The Myth of the European Army
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Myths endure because they create an outstanding surface upon which a range of ideas can be projected. The idea of a European army is no different. It has long been a repository for a wide array of concepts and goals for a flamboyant vision. Yet anyone who tries to grasp this pretty soap bubble ends up disappointed: It slips away or bursts.

Large swaths of the European left and the Gaullist-inspired right regard and have for decades regarded a European army as a tool of emancipation from US hegemony within or from NATO. Many European federalists, on the other hand, connect the same idea with the creation of a federated European state based on the American model. Still others hope that the European army might be a transitional stage toward the pacifist goal of abolishing the military altogether. Today, the idea of a European army alternates primarily between proposals for the military wing of a new Superpower Europe and an important tool for worldwide disarmament. But that is far removed from the reality of the European Union at the start of the 21st century.

European Commission President Juncker and German Defense Minister von der Leyen recently reinvigorated the debate. Juncker has called for a European army as a deterrent for Russia's Great Power aspirations and as a tool for military self-assertion by the EU – a de facto substitute for NATO. He then neglected to elaborate further on these ideas or explain their conceptual basis. Von der Leyen's push, relying on the opposite assurance, is that it is strictly a matter of strengthening NATO's European pillars. She also failed to elaborate on her ideas.

The instrumental and insincere way that they both address the issue suggests that they are not really concerned with the long-term prospects but rather with the short- and middle-term goals of European security politics.

Consequently, anyone who takes up the idea of a European army has already been taken in. In its wondrous vagueness, it has no import except as an argumentative fallback position to be taken up some time in the future and as a way to facilitate today's actual agenda.

A European army is inconceivable unless the EU Member States are willing to largely transfer

decision-making authority for their own national security and defense policy to the European level. Doing so would mean the individual member states would have to accept a loss of sovereignty in the future in terms of the Common Security and Defense Policy, a proposition that they have thus far consistently refused. This would require an amendment to the Basic Law in Germany, it would mean abolishing the core of the French Constitution, and it would raise fundamental questions of constitutional law in the UK and a number of other EU Member States.

Anyone who believes that the politically contentious goal of a definitive federated European state based on the American model can be implemented through military integration of national armed forces into a single European army has apparently failed to note the current European trend toward renationalizing domains that had previously been granted to the supranational level. This opposition has the potential to endanger the entire European project. When asked about Juncker's plans for a European army, British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg answered dryly, "It's not going to happen." Period. Anyone who wants to qualitatively advance European integration needs to make progress in the fields of economic, financial, and social policy and cannot begin with an attempt to abolish member states' military sovereignty.

A European army is not an answer to Europe's present security-policy challenges. It is no more a political answer to the crisis zone in Europe's neighborhood, which stretches from Mauritania on Africa's Atlantic coast to Libya, Central Africa, South Sudan, and Somalia on the Indian Ocean and from Yemen across the entire Middle East into Central Asia, than it is to Russia's new nationalist Great Power politics in Eastern Europe. This is partly because consolidation on a military level would not address the gravity of the problems and also because we do not have the time that a transition to the big leagues would necessarily require.

This moment calls for a common European stabilization strategy with civil and military cooperation that flexibly and pragmatically utilizes the existing differences and works with partners like the African Union on equal footing.

Within the European Union, there are different visions for military deployment. The spectrum ranges from Austrian neutrality to German military restraint and strict parliamentary control to a self-perception in countries like France and the UK that considers the projection of military power as a "normal" tool of foreign policy led by the executive.

That can and must not be eliminated by merging national armies. On the contrary, European

security policy can only be made more effective and efficient by concentrating on bolstered cooperation on security policy and building common military action forces for specific purposes. That is a rather different security policy from creating a common European army. But this limited ambition points to a practicable way forward and not merely an imagined one.

From a Green perspective, a European army also raises the issue of British and French nuclear weapons. A common army whose operational doctrine involves weapons of mass destruction would be politically unacceptable for us. But complete nuclear disarmament as a condition for a European army would be another way of deferring the project into a distant utopian future.

Moreover, is a European army even desirable it if will ultimately cost the EU its unique position as a civil power, which implies a high potential for soft power and has to date clearly distinguished the EU from traditional Great Powers? That constitutes a very important component of its international reputation. It is precisely why this new kind of international association, which combines elements of a single federated state and elements of a federation of national states, is a model for paths to integration beyond the formation of Great Powers in many regions of the world. Is the idea of a European army not actually a logical contradiction that would require the radical resolution of security-policy cooperation and coordination problems because it is unclear whether the necessary political will for cooperation and coordination exists and, in the absence of that political will, the proposed organizational solution is on shaky ground?

For that matter, what about NATO? Does anyone really believe that the contradictory aspirations described above with respect to strengthening or weakening NATO by creating a European army can be treated as a secondary issue?

There are significant forces within the EU that want to link greater cooperation with expanded executive authority over the military. It would be a mistake to underestimate the strong military-industrial-political complexes in various member states. There is a definite possibility of a large military apparatus that is not subject to more effective parliamentary authority at any level. For a long time now, this has been justified with the claim that parliamentary reluctance in Germany is an impediment to efficient joint military planning and the rapidity that is necessary for an emergency deployment. Although not a single example has been raised to support this claim, relativizing parliamentary reluctance is currently being widely debated in Germany.

In practical terms, this is about setting the course for the next few years. For us Greens, the question of whether intensified military cooperation and integration is accompanied by the retention of democratic parliamentary control at the national level or the expansion of that control at the European level is a core issue. It raises the issue of the role of the military in our society. By contrast, focusing on the centralization of military capabilities by idealizing a European army relocates the discourse and opens up political leeway for other priorities.

A committee under former German Defense Minister Volker Rühe has been in session for almost a year developing proposals for revising the German Parliamentary Participation Act. It is no secret that many Christian Democratic politicians want to give their government more flexibility in pushing for German military deployments. It is therefore no coincidence that the idea of a European army caused waves throughout Germany only a few weeks before the committee's final report was published.

Defense Minister von der Leyen, a resolute supporter of Europe's military forces, had only a curt response to these debates: "We may have to change German law."

Even von der Leyen is aware that there will not be a European army during her active political career. But from her perspective, the idea of a European army is an outstanding way to boost the debate over streamlining the deployment of German soldiers abroad. That is something that we Greens should clearly keep our distance from.

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