change, which they argue can result from the impact of the foreign policies and grand strategies of the major powers over time (Ripsman – Taliaferro – Lobell 2016: 80–90). Neoclassical realism has thus evolved into a theoretical model which posits an ongoing circular relationship between the international system (the independent variable), domestic-level factors (the intervening variables), and national foreign policies and strategies (the dependent variable), in which the latter has causal effects for, and can help explain changes to, the international system over time.

Neoclassical realism is not without its critics, including those who argue the approach forfeits the spare elegance, and hence distinctiveness, of Waltzian neorealism. By adding domestic or unit-level variables to systemic ones, these critics claim, neoclassical realists have engaged in “*post hoc efforts to explain away the anomalies of neorealism, making use of whatever tools are necessary to plug the holes of a sinking ship*” (in the words of Rathbun [2008: 295], himself a strong proponent of neoclassical realism). The result, critics argue, is a degenerative research paradigm that lacks coherence and is indistinct from alternative research paradigms such as liberalism and constructivism (Vasquez 1997; Legro – Moravcsik 1999; Narizny 2017). In response to such criticisms, neoclassical realists assert that the incorporation of domestic variables extends the limited explanatory range of Waltzian neorealism, which “*makes no claim to explain foreign policy or specific historical events*” (Schweller 2003: 317), thus making neoclassical realism “*a logical and necessary extension of structural realism*” (Rathbun 2008). The sacrifice of theoretical parsimony, they argue, enables a richer and more complete understanding of international politics and the details of specific foreign policy cases (Schweller 2003; Turpin 2019: 5–6). It is indeed this explanatory richness, achieved through the consideration of both systemic and unit-level variables, which makes neoclassical realism an appropriate framework for examining and understanding recent developments in European defense cooperation (Dyson 2016; Haine 2012; Turpin 2019).

ANALYZING THE RELAUNCH OF EUROPEAN DEFENSE COOPERATION

In this section, we utilize a neoclassical realist approach to analyze the relaunch of European defense cooperation. We argue that significant changes in Europe’s geostrategic and security environment, at both global and regional levels, have created strong

incentives for increased defense cooperation. While neorealism may view such cooperation as a logical response by European states to these systemic pressures, it cannot explain the nature of new defense cooperation arrangements, especially PESCO and the E2I. By focusing on the key role of domestic-level intervening variables, however, a neoclassical realist approach can help us understand why these new defense cooperation arrangements have taken the form and content they have. Specifically, we argue that the agreement on PESCO reflects a compromise between the divergent preferences of France and Germany, the EU's most powerful and influential member states. These different preferences, in turn, are influenced by divergent national security priorities, which are the product of different geographies, threat perceptions, and military capabilities. However, we also identify national strategic culture – understood here in a broad sense as deeply embedded conceptions and notions of national security shared by a society as a whole (Kupchan 1994: 22) and including national perspectives on European integration – as a key unit-level factor shaping French and German preferences on defense cooperation. The impact of the EU institutional system must also be considered, as it affects intergovernmental bargaining outcomes and hence the possibilities for defense cooperation within the EU framework, making the pursuit of such cooperation outside the EU potentially more attractive, and thus helping to explain the E2I.

Europe's Changing Strategic and Security Environment

The systemic pressures currently facing Europe are multiple and multidimensional. At the global level, the international system is transitioning from the relatively brief, post-1989 unipolar order to an increasingly multipolar one, the result primarily of China's rapid economic, military, and political rise and relative US decline. This transition, which was perhaps inevitable in any case, was hastened by the loss of US power and prestige resulting from its military struggles in Afghanistan and Iraq and controversial actions in the Global War on Terror. It was further promoted by the US-centered Global Financial Crisis of 2008, which exposed the flaws of the American economic model and accelerated the shift of economic power and influence *from the West to the Rest*, especially Asia. US strength, as well as America's global image and soft power influence, was also undermined by the gridlock and paralysis of the highly polarized US political system during the 8-year presidency of Barack Obama, which prevented Washington from addressing key domestic social and economic problems. Far from reversing this trend, the *America First* policies of the Donald Trump administration, by alienating others and isolating the United States internationally, and through the negative impact on the US economy of the administration's ubiquitous trade wars, seem destined to reduce US power and influence even further (Zakaria 2019; Drezner 2019).

For Europe, aside from dealing with China's growing economic and political influence, exemplified by the gigantic *Belt and Road Initiative* to build increased infrastructure ties between China and Europe, and the *16+1* diplomatic initiative linking China and European states seeking to benefit from Chinese investments, the main consequence of this global power shift has been its impact on US strategic and foreign policy priorities. After taking office in January 2009, the Obama administration – seeking to extricate the US from costly wars in the broader Middle East, and to offload more responsibility for security in the EU's neighboring regions to its European allies – began planning for a strategic *Pivot to Asia* (Binnendijk 2014). The new strategy was an explicit acknowledgement of the Asia-Pacific region's growing importance for the United States and the global system, and an implicit recognition of the need for a more comprehensive US effort to counter China's growing power and influence in the region. In the end, the Obama pivot did not amount to much, as plans for a more substantial reallocation of military and diplomatic resources were frustrated by budgetary pressures and continued US military involvement in the Middle East and Afghanistan, and by a renewed focus on European security after

Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014. Nevertheless, the new strategy, and the shift of US strategic interests that it signaled, generated concern in Europe that the pivot indicated a loss of US interest in Europe and an abandonment of its traditional focus on European security (Sverdrup-Thygeson – Lantaigne – Sverdrup 2014: 1).

If Obama's Asia pivot increased European concerns about US disengagement and abandonment – accentuated by Washington's reluctance to get involved in conflicts in Europe's neighborhood, like those in Libya and Syria, and its insistence that Germany take the lead in diplomatic efforts to deal with the crisis in Ukraine – transatlantic relations have deteriorated even further since the November 2016 election of Trump. As is well documented, the new president has evinced considerable skepticism of NATO and openly mused about the possibility of the US leaving the Alliance (Barnes – Cooper 2019). He has also expressed antipathy toward the EU, calling it an organization created to take advantage of the US on trade. Trump's attacks on the EU include his public support for Brexit and calls for other member states to follow Britain's example and leave the EU. His administration has imposed tariffs on European exports of aluminum and steel, calling them a threat to US national security, while also threatening new duties on imports of European automobiles. It has also withdrawn the US from international agreements strongly backed by the EU, including the Paris climate accord and the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, while adopting a critical attitude toward international institutions like the UN and WTO and the broader liberal international order that is so crucially important for the EU. On the whole, the Trump administration's rhetoric and actions have created increased European uncertainty about US foreign policy, the future of transatlantic relations, and Washington's commitment to Europe's security. While transatlantic relations may well improve after Trump, many European analysts also understand that long-term structural trends (the rise of China, domestic political changes and demographic trends) pulling America away from Europe suggest the US security commitment could become increasingly tenuous going forward, even under more internationalist administrations (Shapiro – Pardijns 2017: 10–12; Heisbourg – Terhalle 2018).

Moreover, the growing uncertainty about the US and transatlantic relations takes place within the context of a deteriorating regional security environment, with threats posed by Russia's increasingly assertive policies in the East, which were most clearly demonstrated by its 2014 annexation of Crimea and military support for separatist rebels in southeastern Ukraine, and the increased conflict and turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, where the 2011 Arab Spring rebellions have led to continuing instability in Libya and prolonged civil war in Syria. While Russia's actions have challenged the sovereignty and borders of former Soviet states and called into question the post-Cold War security order in Eastern Europe, the turbulence to Europe's south has spurred mass migration to Europe and generated increased fears in many European countries of radical Islamic terrorism, contributing to a growing sense of insecurity and helping to fuel a populist-nationalist backlash against the EU and liberal democracy. Also contributing to growing regional insecurity is continued corruption and instability in the Western Balkans, where a renewed outbreak of ethnic and nationalist violence remains an ever-present danger, and Turkey's authoritarian turn under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – especially since a failed coup attempt in July 2016 – which has led to the increased estrangement from Europe of this critical state on the EU's southeastern flank.

Finally, in the context of global power shifts and a more threatening regional security environment, the EU itself has been severely weakened, the result of a series of overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises that have hammered the bloc since 2010, including the Eurozone debt crisis, the massive influx of refugees from the Middle East and Africa in 2015, an upsurge of terrorist attacks inside Europe, and the mounting disintegrative pressures posed by the growth of populist nationalism and Euroscepticism throughout the EU. Perhaps the most shocking development of all was the June 2016 Brexit referendum,

in which a narrow majority of British voters opted to leave the EU, launching months of difficult negotiations between London and Brussels on the terms of Britain's departure and initiating a period of serious political turmoil and paralysis in Britain, while also creating a precedent that other member states might someday be tempted to follow. While Brexit, if it happens, is the most vivid demonstration of the EU's weakened state, depriving the bloc of its third largest economy, one of its two largest militaries, and its substantial diplomatic prowess and weight, the other aspects of Europe's "*polycrisis*" (Zeitlin – Nicoli – Laffan 2019) have contributed to the EU's relative decline in both regional and global terms at a time of shifting global power, increased regional insecurity, eroding transatlantic ties, and the growing assertiveness in European affairs of Russia and China. At the same time, Europe's various crises have motivated EU leaders to find new integration projects, including in the area of security and defense, to demonstrate the EU's continued relevance and vitality, and to strengthen the bloc's internal cohesion at a time of increased insecurity and mounting centrifugal pressures.

European Responses: From common funding and Permanent Structured Cooperation to cooperation outside the EU framework

The systemic pressures discussed above are clearly recognized in Europe and have created strong incentives for increased European defense cooperation. The June 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS), for instance, cites global and regional systemic developments as reasons why the EU should pursue greater defense cooperation and achieve the goal of *strategic autonomy* (a term mentioned eight times in the document) (EUGS 2016). The French government's 2017 Strategic Review describes an ongoing "*deterioration of the international environment*" at both the global and regional levels, declaring that "[c]onverging threats against Europe require Europeans to commit more heavily to ensuring their own security, and to work towards the goal of shared strategic autonomy" (Republic of France 2017: 15, 56). Similarly, the German government's 2016 Defense White Paper notes that "*Germany's security environment has become even more complex, volatile and dynamic and is therefore increasingly unpredictable,*" thus requiring further European defense cooperation and progress towards building a "*European Security and Defense Union*" (German Federal Government 2016: 28, 76). European states have responded to their changing geostrategic and security environment with a number of new defense cooperation initiatives ranging from instruments for common funding and Permanent Structured Cooperation to cooperation outside the EU institutional framework.

A major step was the approval by EU leaders in December 2016 of the EDF (European Council 2016b: 3–4), with final approval by the European Parliament in April 2019 (Brzozowski 2019). The main purpose of the EDF is to establish and strengthen a European defense industrial base by incentivizing European governments to work together on joint capability projects in order to support the goal of EU strategic autonomy (Besch – Quencez 2019). While the amount of money the EDF will dispose of – €13 billion in the 2021–2027 EU budgetary period, with a small €590 million sum approved for 2019 and 2020 – is relatively modest, its creation is significant because for the first time, money from the EU budget is being used to help fund collaborative defense research and development by the member states (European Commission 2019). It is also significant because of the key role of the Commission in bringing the EDF about, signaling the Commission's growing involvement in the area of defense (Haroche 2019; James 2018; Lavallée 2018).

In addition to the EDF, other recent steps include the approval by EU defense ministers in May 2017 of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD), an annual review of national defense planning and capability development practices conducted by the European Defense Agency (EDA) with the goal of identifying capability gaps, deepening defense cooperation, and ensuring more efficiency in defense spending plans (EDA 2017),

and the creation in June 2017 of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), a permanent operational headquarters for *non-executive* (mostly training) CSDP missions of up to 2,500 troops (CEU 2017a). The MPCC was initially intended to be a standing EU military operational headquarters (OHQ), but this was opposed by Britain, which, pending Brexit, was still a full member of the EU with veto power, leading to the new institution's downgrading to its current status (Howorth 2017b: 5–6).

The launching of PESCO is potentially the most significant new CSDP initiative. The legal basis for PESCO was established by the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, Article 42(6) of which permits a subgroup of member states “*whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria, and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area,*” to strengthen their military and defense ties on a voluntary basis in the form of a permanent structured cooperation within the EU framework (OJEU 2012: 39). The PESCO provision remained initially unused, however, as for several years after 2009 Europe's attention focused on the Eurozone debt and economic crisis. Prompted by a deteriorating security environment, discussion of whether to activate PESCO increased within the EU after 2013, including within the context of the HRVP's consultations with member states on the new global security strategy that began in the second half of 2015 (Tocci 2016, 2017). The EUGS, submitted to the European Council in June 2016, did not mention PESCO specifically, but suggested that enhanced defense cooperation between member states, “[i]f successful and repeated over time [...] might lead to a more structured form of cooperation, making full use of the Lisbon Treaty's potential” (EUGS 2015: 48).

The shocking Brexit vote, occurring just five days before the European Council meeting that endorsed the EUGS, served as a major catalyst for increased defense cooperation. Not only would Britain's prospective departure remove a key obstacle to closer defense cooperation, along with further consolidation of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and strengthened internal security and control of the EU's external borders. Increased defense cooperation was also viewed as an important means of demonstrating the EU's continued relevance and vitality at a time of internal crisis and mounting centrifugal pressures. Thus, just days after the Brexit vote, the French and German foreign ministers released a joint letter calling for more European integration, including closer cooperation on security and defense (Ayrault – Steinmeier 2016). This was followed in late July with President François Hollande's announcement of a new French initiative on defense cooperation, in collaboration with Germany, as a means of revitalizing the EU (Barbière 2016). On 12 September, the French and German defense ministers issued a joint paper calling for enhanced defense cooperation and the strengthening of CSDP, “*including the use of PESCO*” (Le Drian – von der Leyen 2016: 6; Euractiv 2016a), which was then discussed at an informal meeting of EU defense ministers later that month (Euractiv 2016b). In early November, the governments of France, Germany, Italy, and Spain issued a joint letter calling for a common European defense policy that would enable the EU to act independently of the United States to deal with external crises (Euractiv 2016c).

Parallel to these efforts, as requested by the June 2016 European Council (2016a: 7), the HRVP developed its Implementation Plan on Security and Defense, which it presented to EU foreign and defense ministers on 14 November. Calling for a “*new level of ambition*” for EU security and defense cooperation, among other ideas the HRVP proposed activating PESCO to enable willing member states to strengthen their military and defense ties (CEU 2016: 2, 6). This idea was endorsed by the European Council in December, with EU leaders asking the HRVP to further develop its proposals in the coming months (European Council 2016b: 4). On the basis of the HRVP's work, on 22 June 2017 the European Council decided to launch “*an inclusive and ambitious*” PESCO, pledging to agree within three months on a list of criteria and commitments that member states wanting to participate would have to meet and a set of concrete capability projects, with further details to be agreed at future summits (European Council 2017: 5).

The main question remaining at this point was how demanding the criteria and commitments would be, and thus which member states would be allowed to participate in PESCO – in other words, what the balance between *inclusive* and *ambitious* would be. A key breakthrough came with the Franco-German Ministerial Council on 13 July 2017, which achieved an initial compromise between Paris and Berlin on the entry criteria and required commitments (Koenig – Walter-Franke 2017: 12). This was followed on 21 July by a letter to the HRVP from Paris and Berlin, also signed by the governments of Italy and Spain and supported by Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, and the Netherlands, outlining the required commitments for an inclusive and balanced PESCO (Fiott – Missiroli – Tardy 2017: 25; Biscop 2018: 179, fn. 8). Based on this proposal, work continued throughout the fall, including a series of workshops organized by Paris and Berlin to inform other member states on the entry criteria and the assessment of PESCO projects (Fiott – Missiroli – Tardy 2017: 25; Gebauer – Müller 2017).

On 13 November 2017, 23 member states – all but the UK, Ireland, Portugal, Denmark and Malta – signed up for PESCO, with Ireland and Portugal joining soon thereafter (CEU 2017b). The following month, the participating states released a list of 17 projects aimed at improving military capabilities and the operational capacity of CSDP missions (CEU 2017c). On 14 December, on the sidelines of the European Council meeting held that day, the leaders of the 25 participating states formally launched the new arrangement. On the occasion, Mogherini spoke for many other EU leaders in terming the launching of PESCO an “*historic decision*” on the path of European defense integration (Euractiv 2017). In March 2018, EU defense ministers held their first meeting in the PESCO format, at which they formally adopted the previously announced projects and agreed on a roadmap for assessing and selecting the next set of projects (Gotev 2018). An additional 17 projects were adopted by the Council in November 2018 (CEU 2018).

While the plans for PESCO were developed within the EU framework, with the involvement of other member states and the HRVP, the final arrangement was essentially a French-German compromise (Biscop 2018: 164). Each side ideally wanted something different. While Berlin favored a PESCO that was as inclusive as possible and involved many member states, Paris desired a relatively small grouping of like-minded states that would be more effective and capable of acting quickly in the event of crises. The key debate thus centered on the criteria for entry and the binding commitments member states would have to make in order to participate. If these were strict and set a high bar, as Paris wanted, a smaller and more ambitious PESCO would result, but if they were relaxed, as favored by Berlin, more member states would be capable of meeting them and a larger PESCO would be possible (Major – Mölling 2019; De France 2019).

In the end, a compromise was achieved that turned PESCO into a process or “*pledging machine*” – in order to join PESCO “*member states would not need to already possess and [be able to] provide a high level of capability or operational assets, but would instead commit to reach ambitious goals*” (Billon – Galland – Quencez 2017: 2). The PESCO Notification submitted in November 2017 thus legally committed participants to increase defense spending, participate in joint capability development projects within the EU framework (CARD, EDF, PESCO), and improve the interoperability as well as availability and deployability of their forces (CEU 2017b: 3–5). To achieve these commitments, each participant agreed to submit a national Implementation Plan that would be assessed annually within the PESCO framework by the HRVP and updated as necessary (CEU 2017b: 9). While presented as a compromise, by adopting a phased approach to meeting commitments with unspecified timelines (Billon – Galland – Quencez 2017: 6), the agreement essentially achieved Berlin’s goal of enabling a large number of member states to qualify, with 25 eventually signing on, a larger number than envisioned in the Franco-German proposal (Koenig – Walter-Franke 2017: 13; Biscop 2018: 164). It did so, however, by severely diluting the original ambitions of PESCO and

raising serious questions about what the new arrangement would accomplish (Besch 2018; Witney 2018; Valášek 2018).

French disappointment with the PESCO agreement was a factor in Paris' decision to launch a separate defense cooperation initiative outside the EU framework, the E2I. The E2I was first proposed by French President Macron in September 2017, in a speech at the Sorbonne (Keohane 2017). It entailed the creation of a common intervention force among European countries possessing both the resources and the will to take military action. A key goal of the initiative was, through staff exchanges and joint exercises, to promote the development of a shared strategic culture and military doctrine among participants, thus fostering a shared assessment of threats, enabling members to carry out missions together and permitting a more rapid response to security crises. Being outside the EU framework, the E2I would avoid the restrictions imposed by consensus-oriented EU decision-making rules. It would also be open to non-EU countries, thus allowing participation by the UK after Brexit. Nine European states – France, Germany, Belgium, the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Estonia, Spain, and Portugal – eventually agreed in June 2018 to launch the E2I, with Finland later joining (Salam 2018). The E2I states held their first meeting in Paris in November 2018 (Stratfor 2018).

The creation of the E2I reflected French skepticism that PESCO would amount to much, and that it would enable the kind of rapid military reaction to crises in the European neighborhood that Paris viewed as necessary. In essence, the E2I was what France originally hoped PESCO would be, before it was forced to compromise with Germany and accept the more inclusive and less ambitious arrangement preferred by Berlin (Gotkowska 2018: 9). Clearly, the E2I initiative was motivated by French national security priorities and interests: Through it, France hoped to gain the support of other European states for its efforts to deal with security challenges in the EU's southern neighborhood, a region that Paris considered of paramount importance for both French and European security, but this was a task that it was increasingly unable to undertake on its own (Mölling – Major 2018).

While Germany eventually decided to join the E2I, it was not happy about the French initiative. Berlin was concerned that the E2I would undermine EU defense initiatives, especially PESCO. It also worried that the smaller and more exclusive E2I would create divisions within the EU between participants and nonparticipants, thus weakening EU cohesion, something Berlin had worked hard to avoid with its push for a more inclusive PESCO (Mölling – Major 2018). Finally, Berlin feared that through the E2I it would be pulled into French-led military operations abroad, something that clashed with the country's cultural aversion to military intervention and would no doubt be controversial domestically (Stratfor 2018). In the end, however, Berlin opted to join the initiative to avoid further straining relations with Paris, especially in view of the fact that the E2I was an initiative personally supported by the French president, making it a matter of great political importance for France, so that a German refusal to join would be viewed as an affront (Mölling – Major 2018).

Explaining the new forms of European defense cooperation based on the differences between French and German strategic cultures

The different forms of renewed European defense cooperation can be explained in part by the divergent national security priorities and preferences of France and Germany. Geography plays a key role here, exercising an important influence over perceptions of threat to national security. Germany's location in central Europe leaves it more vulnerable to threats from Russia. An eastward-facing Germany thus prioritizes deterrence and territorial defense based on large-scale, heavy-armored units rather than smaller, more flexible forces suited for expeditionary missions (Zandee 2017; Duke 2019: 138). France, on the other hand, is both more physically distant from Russia and more

oriented, by virtue of its geography but also its historical colonial and contemporary demographic ties, towards the south, focusing on security threats emanating from across the Mediterranean, from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa as well as the Middle East. France's possession of nuclear weapons also gives it a powerful deterrent against military attack – one not possessed by Germany, which depends on the US and NATO to provide it – which allows it to deemphasize territorial defense. For France, therefore, a key security priority is the ability to rapidly deploy smaller, more agile military forces to deal with crises and instability to its south. However, a militarily overstretched France is no longer able to deal with the challenges of its southern neighborhood on its own and needs European partners, something Paris initially hoped PESCO could provide. The failure of PESCO to fulfill these hopes led Paris to launch the E2I, which provides a basis for European cooperation to create such rapidly deployable forces and thus more directly addresses French security priorities (Mölling – Major 2018; Gotkowska 2018: 9–10, 12).

Also shaping French and German preferences regarding European defense cooperation, however, are divergent national strategic cultures, including differing perspectives on European integration. As it is a victor of the Second World War and a former colonial power, France's strategic culture displays a readiness to utilize military force to deal with security problems, especially in its southern neighborhood. It also includes a longstanding desire for French and European strategic autonomy from the United States (Irondele – Schmitt 2013). Germany, traumatized by its catastrophic defeat in the Second World War and bearing historic responsibility for the war and the Holocaust, has a strategic culture that is more pacifist and averse to the use of military force, especially for purposes other than territorial defense. This cultural aversion is reflected in significant domestic political constraints, including strong public opposition to military engagement and the constitutional requirement of parliamentary approval for any deployment of military force (Koenig – Walter-Franke 2017: 8). Germany is also more dependent on the US and NATO for its security, and thus more skeptical of calls for European strategic autonomy (Junk – Daase 2013). As a consequence, while France favored a more ambitious PESCO that would be more operationally capable and effective – more usable, in other words – and that would allow Europe to demonstrate strategic independence from the US, Germany was comfortable with a diluted, more cumbersome and less usable arrangement focused mainly on the longer-term development of military capabilities. For the very same reasons, Berlin is uncomfortable with the E2I, whose potential usability in crisis situations is much more suited to French strategic culture and preferences.

Another key aspect of strategic culture with ramifications for French and German preferences regarding European defense cooperation is different national views on European integration. For Germany, the EU *“has been a central component of Berlin's political and social identity since the end of the Second World War”* (Major – Mölling 2019: 6), and substantially contributing to the deepening and completion of the European Union is an important element of Germany's *“foreign policy reason of state”* (Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet 2016: 377). For Berlin, therefore, a key motivation for increased defense cooperation was to boost the EU at a time of crisis and weakness, and to enhance EU cohesion in the face of growing centrifugal forces within the bloc. A more inclusive PESCO would help achieve these goals, while Berlin feared that a more exclusive arrangement would only further exacerbate intra-EU divisions (Major – Mölling 2019; Billon – Galland – Quencez 2017: 2). The more exclusive nature of the E2I, on the other hand, and the possibility that it could weaken EU defense cooperation plans and undermine EU cohesion, are key reasons for Berlin's uneasiness over the French defense initiative (Major – Mölling 2019: 12–13).

In contrast to Germany, France has traditionally had a more instrumental view of European integration, viewing it as means of augmenting French power and influence in

the world – or as a “*palliative to potential deficiencies in French power*” (De France 2019: 5) – rather than as a central component of national identity and purpose and a framework for national security (although for the argument that French views of European integration are actually more “*schizophrenic*,” see De France 2019). For France, therefore, PESCO was less a political project to strengthen European integration and cohesion and more a means of strengthening defense capabilities in ways supportive of Paris’ strategic interests (Major – Mölling 2019: 3), leading it to favor a smaller and more ambitious (operational) initiative. Once it became apparent that PESCO would not meet its security needs, the French government decided to pursue its defense cooperation objectives outside the EU framework in the form of the E2I.

The EU institutional system also influenced the outcome of intergovernmental bargaining on PESCO and France’s decision to launch the E2I. Unlike with other decisions on foreign, security, and defense policy where unanimity is required, the decision rules for the launching of PESCO, set by Article 46 of the Lisbon Treaty, require only a qualified majority vote in the Council, making an agreement more likely (OJEU 2012: 40). However, unlike the Commission’s prominent role in the process leading to the creation of the EDF, European institutions played only a marginal and facilitative role in the launching of PESCO, with the HRVP’s work on this issue providing mainly a framework for intergovernmental discussion. The real dynamic in the launching of PESCO was the bargaining between Germany and France, with other member states being brought in after Paris and Berlin had reached agreement among themselves (Biscop 2018: 163–164, 178–179, fn. 5 and 8). In this bargaining process, however, the EU context was important for the final outcome because of the linkage between defense and other policy issues. In particular, since France needed Germany’s support for its proposals to reform EMU – like those for the creation of a budget for the Eurozone and the new post of Eurozone finance minister – it was compelled to defer to Berlin’s preferences on the design of PESCO (Gebauer – Müller 2017), choosing instead to pursue the creation of the E2I outside the EU institutional framework.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed the relaunch of European defense cooperation from the perspective of neoclassical realism, a theoretical approach to the study of foreign policy which explores how domestic political and ideational factors shape national foreign policy responses to international systemic pressures. As this article has argued, the impulse for renewed defense cooperation has clearly come from such systemic pressures, not factors or dynamics internal to the EU, as emphasized by theories of European integration, or the preferences of key domestic actors or processes of cultural dialogue and learning, as stressed by liberal and constructivist theories of international relations respectively. Global structural shifts and corresponding changes in the behavior of great powers like the US, China, and Russia, a more dangerous regional security environment, and the EU’s own weakened state as a consequence of the economic crisis, Brexit, and the rise of populist-nationalist Euroscepticism, have all generated incentives for increased defense cooperation. Under these conditions, the decision of European states to pursue such cooperation is in keeping with the expectations of neorealism, which asserts that international systemic change affects the behavior of states and international outcomes. What neorealism cannot account for, however, because of its neglect of domestic or unit-level factors, is the form or content of this cooperation. Instead, explaining defense cooperation outcomes requires an understanding of the preferences on this issue of key European states, which are in turn shaped not just by their international structural position but also domestic political and ideational factors. By taking such unit-level factors into account and examining how they operate as intervening variables that shape national responses to international systemic pressures, neoclassical realism provides an analytical framework

that allows us to explain the policy preferences of key European states and defense cooperation outcomes.

In particular, this article has identified national strategic culture, including views on European integration, as a key domestic variable shaping the preferences on defense cooperation of France and Germany, the EU's two most powerful and influential member states. Along with divergent security priorities stemming from their different geographies and military capabilities, the different strategic cultures of France and Germany led the former to favor a more ambitious and effective PESCO, while the latter pushed for a more inclusive arrangement aimed more at intra-EU cohesion and long-term institution building rather than the creation of a deployable expeditionary force. The outcome, an inclusive and less ambitious PESCO reflecting more the preferences of Berlin, can be largely explained in terms of the bargaining power enjoyed by Germany in the contemporary EU context, with Paris willing to make concessions on PESCO because of its desire for German cooperation on other issues of importance to France, chiefly concerning the reform of EMU and European economic governance. France's disappointment with PESCO, however, also led it to pursue a separate, and possibly conflicting, defense cooperation initiative outside the EU framework with the launching of the E2I.

The key role of strategic culture as a factor shaping national preferences on defense cooperation aligns with the expectations of neoclassical realism concerning the relationship between international systemic pressures, the independent variable, and domestic intervening variables, with the nature of the former determining the relative importance of different categories of the latter. In terms of the model developed by Ripsman et al. (2016: 91–95), we can characterize the nature of systemic pressures presently confronting Europe. Systemic clarity can be classified as medium – while the nature of the threats facing Europe is fairly clear and widely agreed upon, we have seen key states prioritize them differently; nor does the system provide much guidance on how to respond to them beyond the general need for more defense cooperation – but the nature of the strategic environment is relatively permissive, in the sense that threats are not existential or exist mainly in the medium to long term. In this situation leader images should be less influential than in crisis situations; however, the relatively compressed time frame for decision making – most key decisions on new defense cooperation initiatives have been made within a three-year period – means that state-society relations and domestic political institutions should have relatively less of an impact, except perhaps in an anticipatory sense. This leaves strategic culture as the intervening variable most likely to influence national preferences on defense cooperation over the period being examined, as this article has indeed determined. Assuming little change systemic pressures, however, while strategic culture will remain an important factor influencing national preferences, the influence of domestic political factors, including institutional structures, public opinion, and electoral politics, is likely to grow over time as defense cooperation efforts proceed. A sharp change in the nature of the systemic pressures confronting Europe, however, including perhaps a convergence of views on the priority of different security threats, or the emergence of a more restrictive (threatening) strategic environment, could alter the relative influence of these various domestic factors yet again.

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