TOWARD A EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE: FEASIBILITY, STRUCUTRE, AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

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Vienna, 2 June 2025 **Jules Van Dyck**

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Executive Summary

This capstone examines the prospects and challenges of creating a European Department of Defense (EDD) as a central body for EU defense. In light of the shifting security landscape of Europe since the last few years, characterized by Russia's conflict in Ukraine and uncertainties in the transatlantic relationship with the Trump administration, EU defense actions are more important than ever. A comparison with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) offers insights on centralized command, leadership, financial planning, and oversight. Factors, like restrictions and political sovereignty are carefully considered when assessing feasibility for an EDD implementation plan, in congruence with NATO coordination and democratic governance. Various approaches for EDD implementation are examined in detail. From EU treaty adjustments to gradual reforms. Ethical considerations around militarization and transparency, are adequately taken into account in the process.

In the end of this capstone project, a succinct analysis concludes that establishing an EDD could bring advantages in terms of independence and security cooperation on a global scale if leaders effectively manage issues related to sovereignty concerns and incorporate democratic oversight while maintaining collaboration with NATO. The final recommendations outline steps to build an EDD that strengthens defense while preserving the EU's identity as a promoter of peace.

1. Introduction

European leaders and defense/security experts have been discussing to further integrate European defense frameworks. The EDD could unify EU strategic planning, procurement, and potentially operations, driven by security challenges and doubts over U.S. reliability (Heisbourg, 2024; Reuters, 2025; The Guardian, 2025; Kallas, 2025). While the CSDP coordinates defense efforts, it lacks a hierarchical and operational structure. European defense continues to operate on a bureaucratic level with each country maintaining control over its own military forces (European Commission, 2025; Castaldi, 2025).

In light of developments and challenges faced by European defense system following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, increasing military expenditures by EU nations are steadfast (Dhojnacki, 2025; Biscop, 2025). Concerns further raise about NATO's unity due to U.S.' reduced involvement under President Trump, re-elected in 2024 (Leblond & Vannier, 2024; Burilkov & Wolff, 2025). This leads to suggestions for the EU to take on a more significant and dominant role in ensuring its security (Kallas, 2025; Fiott, 2025). In this constellation, Europe is on its way already to boost its defense capabilities through initiatives such as ReArm Europe, that sparks debate about further consolidation towards a EDD (Haesebrouck & Haas, 2025; EEAS, 2025).

This report examines the creation of an EDD, beginning with the evolution of European defense cooperation and key structures like PESCO, the EDA, and the EDF. It then places these advancements in the context of recent development with the war in Ukraine and disruptions in the transatlantic partnership. Furthermore, a comparative study will take place, with the U.S. DoD shedding light on how centralized systems can oversee military forces with civilian supervision. This could serve blueprint that Europe could potentially adapt (though not entirely replicable). The research then assesses practical, ethical, NATO-related, and democratic

challenges, and proposes steps like strengthening the EDA and MPCC, building coalitions of the willing, and planning future treaty reforms.

2. Background and Evolution of European Defense Integration
2.1. Historical Context

The idea of a unified European defense began with the 1952 European Defence Community, but failed when France rejected it in 1954 over sovereignty concerns (Howorth, 2007). As a result, the Western European Union (WEU) persisted as a defense agreement that operated under the shadow of NATO's predominant role throughout the Cold War era (Howorth, 2007).

The 1992 Maastricht Treaty launched the EU's CFSP (Howorth, 2007), followed by the 1998 Saint Malo Declaration pushing for autonomous EU defense capabilities under what became the CSDP. Despite these advancements in defense integration, progress was made cautiously by aligning with NATO structures and requiring approval from all member states for major decisions. The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 officially brought in a defense clause (Article 42.7 TEU) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), but these still mainly functioned as mechanisms controlled by the member states' governments (Scazzieri, 2025).

2.2. Incremental Progress: PESCO, EDF, and the EDA

Despite taking careful considerations, the EU has been progressing in creating the tools for defense matters. The EDA established in 2004 is responsible for organizing efforts among member states to enhance their defense capabilities; however it operates within the constraints of each member states individual rights (European Defence Agency, 2025). On the other hand, since its inception in 2017, PESCO allows clusters of nations to engage in defense initiatives, such as the establishment of shared training facilities or development of military gear (PESCO, 2025). Additionally the European Defence Fund (EDF) was introduced to offer support by the EU towards research and procurement endeavors (Scazzieri, 2025).

Even though each new plan shows further ambition for defense strategies in Europe, the current defense policy is still far from being organized like the US DoD. European countries

are still consolidating full sovereignty over their armies, and when it comes to large EU defense missions, they usually depend on various temporary contributions. The idea of combining all these structures into one body, depends on overcoming issues related to national sovereignty and enhancing the capabilities already in place (Fiott, 2024).

3. Methodology and Documented Analysis

3.1. Research Approach

This capstone project uses a method of comparing policies in two areas. Firstly, it delves into the defense structures in the EU which includes PESCO, EDA and EDF, as well as new initiatives like ReArm Europe, SAFE fund, the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) and the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS). This analysis reviews the structural strengths and weaknesses of EU defense efforts and compares them with the U.S. DoD's development, budgeting, oversight, and command structures. By examining both, we identify practices that could strengthen EU institutions and guide the creation of an EDD (Rose, 2004).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

This study draws on EU documents, including TEU Articles 42–46, which outline the CSDP and related defense competences. Commission notices regarding current European defense structures and processes such as those on ReArm Europe and discussions from the European Parliament sessions, on defense topics shed light on existing institutional perspectives and legal discussions.

The study uses official documents, scholarly articles, and U.S. DoD sources to examine European defense integration and centralized budget management. Moreover, policy speeches and Commission documents for recurring themes like "strategic autonomy", "sovereignty," and "defense budget integration" will be explored in a qualitative content analysis in order to carry out its impact on discussions about a European Department of Defense. Additionally, mentions of "militarization" and "NATO overlap" are documented to assess the role of concerns and alliance agreements in determining the projects viability (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

3.3. Methodological Framework

When assessing the practicality of the project, viability was determined by using a critical approach based on the following criteria:

Legal and Institutional: When examining institutional aspects we compare treaty clauses, with the possibility of introducing new treaties or protocols.

Political Will and Sovereignty: Assessing states' readiness to share defense responsibilities while preserving sovereignty.

Comparative Fit: Assesses how the best practices of the U.S DoD such as a succinct budget and clear chain of command, legislative oversight could potentially be tailored to suit the multinational environment in Europe.

Ethical and Normative: Assessing risks of militarization, arms exports, and transparency.

A stepwise policy analysis (Bardach & Patashnik, 2023), then identified alternative models: full treaty revision, differentiated integration, incremental consolidation and weighed each against the defined criteria.

3.4. Limitations and Potential Biases

This research encounters a number of constraints. To begin with, the nature of discussions regarding EU defense planning are happening in real-time, and are influenced by the developing NATO-US relations, the unpredictable resolution of the conflict in Ukraine and the changing domestic political landscapes in key member countries. Thus, the analysis offers only a brief snapshot of rapidly evolving geopolitics.

Furthermore, the presence of classified information presents a limitation as military procurement tactics and defense discussions often occur in private settings which restrict access to specific data. Moreover, there is a chance of researcher bias in this project since it adopts an EU centered viewpoint and may tend to favor institutional solutions by nature. The researcher cross-checked comparing viewpoints from sovereignty advocates to NATO-first Atlanticists. With the given limitations in place, the selected qualitative and comparative method remains a tool for exploring the organization and rationale behind an EDD.

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4. Current Landscape: European Defense Transformation Post-2022

Europe's defense situation has seen tremendous changes following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The conflict exposed EU weaknesses in defense, industry, and U.S. reliance, prompting a paradigm shift toward deeper collaboration and independent security decision-making (European Parliament, 2025; Dhojnacki, 2025; European Commission, 2025).

4.1. Post-Ukraine Invasion Transformation

Russia's 2022 invasion led the EU to set defense goals in the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense, including a 5000-troop Rapid Deployment Capability (EEAS, 2025). The EU Peace Facility provided assistance to Ukraine, a shift from prior limitations. Later in 2023, the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) initiated efforts to bolster Europe's manufacturing capacity for arms and essential equipment (Paul et al., 2024).

By the start of 2025, the EU introduced the ReArm Europe Plan with a plan to allocate up to €800 billion for defense by 2030 along with the SAFE Fund of €150 billion offering low interest loans linked to European manufactured defense systems (Economic Times, 2025; Bisaccio, 2025). Observers suggest that if these substantial investments are managed separately at national levels, there may be fragmentation and duplication (Strupczewski, 2025; O'Dwyer, 2025). A centralized entity such as an EDD could assist in coordinating procurement decisions and enhancing capability development for greater efficiency (Paul et al., 2024; Mejino-López & Wolff, 2024).

4.2. European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI)

Germany also initiated the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) in 2022. It continued its development until 2024 with the participation of over 20 countries to establish an air and missile defense system. The ESSI project shows nations' efforts in large-scale defense while remaining aligned with NATO objectives. Supporters envision ESSI as a model for

coordination at the EU level in defense matters; however some skeptics raise concerns regarding potential conflicts arising from shared command structures with NATO (Fiott, 2024).

4.3. European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS)

In March of 2024, the Commission unveiled the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) advocating for a shift, towards a "war economy mode" to decrease dependence on non-European defense suppliers (Besch, 2024). Former High Representative of the EEAS Josep Borrell remarked that Europe lacks its own version of the U.S. Pentagon - highlighting the need for an EDD to bridge this gap in a coherent institution defense framework. The EDIS proposal has stirred up debates, some view it as a move towards militarizing the EU's identity, while others believe it is essential in promoting an European defense technology foundation (Mejino-López & Wolff, 2024).

4.4. NATO Tensions Under Trump

In the second term of President Trump's administration, there have been some significant tensions within NATO that have intensified over time. Discussions about reductions in U.S. presence in Europe's security/conditional backing for Article 5 have caused large concern among Eastern EU countries (Badshah, 2025; Reuters, 2025). The current atmosphere of uncertainty adds weight to the argument for an EDD, in conflux with NATO (Jbatchik, 2025; Sorgi, Barigazzi, & Faggionato, 2025).

5. Comparative Analysis: Lessons from the U.S. Department of Defense

This section examines the U.S. DoD's development, financial management, and command structure for lessons relevant to Europe.

5.1. Historical Evolution of the DoD

The U.S. DoD emerged from post-World War II reforms, with the 1947 National Security Act and 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act centralizing command under the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff (Center for Maritime Strategy, 2024). Its creation, after years of negotiation, mirrors the EU's likely challenges in integrating 27 forces (Fiott, 2025; Jones, 2025).

5.2. Centralized Budgeting and Legislative Oversight

A key feature of the DoD is its centralized budget process: military branches submit requests, combined into a single proposal reviewed by Congressional committees and audited by bodies like the Government Accountability Office and Congressional Budget Office to ensure accountability.

In terms of implications for an EDD, having a singular budget for the EU defense could lead to better resource management by consolidating resources from member countries and focusing on projects that contribute effectively to overall security objectives collectively. Replicating U.S. legislative oversight in the EU would require major treaty changes, while the U.S. defense budget of over $700 billion far exceeds EU levels. This difference implies that creating an EDD could require finding additional sources of revenue or shifting more funds from national defense budgets towards the EU defense budget. Both of which could pose challenges with important implications in national politics (Fiott, 2025; Allard & Rizzo, 2025).

5.3. Unified Command and Joint Culture

The U.S. chain of command flows from the President to Unified Commands. It then goes down to the Secretary of Defense, and then to Unified Combatant Commands. In addition to that system is the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs who serves as a advisor to ensure that strategic planning aligns well across all branches of the military.

When applying these insights to the European setting and considering EDD's implementation for enhancing defense decision-making processes in the region; it becomes apparent that unlike the U.S., that has a Commander in Chief in the form of the President, Europe lacks such a centralized leadership figurehead at the helm of its affairs in times of crisis. The responsibility might be distributed across an entity like the European Council, or possibly assigned to a newly fortified High Representative or Commissioner for Defense; thereby prompting concerns, about delineating clear lines of authority especially in moments of urgency and uncertainty. The EU must establish a doctrine that blends various strategic cultures found within the region. From France's focus on nuclear deterrence, to Germanys restricted military involvement (as per their constitution). Standardizing approaches could boost effectiveness during crises, and it would necessitate agreement on guidelines for engagement rules and military deployment triggers, all of which are subject to intricate political negotiations among the EU member states (Fiott, 2025; Heisbourg, 2024; Rhode, 2024).

5.4. Cultural and Structural Differences

The strategy of the DoD highlights the advantages of authority; however the U.S. operates as a system with significant constitutional powers at its core. In contrast, the EU is comprised of nations that must willingly combine this form of supranational authority. The Goldwater Nichols Act successfully resolved such disputes and fragmentation because Congress possessed the authority to enact modifications (Center for Maritime Strategy, 2024). In Europe, implementing a reform would necessitate amending treaties which would require

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creating or amending legal frameworks, or establishing strong intergovernmental pacts (Fiott, 2025).

5.5. Conclusion

The U.S. DoD shows how a unified command, single budget, and democratic oversight can effectively coordinate defense efforts. While the EU cannot simply replicate this model due to sovereignty limitations, they could still benefit from selectively adopting certain aspects such as synchronized procurement processes, establishing a single operational headquarters and integrating oversight mechanisms to improve defense collaboration. An EDD could adopt U.S. lessons on oversight and planning, adapted to Europe's multinational context (Fiott, 2025; Jones, 2025).

6. The Case for a European Department of Defense

Drawing from the evolution of EU structures over time and the urgency spurred by geopolitical challenges, along with insights gleaned from the U.S. DoD, we experience a strong case made for the creation of an EDD.

Europe is currently dealing with a turbulent and hostile security landscape and the risk of reduced involvement from the U.S. emphasizes the need for self-sufficiency in terms of strategic independence and shared security measures within the region. The establishment of an EDD would symbolize Europe's commitment to autonomy by enabling it to defend against external threats and take action independently in situations where U.S. intervention may not be forthcoming. Kaja Kallas (2025) who serves as the current EU High Representative cautioned "We don't have a cold war, but we have a hot war on European soil, and the threat is existential. It's as real as it can get." (Kallas, 2025). Such direct statements suggest that incremental coordination may not be enough and Europe might need to establish a defense system, for effective collective security by the year 2030 (Fiott, 2025; Dhojnacki, 2025).

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, a consolidated military organization could improve efficiency. It would in fact strengthen capacity development significantly. Since, with 27 distinct military forces and various different procedures for purchasing and planning, this often lead to redundant activities involving numerous types of armored vehicles ships etc. while missing out on essential resources like large-scale strategic airlift capabilities. By streamlining this process of planning and procurement, in which ReArm Europe is already an adequate step forward, an EDD could further streamline these operations and address crucial deficiencies similar to how, NATO's unified command operates on an alliance wide level (Bergmann et al., 2024; Fiott, 2025).

Thirdly, enhancing the EU's influence and political power on the global stage could be achieved through an EDD implementation. For the EU to command respect as a credible player

in great power politics, it requires strong defense structures in place. A cohesive security approach supported by an EDD would amplify the EU's influence in security matters. Moreover, it would provide assurance to both allies and foes in which Europe possesses genuine military strength to back its diplomatic efforts. In a real world scenario, an EDD could serve as a contact point for conducting deterrent discussions and offering security support, like supplying weapons to Ukraine, of depending on a mix of EU tools and individual country contributions. On a symbolic level, having a European Secretary of Defense present alongside defense and foreign ministers in international meetings would strengthen the image of the EU as a united player in defense issues and encourage stronger unity and solidarity among EU member states (Bergmann, 2025; Biscop, 2025).

Fourth, creating an EDD could potentially enhance democratic accountability in a paradoxical manner. Numerous defense decisions are presently made in private, behind closed-doors settings, within NATO or intergovernmental environments. If an EDD operates under the EU's guidance and supervision mechanisms such as the European Parliament or even the European Court of Justice, it could offer oversight and transparency for the public. This could enlarge the level of quality of decision making processes to public scrutiny, compared to the existing EU processes and structures (Carnegie Endowment, 2025 ; Wertheim, 2025).

Finally, in light of current events in Ukraine and growing concerns about defense across EU countries, we can observe that conflict has sparked calls for enhanced security measures within the EU the rising public expectations for protection and solidarity in times of crisis. These discussions justify the need for an EDD to address gaps in defense structures within the EU and foster a solidified sense of shared accountability for safeguarding Europe's security interests on a level without an established counterpart, to the U.S.' Pentagon despite considerable joint military investments. Nevertheless, there are challenges in terms of

institutions, politics and ethics that need to be dealt with as detailed in the following sections (Fiott, 2025; Bergmann et al., 2024).

7. Feasibility and Challenges

Proposing an EDD is one thing; implementing it is another. Legal, political, NATO-related, and democratic challenges must be addressed for an EDD to become reality. This section examines these feasibility issues.

7.1. Institutional and Legal Constraints

Under the current EU treaties in place today, defense mainly remains within the jurisdiction of nations and decision-making among governments in the EU member states. The legal structure of the EU (specifically outlined in the Treaty on European Union, Articles 42 through 46) allows for collaboration in defense matters like mutual aid (Art. 42.7) and PESCO (Article 46) but does not go as far as establishing centralized control over defense issues at a supranational level (PESCO, 2025). To establish a genuine EDD, changes to the existing EU treaties or the creation of an entirely new treaty would likely be necessary. An EDD would grant the EU authority over military personnel, budgets, and defense policies. This goes beyond what the EU can do at the moment based on its current competencies (Buzmaniuk, 2024) Changing the EU treaties is a process that requires all member states to agree and ratify the changes individually; sometimes this involves holding referendums that may not lead to a successful outcome (PESCO, 2025).

Some experts propose bringing back the 1952 EDC Treaty or utilizing reinforced collaboration through the framework of PESCO. However these strategies also present challenges. A further obstacle is the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in CFSP/CSDP which could result in an EDD not being subject to EU legal oversight unless modifications are made to the treaties (Chawla, 2024; PESCO, 2025).

7.2. Sovereignty and Political Will of Member States

Several EU nations are still keen on safeguarding their defense autonomy and are hesitant to relinquish authority over decisions on their armed forces, purchasing and

deployment strategies (Wertheim, 2025). They value their rights greatly in this regard; France especially treasures its nuclear independence. Smaller countries or those that remain neutral are concerned about losing autonomy or breaching their stance of neutrality. However, political stances can change due to pressures (Monaghan, 2024). As evidenced by Denmark's referendum overturning its opt out clause following the Ukraine conflict, as well as Sweden and Finland joining NATO, a EU Defense Directive proposal should consider strategic and tactical boundaries like the need for supervision, in military deployments (Monaghan, 2024). The process could begin with a group of states that're willing to collaborate and may allow for additional states to come on board at a later stage (Wertheim, 2025; Rhode, 2024).

7.3. NATO Interoperability and Overlap

Every proposal for an EDD raises questions for NATO; would it strengthen or undermine the current transatlantic unity and effectiveness? This capstone advocates that it should serve as an component within NATO's framework, a European pillar. This requires careful coordination to ensure seamless leadership and standardization. The presence of non-EU NATO members such as the UK and Türkiye adds complexity to this scenario, excluding them could risk division within European defense efforts while including them would require specific agreements to navigate potential challenges (Koenig, 2024; Besch & Varma, 2025). In essence, a well-crafted EDD should aim to bolster NATO's capabilities by sharing responsibilities rather than causing any form of separation or decoupling (Consilium Europa, 2025; Scazzieri, 2025).

7.4. Democratic Accountability and Ethical Concerns

Expanding defense raises concerns about transparency and militarization. Defense policy is secretive matter. This could complicate matters if integrated into the EU without adequate oversight from a strong parliamentary body to balance potential democratic shortcomings. This is highlighted by critics who fear the emergence of an EU military industry

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could dominate over principles of civilian governance within the EU. On the other hand, supporters argue an EDD could enforce ethical rules on arms trade, uphold international law, and strengthen European parliamentary oversight. Navigating the balance between strengthening the capabilities of the EU and upholding its normative values continues to be a key hurdle (Bruegel, 2025).

8. Models for Implementation

Below are three main models for establishing an EDD, reflecting different levels of political ambition and institutional reform.

8.1. Full EU Integration via Treaty Change

One possible comprehensive strategy would be to establish a European Defense Minister role, similar to that of a Commissioner or High Representative within the EU framework, that holds executive authority as outlined in EU treaties. The implementation of this plan would streamline defense initiatives such as PESCO, EDF and the EDA into a structure with a single budget line for EU defense spending. In addition to this, restructuring it could grant the European Parliament shared decision-making powers over defense expenditures and strategic direction making sure there is democratic oversight at the supranational level (Castaldi, 2025).

The main advantage of this model is achieving a level of maximum coherence by turning the EDD into a "European Pentagon." However its main drawback is the necessity of a treaty revision/adaptation, a challenge that proves to be quite formidable and contentious. National referendums frequently come with a risk of being rejected especially when citizens perceive the proposal as a threat to their nations sovereignty (Koenig, 2024).

8.2. Differentiated Integration

Another options of integration would be one of developing a dual-speed approach, similar to that of the stages of Schengen or the Euro. This could involve a select group of countries, like France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Benelux, Poland, (potentially UK), forming a separate Defense Union Treaty outside the official EU framework to establish an entity akin to EDD among themselves initially. Combining these EU countries, you formulate 75% of the EU's total GDP and circa 64% of EU's defense spending (World Bank, 2023). If effective, this setup could later integrate into the EU's legal defense framework.

One large key benefit of this method is that it avoids the requirement for agreement from all EU member countries from the start, instead, allowing those with similar goals and incentives to move forward swiftly together. However, this approach also comes with a downside of creating a two-tier EU where some nations are left on the sidelines. This situation could possibly increase rifts within the Union.

8.3. Incremental Model

A more gradual approach would be to steadily, but cautiously enhance the effectiveness of the current EU defense institutions. This would be by starting to is empower the CSDP, which involves the EDF, EDA, PESCO etc. In this way, it would enable it to handle procurement activities related to initiatives like ReArm or SAFE, while ensuring there is a clear directive in place to minimize redundancy within the system (Bergmann et al., 2024). Subsequently, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) could be developed into a robust center of operations, with the capacity to manage extensive missions and fully coordinated military units effectively (EEAS, 2025). Moreover, naming a Defense Commissioner for the EU to oversee EDA, PESCO and EDF would help streamline planning, budgeting and operational supervision. After these components prove effective, a potential treaty amendment could officially acknowledge the outcome as a de facto EDD (Fiott, 2025).

One major benefit of this approach is that it prevents abrupt, uncalculated shifts in power, by enabling each stage to undergo testing, monitoring, reflection and receive political approval beforehand. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that progress may be sluggish and disjointed if only certain member nations choose to participate more actively than others. Moreover, without a defined objective, there is a risk that the process could lose its momentum over time, and lead to the same existing overly bureaucratic inefficiency in place that this capstone is trying to solve (Koenig, 2024; Fiott, 2025).

9. Ethical and Normative Implications

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe has seen growing support for stronger defense cooperation. Europe has seen growing support for stronger defense cooperation, although sentiment varies by country; however this sentiment varies across different countries in the region. Neutral countries, like Austria and Ireland, are grappling with the challenge of balancing their obligations under more integrated European defense efforts with their commitments to neutrality, which may lead to discussions around formal exemptions or ensuring that decisions regarding military deployment remain within national jurisdiction (Michaels & Sus, 2024). Additionally, it is important for any potential EDD to have adequate democratic legitimacy. This is both a moral and practical necessity; without public support, any defense cooperation initiative could face opposition similar to what led to the failure of the original European Defense Community (EDC), back in the 1950s (Castaldi, 2025; Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

Looking at it from a different angle, could a central EU defense body also streamline the purchasing and selling of weapons? On one side, if an EDD enforces arms export rules across the EU, it might lower the chances of escalating national arms disputes. On the other side, boosting Europe's defense industry capacity could result in increased weapon sales internationally, unless closely monitored. Civil society warns of a profit-driven military-industrial complex. Thus, implementing transparent and fair export regulations and controls, coherent vetting processes and thorough legislative scrutiny, it could aim to reduce these risks, guaranteeing that an EDD represents a responsible and conscientious defense, rather than unchecked militarization (Varma, 2024; Fiott, 2024; Besch, 2024).

The EU traditionally prioritizes conflict prevention, humanitarian aid, and diplomacy. Skeptics warn about militarization (Fiott, 2024; Scazzieri, 2025). In this light, a robust EDD might exacerbate these critiques. Yet, in practice, both soft and hard power can work hand-in-

hand; an EU that is ready to use force when necessary could enhance its bargaining power in diplomatic frameworks, as opponents recognize the real deterrence and strength that is necessary for backing up EU stances. Diplomacy requires credible military leverage. By keeping an emphasis on diplomacy and possibly increasing the resources of the EEAS, the EU can uphold its reputation as a promoter of peace, while also enhancing its ability for credible, united defense efforts (Fiott, 2024; Jbatchik, 2024; Biscop, 2025).

10.   Recommendations

1. **Common Vision & Roadmap**

Release a European Defense White Paper outlining the long term vision, for a defense framework by 2030, and define milestones while delegating tasks to the Commission, Council and member countries.

2. **Leverage Upcoming Treaty Debates**

Promoting the integration of defense in a treaty reofrm, (e.g., a Constitutional Convention on Europe) and preparing a "European Defense Protocol" for approval when the right political circumstances arise.

3. **Upgrading European Defence Agency (EDA) and MPCC**

Give the EDA the power to coordinate binding decisions for projects funded by ReArm and SAFE in order to reduce repetition/duplication

Develop the MPCC into a robust headquarters with the task of organizing and executing significant missions that go beyond just small-scale training operations currently in place.

4. **Comparative Learning from the U.S. DoD**

Organizing an exchange program between the EU and the U.S. to delve into how the U.S. DoD manages its budgeting procedures and supervises its operations within the chain of command structure. The initiative seeks to adapt these practices to the EU's structure, including its parliamentary systems and absence of a single head of state.

5. **Collaborative Projects**

Showcase high profile projects, such as a drone initiative or a specialized missile defense system in ESSI to illustrate the benefits of purchasing and strategic coordination.

6. **Coalition of the Willing**

Encourage a core group of member countries to sign an agreement as the foundation of an EDD, which could be opened up to all countries once certain criteria are met and political determination is gathered. This strategy mirrors the growth of Schengen or the Euro expansion, which originated from a number of nations to almost the whole EU.

7. **Democratic Oversight Mechanisms**

Propose that the European Parliament shares partial decision-making power on the EDD budget and establishes a Parliamentary Defense Oversight Committee while mandating reports on EDD activities and spending.

8. **NATO Coordination**

Propose establishing a NATO-EU Defense Cooperation Agreement to specify that an EDD supports and complements NATO efforts and invites EU allies like the UK and Norway to participate in EDD initiatives according to EU guidelines to prevent redundancy or strategic ambiguity (Taylor, 2024; Jbatchik, 2024).

9. **Ethical Guidelines and Transparency**

Create a European Defense Code of Conduct defining use-of-force rules, arms export guidelines, and commitment to international law. This should share summarized information on arms transactions and mission costs openly, and allow external reviews by the European Court of Auditors to ensure utmost transparency and accountability.

10. **Formal Recognition Target**

By 2030, an exclusive European Council meeting on defense should be established to discuss the possibility of establishing the EDD formally, recognized as a treaty revision or "Defense Protocol". This agreement could officially cement the basis of the EDD if previous gradual actions have shown positive and constructive outcomes.

11.   Conclusion

The idea of a European Department of Defense is becoming a tangible goal, driven by Russia's actions in Ukraine and shifting U.S. commitments under President Trump. Initiatives like ReArm Europe and SAFE highlight the need to move beyond national defenses and unreliable U.S. guarantees. A well-constructed EDD would combine purchasing processes into an efficient system and incorporate democratic supervision to align with the centralized governance model of the U.S. DoD, but tailored to suit Europe's diverse multinational landscape.

There are still obstacles to overcome in this regard. Dealing with institutional hurdles calls for political guidance and possibly the creation or adaptation of agreements and existing treaties. Sovereignty issues demand balancing national authority with coordinated planning. Maintaining alignment with NATO is crucial, an EDD should serve as the European pillar and complement rather than replace the existing transatlantic alliance. However, the possible benefits; enhanced deterrence capabilities, allocation of defense resources, increased global reputation/credibility, and improved democratic accountability, warrant serious deliberation.

By federalizing the current EU defense & security institutions and promoting alliances among coalitions of the willing to cooperate while outlining a clear long-term vision based on reformed treaties, the EU can systematically work towards establishing an EDD. U.S. DoD insights show that cohesive institutions enhance military efficiency. European decision makers could act upon the opportunity they have now. The potential to elevate defense collaboration from a fragmented arrangement to a genuine defense union is available. This could signify a tremendous achievement comparable to the introduction of the Euro or the Schengen zone, for the European Union. An EDD would indicate that Europe is not just unified in its diplomatic stance, it also has the ability to come together to protect its citizens and principles as an effort

in times of global instability. This serves as a crucial factor in safeguarding Europe's peace, security and strategic autonomy amidst uncertain times.

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