STRATEGIC AUTONOMY UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Frédéric Mauro



The New Holy Grail of European Defence

GRIP

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BIRTH OF A CONCEPT

Words and ideas are like clothes: they are subject to fashion. Most assuredly, the concept of "strategic autonomy" is currently à la mode, in Paris and in Brussels alike. The 2017 French Strategic Review of Defence and National Security is peppered abundantly, if not excessively, with the term and there are very few documents on the subject of defence to come out of the Council, Commission or European Parliament these days that do not refer to it.

Not only is the concept a commonly used one in political statements, but it is starting to make its debut in the legal field. The regulation currently being drafted for the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) lists it as one of the objectives of the programme and, possibly, one of the criteria used to assess the eligibility of beneficiaries of European funding.

But what is "strategic autonomy"? Because there is no precise definition, crafted by lawyers, of these two words that are now commonplace.

A VAGUE CONCEPT ON THE CROSSROADS OF FRENCH CONCERNS AND EUROPEAN AMBITIONS

A. The French concept expressed at the end of the Cold War

The words "strategic autonomy" first appeared in an official document: the French "White Paper on Defence" of June 1994.[1] We found no trace of the concept before that, not even in the White Paper of 1972, which refers only to the concept of national independence.[2] General de Gaulle would appear to have used it only once in all of his speeches,[3] although he intellectually demarcated its outlines.[4] In the thinking of the time, the concept of national independence, which everybody can understand, was more than enough to describe a defence ambition.

But due to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the authors of the 1994 White Paper would feel the need to break this concept down to the point of stating that "the future of deterrence and the terms and conditions of our strategic autonomy

1. The 1994 document contains the first six instances of the concept : pages 49, 50, 52, 78, and 139. www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/944048700.pdf
2. Mention is made of the words "strategic autonomy" from 1974 in a number of doctrinal works, but they are not accompanied by any real developments. See 61.
3. On 16 March 1950, General de Gaulle summed up the situation before a group of journalists. Press conference held at the Palais d'Orsay. In response to a question put to him concerning the ratification of a bilateral Franco-American impact on military assistance concluded on 27 January 1950, the General replied: "I cannot see any disadvantage, quite the reverse, in being given the resources to arm five divisions by virtue of mutual assistance. But we cannot think that this will profoundly change the conditions in which we will be in the terrible economic situation that may arise. Furthermore, there is still nothing to clarify the role we will play in creating inter-allied action. Finally, the weaponry is limited, as you know, to weapons that confer no strategic autonomy upon us. But this is a bad thing for us, because after all, the policies do not always overlap, particularly concerning Africa, and even French Africa. It may be unacceptable to us not to be able to do anything by ourselves, which is effective in certain scenarios (…)". Charles de Gaulle, speeches and messages, "Dans l'attente (février 1946-avril 1958)", Librairie Plon, 1970. p. 328 [access subject to a charge]
4. "The defence of France must be French. This is a requirement that has not always been very familiar in recent years. I'm aware of this. It is vital that it becomes familiar once again. If a country like France should be called upon to go to war, it must be her own war. Her effort must be her own effort. If this is not the case, our country would be at odds with everything she has been since the beginning, with her role, with her self-esteem, with her spirit. Of course, French defence may, if necessary, join together with that of other countries. This is in the very nature of things. But it is indispensable that our defence is our own, that France defends herself by herself, for herself and in her own way. If this is not the case, if we accept that the defence of France had long ceased to be in the national framework and that it was being confused, or merging, with something else, it would not be possible to maintain a State in our country. It is the raison d'être of the Government, at any time, to defend the independence and integrity of the country. That is the basis for everything it does. In France in particular, all of our regimes stem from that basis." Speech by Charles de Gaulle to the military academy of Saint-Cyr, 3 November 1959 (our translation) www.cvce.eu/obj/discours_de_charles_de_gaulle...

are central to (our) reflection."[5] Here, strategic autonomy was meant as another way of saying "independence and freedom of political action."[6] On the one hand, it included being in possession of a nuclear weapon and, on the other, a military apparatus making it possible to act outside national borders.

The question that was then of concern to the French strategists was how to ensure "a new complementarity between deterrence and action, because over the next ten years, (strategic autonomy) will no longer be based on nuclear deterrence alone", and increasingly on "the resources of armies (which) are and will be greatly stretched for external crisis prevention and resolution missions, with no direct risk of nuclear escalation or prospect of total war."[7]

In this first voicing of the concept, strategic autonomy was based on three elements:

" - the knowledge of situations, notably through intelligence, which makes it possible to autonomously predict and assess events, thereby creating the capacity to make decisions quickly, by making enlightened choices;
- being in control of complex situations featuring a mixture of political, military and regional dimensions from a strategic point of view, and multinational and inter-armed force dimensions in the military field;
- strategic mobility, in order to be free in our movements, and to be able to project forces to the right place in a timely fashion."[8]

Obviously, the French were not the only ones to tackle the question of redefining their defence strategies. The British were the first to do so, in July 1990, with the strategic review entitled "Options for Change", followed one year later by the Americans with the National Security Strategy of August 1991. Admittedly, this is partly about reaping the "dividends of peace", but also about moving from a threat-oriented defence policy to a capabilities-oriented defence policy. For the British in particular, the aim was to have smaller armed forces in numerical terms, but for them to be better equipped, better trained, more motivated, more flexible and more mobile, to be used for the benefit of NATO (in other words, in Europe) "or elsewhere, if necessary."[9]

Incidentally, the Atlantic Alliance as a whole also espoused this evolution as, at the London summit of July 1990, the Western leaders would decide upon a shift from territorial defence to crisis management.[10]

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5. LBDN 1994 p. 49.
6. LBDN 1994 p. 52.
7. LBDN 1994 p. 52.
8. LBDN 1994 p. 52 and 53.
9. "Defence Select Committee, The Strategic Defence Review", HC 138-I, Session 1997-1998, quoted in A Brief Guide to Previous British Defence Reviews, House of Commons, 19 October 2010, Standard Note SN/IA/5714
10. Declaration of the heads of state or government on "A Transformed North Atlantic Alliance" in London, July 1990, and in particular paragraph 14: "as Soviet troops leave Eastern Europe and a treaty limiting conventional Armed Forces is implemented, the Alliance's integrated force structure and its strategy will change fundamentally (...): NATO will field smaller and restructured active forces. These forces will be highly mobile and versatile so that Allied leaders will have maximum flexibility in deciding how to respond to a crisis. It will rely increasingly on multinational corps made up of national units." www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/official_texts_23693.htm

But although the French were not the only ones to be looking at re-orienting their military strategies, they were the only ones to use the words "strategic autonomy". These do not appear in the American documents,[11] or the British ones,[12] or in any other European document at the time. What is more, that is still the case.

B. A European concept connected to the emergence of the idea of common defence

Although the concept of strategic autonomy was not officially expressed in France for the first time until 1994, it is reasonable to assume that it already existed in embryonic form in the reflections that followed the end of the Cold War and that the French would make use of this strategic shift to push forward one of their national tropisms – emancipation from American tutelage. In this way, they managed, more or less, to persuade their European partners at the time to adopt it, albeit in a slightly different format.

At the Maastricht Summit of December 1991, the draft Treaty on the European Union was drawn up, with its articles B and J.4.1. that set the EU the objective of the "implementation of a common foreign and security policy including the eventual framing of the common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence". What was not yet certain was whether this "common defence" would be more or less "autonomous" with regard to American defence.

As Sir Peter Ricketts, one of the authors of this part of the Maastricht Treaty, explains: this wording secured the agreement of the parties, as it could be interpreted in two different ways. At the time, the member states were divided into two camps. One group, led by the French, was in favour of a European defence capability, independent of NATO, a position that reflected France's long-held reservations concerning the American dominatino of NATO. This camp saw article J.4.1. as the first decisive step towards an autonomous European defence capability. The other, smaller, camp was led by the British Prime Minister, John Major, for whom it was out of the question to allow the European Union to develop a defence capability separate from NATO, (but who), being a touch more pragmatic than his predecessor [Margaret Thatcher], accepted the

11. The "*National Security Strategy*" (August 1991) the "*Bottom-up review*" (1993) and the first "*Quadrennial defense review*" (May 1997) all avoid the term strategic autonomy, as would strategic documents published subsequently.

12. The British invented the concept of White Paper in the immediate post-war period. They are also the nation to have produced the largest number of strategic documents in the field of defence. To list just the main ones: "*Sandys Review*" (1957); the "*Healeys reviews*" (1965-1968); the "*Mason Review*" (1974-1975); the "*Nott Review*" (1981); "*Options for change*" (1990); (*Front line first: The Defence Costs Study*" (1994); the "*Strategic Defence Review*" and the "*SDR New Chapter*" (2002); the "*Defence White Paper*" (2003); the "*National Security Strategy – update 2009 – Security for the next generation*"; "*A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: the National Security Strategy* and "*The Defence and Security Strategy*" (2010); the "*National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review*" (2015). None of these documents includes the term "strategic autonomy". However, they do often refer to the concept of independence, including in its operational scope ("*independence of action*", SDSR 2010; "*operational independence*" SDSR 2015 4.71), as well as the "*freedom of action*" (SDSR 2015).

inclusion of the words "common defence" (...), but he did so hoping that it would never actually happen."[13]

After the Maastricht Treaty, the British tried to breathe new life into the "Western European Union" (WEU), an organisation that, in their view, could represent an acceptable face of European defence, since it was separate from the European Union. In 1995, the arrival to power in France of Jacques Chirac, who was in favour of a rapprochement with the United States within a NATO framework, allowed an extra step to be taken with the recognition, at the meeting of the foreign affairs ministers in Berlin in June 1996, of a "European defence identity" within NATO. This was the idea that elements of the NATO command structure could effectively be loaned to the WEU to conduct operations in which the Americans would not wish to intervene.

Finally, the "first" Gulf War in 1991, and especially the setbacks suffered by the European powers in the Yugoslavian Wars, particularly their inability to put together an effective military response to the events in Bosnia between 1993 and 1995 without the assistance of the Americans, highlighted the need for Europe to build up its own autonomous military capability.

A development in this direction was made possible with the arrival of Tony Blair in Downing Street in May 1997. His first act was to sign the Treaty of Amsterdam in October 1997, article J.7 of which provided that: "the Union shall accordingly foster closer institutional relations with the WEU with a view to the possibility of the integration of the WEU into the Union, should the European Council so decide." Like Jacques Chirac, the same Tony Blair would find himself frustrated by the difficulties in putting together an intervention force in a Kosovo that was prey to violent incidents and by the reluctance of Bill Clinton and Congress to intervene. This sequence of events led up to the Saint-Malo summit of December 1998. According to Sir Peter Ricketts, the intention of these two European leaders was clear from the word go: they were determined to develop an autonomous military capability for the European Union. And this is clearly reflected in the Franco-British declaration of 4 December 1998, with its key sentence:

> "2. To this end (to be capable of fully taking its role on the international stage), the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises."[14]

This, effectively, was a conceptual breakthrough between the French and the British, each one crossing the boundaries it had previously set for itself: the British agreed that the European Union could be able to develop an authentic military capability.

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13. Sir Peter Rickets, the EU and Defence – The Legacy of Saint-Malo – RUSI Journal, June-July 2017, vol. 162 no. 3, p. 30-38 [accessed subject to a charge].

14. www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/dossiers/d000131-l-europe-de-la-defense/declaration-franco-britannique-sur-la-defense-europeenne-saint-malo-4-decembre-1998

The French agreed that this would involve lending NATO the resources to plan and execute military operations, in other words in harmony with the Atlantic Alliance rather than in competition with it.

As things were, there was complete compatibility between this "capacity for autonomous action" to be built and NATO; had this not been the case, the British would not have agreed to it. In the case of NATO, it was a matter of "territorial defence", principally on European soil, against "armed threats" and with the decisive assistance of the United States, whereas the autonomous capacity of the common defence policy was aimed at "managing crises" on the international stage, in other words outside Europe and without the aid of Washington. With the exception of the command and control resources, therefore, there was no possible overlap between these two axes of military strategies.

At this point, two observations are called for.

Firstly, but this is not news, there is a direct link between the Franco-British declaration of Saint-Malo and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union. Indeed, article 42.1 of the Lisbon Treaty recalls that the CSDP "provides the Union with operational capacity drawing on civil and military assets". "Capacity for autonomous action backed up by credible military forces" or "operational capacity drawing on civil and military resources": a few slight nuances aside, the idea is the same.

Secondly, there is an obvious relationship between, on the one hand, the concept of strategic autonomy promoted by the French in 1994 and, on the other, the European concept that emerged in 1998. In both cases, the aim is to be able to conduct military crisis management operations outside European territory, autonomously, in other words without the Americans, but with the support of NATO resources if required.

C. The concept becomes embedded in French strategic thinking ...

In a continuation of its 1994 predecessor, the French White Paper on defence and national security of June 2008 likens strategic autonomy to three freedoms put together: "the freedom of assessment", "the freedom of decision" and the "freedom of action on the part of the Head of State",[15] but without going into any more detail on what these components consist of. However, the document states that "space (is) a decisive factor in strategic autonomy",[16] along with "scientific, technological and industrial competences."[17] According to the authors, the freedom of decision stands against a situation in which "no French force will be permanently under the command of NATO in peacetime."[18]

15. LBDSN 2008, p. 69 and 133, www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/084000341.pdf
16. LBDSN 2008, p. 135.
17. LBDSN 2008, p. 261.
18. LBDSN 2008, p. 317.

Finally, the White Paper of 2008 refers, for the first time, to the concept of the strategic autonomy of the European Union:

> "France will promote increased pooling of intelligence for use command and planning structures, and in support of the Union's civil and military commitments. In this context, emphasis will be given to the identification of intelligence themes of common interest, sharing open documentation derived from the member countries' space observation facilities, and exchanges of instructors and trainees. These resources will play a key role in ensuring the strategic autonomy of the Union. Therefore our countries need to jointly build and operate common means of observation, transmission, geo-positioning, detection and surveillance of missile launches, as well as surveillance of space.
>
> (...) France believes that the Union needs a permanent and autonomous strategic planning capability. With respect to operational planning and conduct of operations, the Union is currently dependent on the availability either of national command capabilities that only a small number of member states possess, which are very much in demand, or on NATO's means. The growth in its external interventions therefore calls for the expansion of European capabilities in this area. France further believes it is necessary to take steps to ensure that the Union's military operations and civil missions are placed under unified strategic leadership in Brussels."[19]

In the White Paper on defence and national security of April 2013, the term 'strategic autonomy' appears 13 times. A distinction is drawn between nuclear deterrence, which "ensures, permanently, our independence of decision-making and our freedom of action",[20] and "external intervention", which must always fulfil the principal strategic autonomy.[21] It states that:

> "Changes in the strategic context may make it necessary for our country to take the initiative in operations or, more frequently than in the past, assume a substantial share of the responsibilities inherent to conducting military action. France considers that the greater its autonomous capacity for initiative and action, the greater will be its contribution to a collective response and its ability to mobilise allies and partners. France therefore considers the principle of strategic autonomy as the main pillar of its external intervention strategy. It will ensure that it has the capabilities giving it freedom of assessment, planning and command, together with the critical capabilities that form the basis of its freedom of decision and operational action."[22]

19. LBDSN 2008, p. 90.

20. LBDSN 2013, p. 75, www.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/pdf/le_livre_blanc_de_la_defense_2013.pdf

21. LBDSN 2013, p. 83, 88 et 136.

22. LBDSN 2008, p. 136.

Unlike the White Paper of 2008, the words "strategic autonomy of the European Union" make no appearance. It does, however, state that:

> "France's capability also enables it to commit to policies of mutual dependence with its EU partners. France is determined to retain its own capacity for initiative and leadership and believes that better coordination between the EU member states will remove any capacity deficiencies and duplication. These freely agreed interdependencies will strengthen the sovereignty of each member state by increasing the resources available at the European level. This vision underpins our European choice and the mutual dependencies to which we shall continue to commit with our closest partners."[23]

As regards space, the White Paper states that it is both "free access to and use of space" that determine strategic autonomy.[24] This clearly reflects the French insistence, directed at Germany, on the need to master space technology and launchers, a debate that fed into the launch of the Ariane 6.

Finally, the White Paper of 2013 stresses the importance of getting on top of the "critical capabilities that form the basis of our freedom of action."[25] These critical capabilities are defined as those that are:

> "essential to defending our vital interests and allowing us to take the initiative in simple, predictable operations (joint force command, intelligence and targeting capabilities, special forces, combat resources in contact with the adversary); they are also crucial to our capability to play an important role in a coalition in order to preserve our autonomy (campaign of precision strikes deep into hostile territory, independent capability of first entry in a theatre of operation, command capability enabling us to assume the role of lead nation in a medium-scale inter-allied operation or an influential role preserving our sovereignty in a multi-national operation). These capabilities must, in particular, enable us to play a full role within the European Union and assume all responsibilities within the Atlantic Alliance and NATO command structures."

Finally, in the strategic defence and national security review presented in November 2017 by MEP Arnaud Danjean, strategic autonomy makes a very strong showing, as it is referred to in it no fewer than 26 times.[26] "European" strategic autonomy makes a very strong reappearance, as it is not only referred to in the preface signed by the President of the Republic, but it gives its name to the title of a subsection. However, what the concept gains in the frequency of its use it loses in clarity.

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23. LBDSN 2013, p. 21.

24. LBDSN 2013, p. 45.

25. LBDSN 2013, p. 88.

26. RSDSN 2017, p. 3 (three times) 7, 10, 14 (twice, one of which is abbreviated – 'notre autonomie'), 52 (three times), 53 (no. 154 & 156), 54 (no. 157 and title), 56 (title and no. 170 & 173), 57 (no. 178 abbreviated – 'l'autonomie'), 58 (no. 180 & 182 and title), 63 (no. 203), 66 (no. 218), 70 (no. 230), 78 (no. 275), 88. www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/presentation/evenements/revue-strategique-de-defense-et-de-securite-nationale-2017

For instance, it states that "autonomy is also based on diplomacy and, in particular, the capacity to prepare the political and legal framework of the military action (...). Strategic autonomy cannot be thought of in exclusively military terms and presupposes close articulation with our civil instruments, be they in the field of diplomacy or development."[27] This bears a resemblance to the "operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets" referred to in article 42.1 of the Treaty on European Union. No surprise, then, that the strategic review makes a strong case for "strategic convergence" in Europe, which is understood as a better articulation between national strategic autonomy and European ambition, between national interests and shared interests."[28]

In his speech at the Sorbonne on 26 September 2017, Emmanuel Macron himself used the word autonomy in contexts that bear reiterating:

> "In the area of defence, our aim needs to be ensuring Europe's autonomous operating capabilities, in complement to NATO. The basis for this autonomy has been laid, with historic progress in recent months. In June, we laid the foundations of Defence Europe: Permanent Structured Cooperation, enabling us to make enhanced commitments, to progress together and to better coordinate ourselves; and also a European Defence Fund to fund our capacities and research. We are in the process of giving this essential framework content, through discussions between the various member states who wish to move forward in this area."

Attentive readers will have noticed that he is talking about the autonomy of Europe, rather than the autonomy of the Union ...

D. ... and in EU strategic thinking

As regards the European Union, it would appear that the words strategic autonomy cropped up for the first time in the annual report of the European Parliament on the "implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy" of 10 March 2010, for which the rapporteur was none other than Arnaud Danjean. In this report (§ 3), the European Parliament:

> "stresses that the Union must enhance its strategic autonomy through a strong and effective foreign, security and defence policy, so as to preserve peace, prevent conflicts, strengthen international security, protect the security of its own citizens and the citizens concerned by CSDP missions, defend its interests in the world and uphold its founding values, while contributing to effective multilateralism (...)"[29]

27. RSDSN, no. 178,179 and 180.

28. RSDSN 2017, no. 156 p. 53.

29. European Parliament Annual Report ((2009/2198(INI)) on the implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy. 10 March 2010 (rapporteur Arnaud Danjean) www.europarl.europa.eu (Session Document A7-0026/2010).

The European Commission took a few more years to make the concept its own. It would not be until the 2013 communication entitled "Towards a more competitive and efficient European defence and security sector" that we could read that:

> "the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) constitutes a key element for Europe's capacity to ensure the security of its citizens and to protect its values and interests. Europe must be able to assume its responsibilities for its own security and for international peace and stability in general. This necessitates a certain degree of strategic autonomy: to be a credible and reliable partner, Europe must be able to decide and to act without depending on the capabilities of third parties. Security of supply, access to critical technologies and operational sovereignty are therefore crucial."[30]

Since then, the concept of strategic autonomy has been used many times, by the European Council[31], the Council of the European Union,[32] the Parliament, [33] [34] [35] [36] [37]

30. . COM (2013) 542 final, 24 July 2013, p. 3 www.europarl.europa.eu
31. Conclusions of the European Council of 19 and 20 December 2013 EUCO217/13 § 16: "Europe needs a more integrated, sustainable, innovative and competitive defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) to develop and sustain defence capabilities. This can also enhance its strategic autonomy and its ability to act with partners." data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-217-2013-INIT/en/pdf
32. Conclusions of the Council of the European Union of 18 May 2015, 8971/15, § 8 data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8971-2015-INIT/en/pdf
33. Report of the European Parliament dated 29 October 2010 on the European defence technological and industrial base (2013/2125(INI)); report on the substance by the committee on foreign affairs, rapporteur Michael Gahler, three occurrences: § 4, 57 and 58 and report for the opinion by the committee on industry, research and energy, rapporteur Jean-Pierre Audy, three occurrences: § 1, 14 and 22; the latter report also contains a definition of strategic autonomy, along the lines of the French White Paper of 2008; "(the rapporteur) takes the view that in order to have a permanent, competitive European defence industrial and technological base, the following prerequisites are needed: autonomy in making assessments and decisions; freedom of action; security of supply; and access to technology and expertise in its use." www.europarl.europa.eu (Session Document A7-2013-0358).
34. Report of the European Parliament dated 29 March 2016 on the European Union in a changing global environment – a more connected, contested and complex world (2015/2272(INI)), committee on foreign affairs, rapporteur Sandra Kalniete, recital J and § 7. www.europarl.europa.eu (P8-TA(2016)0120
35. Report of the European Parliament dated 31 October 2016 on the European Defence Union (2016/2052(INI)), report on the substance by the committee on foreign affairs, rapporteur Urmas Paet, recital J, § 19, § 35, "the European Parliament warmly welcomes the strategic autonomy concept developed by the VP/HR as part of the EU global strategy; believes that this concept should be applied both in strategic priorities and in strengthening our capacities and our industry", § 37 and report for the opinion of the committee on the internal market and consumer protection (2016/2052(INI)), rapporteur for the opinion Lara Comi, § 5. www.europarl.europa.eu (Session Document A8-2016-0316).
36. Report of the European Parliament dated 3 November 2016 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (based on the Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy) (2016/2067(INI)), committee on foreign affairs, rapporteur Ioan Mircea Paşcu, § 10, 33, 38, 43 and 45. www.europarl.europa.eu (Session Document A8-2016-0317)
37. Report of the European Parliament dated 17 February 2017 on the constitutional, legal and institutional implications of a common security and defence policy: possibilities offered by the Lisbon Treaty (2015/2343(INI)); joint report by the committee on foreign affairs, rapporteur Michael Gahler, and the committee on constitutional affairs, rapporteur Esteban González Pons, and the report for the opinion of the committee on budgets, rapporteur Jean Arthuis. In the latter opinion, the committee on budgets "notes that recent political developments and the numerous threats affecting member states both within the EU and NATO further highlight the utmost urgency of shaping a genuine European Security and Defence Union and of strengthening the strategic autonomy of the European Union." www.europarl.europa.eu (Document de séance A8-2017-0042).

the Commission[38] and the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP).[39] In March 2015, a document published by the European Commission, the European Defence Agency and the European Space Agency is entitled: "Critical space technologies for European strategic non-dependence."[40] Also worth highlighting is a report by the CEPS ("*Centre for European Policy Studies*") published in February 2015 under the aegis of Javier Solana and entitled "*More Union in European Defence*", in which the authors call for Europe to acquire a "military autonomy" that would consist of the possibility of both supporting NATO in the deterrence of conventional or hybrid attacks on European soil and carrying out military operations in response to or in order to prevent crises.[41]

In 2016, the report by the Group of Personalities (GoP), which was set up by the European Commission to report on preparatory defence research action, refers to strategic autonomy no fewer than 28 times.[42] In this report, the concept is presented as an objective to be pursued for the future European research programme. However, the report's approach is nuanced: it seeks to strike a balance, an "appropriate level" or "adequate degree" between closing off the European market (the spectre of "Fortress Europe"), which would be unthinkable, and opening it up too much, which would create dependencies and restrictions on the use of equipment, which would be incompatible with the very idea of strategic autonomy.

In parallel to the GoP report, Klaus Thoma, retired director of the *Fraunhofer Ernst-Mach-Institut*, Professor at the Military University of Munich and sherpa to the GoP, and the author of this report worked together on a preparatory study in March 2016, commissioned by the European Parliament on the "Future of European defence research", in which they attempted to pin down a definition of strategic autonomy as the sum of three freedoms – of appreciation, of decision and action – but also the security of supply.[43]

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38. Regulation (EU) no. 1285/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the implementation and exploitation of European satellite navigation systems, OJ of the EU, 20 December 2013, p. L 347/1, recital 2): "the aim of the Galileo programme is to establish and operate the first global satellite navigation and positioning infrastructure specifically designed for civilian purposes, which can be used by a variety of public and private actors in Europe and worldwide. The system established under the Galileo programme functions independently of other existing or potential systems, thus contributing amongst other things to the strategic autonomy of the Union, as emphasised by the European Parliament and the Council." publications.europa.eu/en. EU Official Journal L 347/1, 20 December 2013.

39. Speech at the annual European Defence Agency conference, 10 November 2016: "Today I believe it is clear to all, I hope it is clear to all, that in practice there is no contradiction between more strategic autonomy and our commitment to our long-term partners (of NATO) (...). But strategic autonomy means first and foremost the ability to be a reliable partner, to care about our own security, to care about the security of our region, for which we are called to take more responsibility in our own interest – not because somebody else asked – and to take a fair share of responsibility, doing it the European way, with this unique mix of hard and soft power, using all our tools." EEAS homepage >EEAS > Opening-speech-by HR/VP Federica-Mogherini-2016-EDA-Conference.

40. Critical Space Technologies for European Strategic Non-Dependence, Actions for 2015-2017, V1.16 www.asi.it/sites/default/files/attach/notizia/european_non-dependence_items_2015_2017_v1_16.pdf.pdf

41. Report of a CEPS task force, More Union in the European Defence, Chair Javier Solana, rapporteurs Steven Blockmans and Giovanni Faleg, p.11 www.ceps.eu/system/files/TFonEuropeanDefence.pdf

42. Report of the Group of Personalities on the Preparatory Action for CSDP-related research: the case for an EU-funded defence R&T programme, rapporteur European Union Institute for Security Studies, February 2016 www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/GoP_report.pdf, p. 20, 23, 26, 35, 36 (three times), 37, 38 (twice), 42, 43, 48, 51, 57, 58, 62, 69, 75, (three times), 76, 78 (twice) and 84.

43. "The future of EU Defence research", European Parliament, 30 March 2016, p. 27.

The global strategy for the common foreign and security policy of the European Union, which was presented on 26 June 2016 by the HR/VP, Federica Mogherini, contains five references to strategic autonomy.[44]

She refers to a measured – not to say timid – sort of autonomy, which perfectly reflects the contradictions between the visions of the different member states:

> "The (global security) strategy nurtures the ambition of strategic autonomy for the European Union. This is necessary to promote the common interests of our citizens, as well as our principles and values. Yet we know that such priorities are best served when we are not alone. And they are best served in an international system based on rules and on multilateralism. This is no time for global policeman and lone warriors."[45]

She is referring to an autonomy that is destined both to reconnect with crisis management beyond the borders of the EU and to protect EU citizens from all sorts of threats:

> "An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders. We will therefore enhance our efforts on defence, cyber, counterterrorism, energy and strategic communications."[46]

Finally, she is referring to an autonomy that is clearly oriented in favour of the defence industry:

> "The EU will systematically encourage defence cooperation and strive to create a solid European defence industry, which is critical for Europe's autonomy of decision and action."[47]

> "A sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence industry is essential for Europe's strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP."[48]

The implementation plan proposed by the HR/VP to the Council of the European Union is in a similar vein. It is a strategic autonomy that is defined as entailing "the ability to act and cooperate with international and regional partners wherever possible, while being able to operate autonomously when and where necessary."[49]

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44. "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy" welcomed by the European Council on 28 June 2016 europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_fr_version.pdf
45. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
49. Council of the European Union, 14 November 2016, 14392/16, p. 4 and § 18. "Europe's strategic autonomy entails the ability to act and cooperate with international and regional partners wherever possible, while being able to operate autonomously when and where necessary."

The implementation plan proper, as adopted by the Council, takes up the same idea, by setting the objective of being able to "enhance [the EU's] strategic autonomy and strengthen its ability to cooperate with partners."[50]

The European Commission's defence action plan of 30 November 2016 is somewhat lukewarm about the concept. It goes no further than soberly to recollect that "as called for by the Council, this European Defence Action Plan contributes to ensuring that the European defence industrial base is able to meet Europe's current and future security needs and, in that respect, enhances the Union's strategic autonomy, strengthening its ability to act with partners (...). The actions proposed in this European Defence Action Plan will lead to a stronger European Union in defence, which ultimately means a stronger NATO."[51] Even so, it maintains the proposition that: "Defence research into innovative technologies, products and services is key to safeguarding the long-term competitiveness of the defence sector and, ultimately, Europe's strategic autonomy."[52]

The year 2017 was not a favourable one for seeing many references to strategic autonomy. There is no mention of it in the "White Paper on the future of Europe"[53] published by the European Commission and virtually none in the "Reflection paper on the future of European defence",[54] also issued by the Commission. There is no trace of it in the progress report on the implementation of the global strategy,[55] still less in President Juncker's speech on the state of the union of 20 September 2017.

This was, however, the year in which the concept of strategic autonomy made its debut in positive legislation.

The Commission's Communication "Launching the European Defence Fund" places the concept at front and centre of the objectives of the fund in question: "to be ready to face tomorrow's threats and to protect its citizens, Europe needs to enhance its strategic autonomy. This requires the development of key technologies in critical areas and strategic capabilities to ensure technological leadership."[56] However, the draft regulation on the European Defence Industry Development Programme (EDIDP) goes no further than to refer to the concept in its explanatory statement, making no mention of it in its legal mechanism.[57]

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50. Council of the European Union, 14 November 2016, 14149/16, § 3.
51. European Defence Action Plan, COM (2016) 950 final, p. 3.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
53. White Paper on the future of Europe. Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 up to 2025, European Commission, 1 March 2017.
54. European Commission, 7 June 2017 ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-defence_en.pdf
55. From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1, 19 June 2017.
56. Communication from the European Commission dated 7 June 2017: Launching the European Defence Fund, COM (2017) 295 final, p. 2 ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2017/FR/COM-2017-295-F1-FR-MAIN-PART-1.PDF
57. COM (2017) 294 final, proposed regulation annexed to the Communication of the Commission, p. 2 ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/23606

On 8 December 2017, the Council of the European Union reached an agreement to rewrite article 2 as follows: "The Programme shall have the following objectives: a) to foster the competitiveness and innovation capacity of the defence industry throughout the Union which contribute to European strategic autonomy by supporting actions in their development phase."[58]

As for the European Parliament, we should soon know what its position is. At the time of writing, the draft report of the committee on industry, research and energy, to which the matter has been referred for a report – and whose rapporteur is Françoise Grossetête – is planning to amend article 2 of the Commission's proposal to add that the programme aims to "consolidate the Union's strategic autonomy in defence matters (...)".

Finally, it is worth noting that strategic autonomy also made an appearance in Franco-German relations, as the two countries support the European Defence Fund and welcome the proposed regulation on the EDIDP, which they described as an important stage towards "reinforcing European strategic autonomy."[59]

We hope that we will be forgiven for this exhaustive summary of reference documents. The fact is that the concept of strategic autonomy has been the victim of a linguistic fad. It has become a catch-all concept that is particularly worthy of clarifying now that it is entering the legal sphere.

58. Council of the European Union, 15536/17, 8 December 2017, Proposed article 2, p. 14 data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15536-2017-INIT/fr/pdf

59. Franco-German Defence and Security Council, Paris, 13 July 2017, conclusions, p. 2 http://www.elysee.fr/Conseil-des-ministres

CLARIFYING THE CONCEPT: AN ATTEMPT AT A DEFINITION

A. From famine to feast in doctrinal references

One might look for the concept of strategic autonomy in the great classics of strategic literature in vain. There is no hint of it to be found in Machiavelli, Napoleon, Clausewitz, Metternich or Aron. Nor is there any trace in the writings of 20th-century thinkers such as Liddell Hart, André Beauffre or Eward Luttwak. Does this mean that strategic autonomy is entirely self-explanatory and that at the time, there was no need to define it, as every sovereign, small or large, was able to raise an army, to buy rifles, cannons, a frigate or two and to wage war, entirely autonomously, as he or she saw fit, when and where necessary and pulling in a few privateers?

In fact, it is possibly no coincidence if the concept of autonomy has come to prominence in a period of great strategic confusion marked by the end of the days of bloc confrontation, tightening defence budgets and an explosion of regional crises, plus the advent of "hyper- terrorism" on 11 September 2001.

Indeed, after a few fleeting appearances in a few works of the 1970s, but with no real doctrinal development,[60] it was in May 2002, in a report on the "external security of France against the new strategic challenges",[61] that a working group headed up by Nicolas Baverez on behalf of the Institut Montaigne would provide the first doctrinal definition of strategic autonomy. The report draws a clear distinction between "independence" and "strategic autonomy":

> "National independence, for its part, had the merit of clarity: it implied the ability to act alone everywhere, to defend oneself alone, to make one's voice heard alone throughout the world. In an uncertain, open and flexible world, monolithism is a much less successful strategy. It is less about being fully independent – even the United States is not that – than about having the capability to overcome frequent and violent shocks. Hence the notion of strategic autonomy.
>
> "In an interdependent world, it is unrealistic to try to do everything oneself, a conscious choice has to be made as to what one needs to be able to do and to master completely (...). In an interdependent world, independence is no longer defined so much by acting alone at any time and at any place as by being able

60. In 1974, particularly in the work "The Nine and NATO: The Alliance and the Community: an Uncertain Relationship" by Lothar Rühl (p. 34, 36...) and, the same year, in the work "Les limites de l'autonomie stratégique – problèmes contemporains de défense nationale" by Raoul Girardet (p. 230).

61. Report by the Institut Montaigne on "La sécurité extérieure de la France face aux nouveaux risques stratégiques" www.institutmontaigne.org/publications

to have the necessary information to define the strategic line and to be able to mobilise a vast range of means of action.

"Strategic autonomy can be translated by simple principles:

" - First principle: there can be no legitimate and effective action that is not based on precise and rapid information. Maintaining one's own means of acquiring sensitive data must remain a priority, whether this be military, political, diplomatic or commercial information. In a world in which mastery of information is crucial, any dependence in this area serves to reduce power and influence;

" - Second principle: the ability to act alone as a last resort, if the higher interests of the nation so require, whilst mobilising the entire range of possible integration options under normal circumstances. Hence the many questions: which operational competences should be kept at national level? Which fields of competence and which operators should be prioritised? The concept of strategic autonomy leads inevitably from there to questioning a few fundamental elements. (...)"[62]

The intellectual proximity of this document to the White Paper of 2008 can be clearly seen, as both "principles" listed in the Institut Montaigne's analysis correspond to the "freedom of assessment" and "freedom of decision" referred to in the White Paper, which only adds to these the freedom of action, strategic autonomy brought about by having an industrial defence base.

This "industrial strategic autonomy" would for the first time be the subject of a study published by the GRIP on 1 September 2014.[63]

As for the military dimension of strategic autonomy, this would be dealt with in an IFRI study entitled "Entry Operations and the Future of Strategic Autonomy" in November 2016. "Entry operations" are defined in this study as an expeditionary-type force projection operation consisting both of reducing the level of threat posed by an adversary and projecting an inter-armed force (naval, air or land) to a distant theatre of operations that is capable, subsequently, of carrying the decision.[64]

But it is since 2016, with Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, that studies on strategic autonomy have increased in number. Since that time, no fewer than six studies have been published.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

63. "L'industrie de défense française : une autonomie stratégique sous contrainte", Aude-Emmanuelle Fleurant and Yannick Quéau, GRIP analysis, 1 September 2014 www.grip.org/fr/node/1337

64. "L'entrée en premier et l'avenir de l'autonomie stratégique", Corentin Brustlein, Focus stratégique, Études de l'IFRI 70, November 2016 www.ifri.org/fr/publications.

The first dates from November 2016 and was published by the ARES group ("*Armament Industry European Research Group*")[65] made up of several European think tanks. It looks at whether there is a common understanding of the concept in eight groups of states (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the Baltic states) and examines its application to the military equipment acquisition and defence research policy. Finally, it asks what could, for each state, be considered "an appropriate level of strategic autonomy".

In a study focusing on the meaning of the concept as seen through the prism of cooperation between the European Union and NATO, Prof Jolyon Howorth considers several scenarios for the evolution of this cooperation if the EU continues to seek strategic autonomy.[66] In this regard, it is worth stressing the mistrust that accompanied – and continues to accompany – the emergence of the concept of strategic autonomy on the other side of the Atlantic, as it is often seen as a vector for Europe to distance itself from the American power,[67] or even industrial protectionism.

Gergely Varga of the Hungarian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade observed in an interesting study[68] that although the concept of strategic autonomy has never been defined, it could "theoretically" mean Europe taking charge of its own territorial defence, which he considers it is not capable of doing without NATO. He also states that in the view of many, strategic autonomy refers exclusively to industrial autonomy. Finally, he considers that the concept of strategic autonomy should be understood as the ability for the EU to carry out expeditionary-type military operations, in its immediate neighbourhood at least.

In a second ARES group study,[69] Dick Zandee and Keith Hartley both raise, but ultimately reject, a broad acceptance of the concept of strategic autonomy, inspired by Indian researchers and defined as "a foreign policy posture, whereby a nation maintains an independent outlook and orientation in foreign affairs with respect to the issues defining her core interests" (Arundai Bajpai quoted by Dick Zandee) or the "ability of a nation state to pursue its national interests and its preferred foreign policy without being constrained by any other states" (A. Devanathan quoted by Keith Hartley). Dick Zandee finally argues that the strategic autonomy of the European Union "can only be safeguarded if it has credible military forces at its disposal", whilst Keith Hartley defines the concept as "the national military and defence industrial capabilities needed

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65. Appropriate level of European Strategic Autonomy, Felix Arteaga, Tomas Jermalavicius, Alessandro Marrone, Jean-Pierre Maulny, Marcin Terlikowski, Report no. 8 of the ARES group (Armament Industry European Research Group), November 2016 www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ARES-Group-Report-Strategic-autonomy-November-2016.pdf

66. Strategic Autonomy and EU-NATO Cooperation: Squaring the Circle, Jolyon Howorth, Egmont policy brief, no.8 5 May 2017 www.egmontinstitute.be

67. If America wants strong European allies, let them find their own path, Paul Zajac, War on the Rocks, 19 December 2017 warontherocks.com ; Beyond European Versus Transatlantic Defense, Erick Brattberg, German Marshall fund of the United States (GMF), Policy brief 2018, no. 003; EU Military Cooperation and National Defense, Daniel Kehoane, GMF, Policy brief 2018, no. 004.

68. Towards European Strategic Autonomy: Evaluating the new CSDP initiatives, Gergely Varga, KKI Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Hungary) studies T-2017-7 kki.hu

69. European Preference, Strategic Autonomy and European Defence Fund, Vincenzo Camporini, Keith Hartley, Jean-Pierre Maulny and Dick Zandee, ARES report no. 22, November 2017 www.clingendael.org

for an independent foreign policy". Something else we can take away from this study is the question raised by Vincenzo Camporini of connecting the concept of strategic autonomy with the question of "to do what?" from an operational point of view.

In a note dated December 2017,[70] Felix Arteaga of the Spanish Institute Elcano gives a synthetic and extremely relevant vision of strategic autonomy as being "the indispensable military capabilities necessary to allow a strategic actor to engage in autonomous action." He argues that this autonomy has three dimensions: political, operational and industrial.

But it is in a joint note of IFRI (French Institute for International relations) and the SWP (*Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*) of December 2017 by Ronja Kempin and Barbara Kunz[71] that, to our thinking, the most complete vision of the concept of strategic autonomy was set out. In an extension of Arteaga's definition, strategic autonomy is defined as the sum of three component parts:

- political autonomy, which is the ability to make decisions in the field of defence and to enact them;
- operational autonomy, which is based on an institutional framework and the required capabilities, to plan and independently conduct civilian and military operations;
- industrial autonomy, which is the ability to develop and build the capabilities required to achieve operational autonomy.

Finally, we refer to three works with the words strategic autonomy in their titles, but which unfortunately provide no definition of the term. The first is from 2008 and bears the title "Strategic autonomy or European defence."[72] It is a collective work which explores the contradiction for France between promoting European defence and remaining autonomous, and the various possible scenarios. The second work, entitled "European strategic autonomy",[73] takes up and develops the proceedings of the conference held on the same theme in October 2013, which is devoted mainly to European defence and which aimed to analyse and put into perspective the bases and tools of the common security and defence policy. The third work, entitled "*Strategic autonomy and the defence of Europe*",[74] assimilates strategic autonomy to the concept of a "European army" and outlines an interesting sketch of how this idea is seen in all 28 countries of the European Union.

70. Strategic Autonomy and European Defence, Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 102/2017, 12 December 2017, Felix Arteaga www.realinstitutoelcano.org

71. France, Germany and the Quest for European Strategic Autonomy: Franco-German Defence Cooperation in a new era, Ronja Kempin, Barbara Kunz, December 2017, Notes de l'IFRI, Notes du CERFA 141, Stiftung Wissenshaft und Politik (SWP) www.ifri.org

72. "Autonomie stratégique ou défense européenne", Paris, Es Stratégies, various military researchers, June 2008, authors: Didier Brousse, Thierry Coqueblin, Thierry Dapsens, *et alii*.

73. "L'autonomie stratégique de l'Union européenne : Perspectives, responsabilité, ambitions et limites de la défense européenne", collectively under the direction of Nicolas Clinchamps and Pierre-Yves Monjal Larcier, 2015.

74. Strategic Autonomy and the defence of Europe: On the Road to a European Army, collectively under the direction of Hans-Peter Bartels, Anna Maria Kellner and Uwe Optenhögel, Éditions Dietz 2017.

Despite these different studies, we consider that it is still possible to fine-tune the concept of strategic autonomy, on the one hand by stressing its relative and contingent nature and, on the other, by clarifying some of its components, particularly its political element.

B. A concept that is both relative and contingent

In our attempt at a definition, our starting point shall be to consider that strategic autonomy should be confined to the military sphere alone. The reason for this is simple: we consider that all attempts to liken strategic autonomy to the ability to carry out an individual foreign policy, or to include other elements in it, such as the development policy, lead to confusion between this concept and that of independence.

It is true that foreign policy and military policy often proceed at a similar pace. As Frédéric Châtillon wrote, it is often accepted that strategic autonomy is based not only on the military apparatus "that allows a country to act alone", but also on the diplomatic apparatus that "allows it not to remain so."[75] But from that perspective, why not also include the budgetary apparatus, which allows a country to support an ongoing war effort in line with the old adage *Pecunia nervus belli*, or the industrial, technological and scientific apparatus, which allows it to build military equipment? The risk is that by extending the scope of "strategic" autonomy too far, you end up back at independence. But in law and in grammar, it is the adjective that restricts the meaning and its absence that expands it. Literally and figuratively, "strategic" autonomy refers principally to the *Strategos*, in other words the person who defines and, where necessary, conducts military affairs.

Let us use this to draw a clear distinction between the terms strategic autonomy, independence and sovereignty, the last of these terms being used more frequently than is reasonable in the area that is of concern to us in this report. If we follow the thinking of Jean Boding and take sovereignty to mean the "absolute and perpetual power of a Republic",[76] we must still clarify that this power is a power that is conferred by the law: it is the power of not being constrained by any power by virtue of any rule not agreed to by the Republic in question. This power is "absolute" in the sense that it either exists or it does not. It is not possible to be semi-sovereign. All States of the European Council are sovereign and they are so in exactly the same way. None of them is any more or less sovereign than the others, as their voices all carry the same weight in defence matters.

Sovereignty, in the same way, is separate from "independence", which is not a legal concept but a factual one, that is capable of covering a great variety of different forms (energy, diplomatic, technological, financial independence, and many others) and, for each of these forms, a multitude of degrees. For instance, the Principality of Monaco is a sovereign state, because no other State can constrain its authorities under any rule of law to which this Principality has not agreed in a Treaty or under a legal competence

75. La puissance, doctrine et pratique, Frédéric Chatillon, director of the Institut de recherche stratégique de l'école militaire (IRSEM), 13 February 2013, www.defense.gouv.fr

76. Les six livres de la République, Classiques Garnier, edited by Mario Turchetti, Paris 2013, § 1.8.1. p. 444.

exercised at a level above the power of the "sovereign" Prince and his council. But the independence of the Principality is obviously greatly reduced, if non-existent, *in reality*.

On this basis, and if we wish the words to preserve a meaning that is understandable to all, we will consider that **strategic autonomy is no more and no less than the ability of a State to decide upon and to wage war alone.**

Under this definition, the contingent nature of strategic autonomy is immediately obvious: **which war do we wish to wage?** Because waging a territorial war in Europe, a cyber-war against States or criminals, security operations against terrorists on European soil, operations to re-establish peace in Africa or peacekeeping in the Middle East are obviously all very different animals.

Unless we consider that strategic autonomy consists of being able to wage all possible wars and counter all possible threats, we are looking at a standard that has no value *erga omnes*. **Absolute strategic autonomy does not exist, unless the term is confused with military independence. In the absence of contextual clarifications, the term is like a suitcase into which you can put anything you want**.

The second characteristic of the concept of strategic autonomy is **that it is a relative concept in the sense that even for a given strategy, there are fifty shades of autonomy**. For instance, the autonomy of France to carry out high-intensity crisis management operations is real, but limited. For certain strategic functions (intelligence, mobility, supplies, etc.), and to different degrees, it depends on the support of its allies. On the other hand, one may reasonably suppose that France remains entirely "autonomous" in matters of nuclear deterrence.

C. The various components of strategic autonomy

We can agree with the contemporary doctrine (Arteaga, Kempin and Kunz) that strategic autonomy comprises three components, once again as long as these components are always brought into the strategy in question.

1. The political component

The word autonomous comes from the Greek *autos* (oneself) and *nomos* (the law), and so a literal translation would be: somebody who self-governs with his own laws. Dictionaries provide convergent definitions of autonomy: "the condition or right of a state, institution, group, etc., to make its own laws or rules and administer its own affairs" (Oxford English Dictionary); "the control or government of a country, organisation, or group by itself rather than by others" (Collins). Being autonomous, therefore, does not mean doing what you want, but acting under your own rules.

In the area of concern to us in this report, being politically autonomous to conduct military affairs is the ability to set one's strategic project freely (e.g. "living in peace with one's neighbours", "being a security provider", "assuming global leadership"), the aims

of one's activities (e.g. "territorial defence", "crisis management", "protecting the citizens"), one's resources, one's operations (a given mission), one's organisation (e.g. headquarters, structuring of tactical units) and, finally, one's own conduct on the international scene, which includes diplomatic action, but also alliances, demonstrations of force, etc.

To simplify, we will assume here that the political component of strategic autonomy is made up of two aspects:

- the ability to make decisions in the field of defence and to put them into practice;
- without being prevented from doing so by other powers.

We are obliged to recognise that France has always been silent on this political dimension of strategic autonomy. This has to do with the fact that the political regime of the Fifth Republic confers upon those holding executive powers an ability to make decisions that is unparalleled in the other Western democracies and that within it, there is broad consensus on the principle of national independence. If this component has never been called by its name in French strategic documents, this is simply because its presence was self-evident and no discussion was required on the matter.

It is quite a different matter for the European Union, where the existence of the common security and defence policy is very recent, really dating back only to the adoption of the Treaty of Nice in 2001 and, more so, the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. In reality, this "common" policy remains within the intergovernmental scope (Title V of the Treaty on European Union) and is therefore a matter for the competence of the member states. And in fact, unanimous decision-making in the field of war and peace is always quite a feat, particularly as players external to the EU can easily play on the divisions between the member states. The limits of the autonomy of decision-making are, at one and the same time, of a legal (lack of effectiveness of decision-making mechanisms), political (differences of opinions on the analysis of the threats) and budgetary nature (lack of European defence budget).

A European autonomy of decision-making, moreover, cannot be designed without taking account of the Atlantic Alliance. As the United States has been cast in the role of the protector of Europe, whether we like it or not, any European military action can be devised only with at least the tacit blessing of the American leaders. From this point of view, the situation has changed very little since the Suez crisis, following which the American President called upon his French and British opposite numbers to put an end to their military expedition.[77]

In these circumstances, to aim for strategic autonomy for the European Union firstly consist of changing its decision-making process to make it more efficient, in other words to take on political autonomy, before considering military capabilities themselves, as

77. See recent statements by the ambassador of the United States to NATO: "Les États-Unis plombent l'autonomie stratégique avec un slogan: pas sans nous", Blog Bruxelles2 professionnel, 13 February 2018 club.bruxelles2.eu/2018/02/les-usa-critiquent-linitiative-europeenne-en-matiere-de-defense/and:" Les USA tancent l'Europe: quand le cow-boy sort son flingue, faut-il avoir peur?", Blog Bruxelles2, 13 February 2018.

called for by Federico Santopinto in 2010.[78] This would also involve adopting a common budget. On this point, we must refer to the proposal made by the French President, Emmanuel Macron, in his speech at the Sorbonne, for a "common defence budget and a common doctrine of action". [79] An initiative of this kind should mark not the hypothetical culmination of European defence, but its starting point.

Secondly, aiming for strategic autonomy for the European Union would consist of clarifying, once and for all, its relations with NATO, rather than building up micro-measures of coordination between the two institutions, as has been the case since 2016 through the implementation of the Warsaw declaration which, as useful as it is, does nothing to resolve the "squaring of the circle" between the EU and NATO referred to by Prof. Jolyon Howorth.[80]

2. The operational component

This refers to the capacity to carry out military operations autonomously, in line with the objective pursued, over time.

This, first of all, assumes an ability independently to assess the reality of the situation, or "freedom of assessment" to borrow the terms of the French strategic lexicon. It is worth noting that this freedom of assessment may be of critical importance, as shown by the outbreak of the second Iraq war, which was partly a result of misinformation concerning the existence of weapons of mass destruction. Obviously, all means of intelligence, both human and technological, allowing an independent assessment of the situation at strategic level contribute to this ability. The diplomatic dimension, which is a source not only of information, but also of action and influence, must obviously be included in this component of operational autonomy. In the same way, one would have to take account of all academic resources made up by universities, think tanks and other observatories, allowing an ongoing assessment of the various sensitive geographical areas or technologies that could be used in the military sphere, under the heading of the elements that constitute the freedom of assessment.

Next, this implies the ex ante existence of a military apparatus appropriate for the missions assigned to it and including the capability to plan and conduct operations. With regard to this, the work of NATO's Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and the American military doctrine makes frequent reference to the acronym DOTMLPF, to mean that a military tool is based on the set of factors referring to Doctrine, Organisation, Training, Material, Leadership and Education, Personnel and Facilities,[81] which has given the French DORESE (Doctrine, Organisation, Ressources humaines,

78. "Des capacités militaires sans capacités politiques ? Pourquoi la CSP ne doit pas être trop inclusive", Federico Santopinto, GRIP analysis, 14 September 2010 www.grip.org/fr/node/157; " Europe puissance tranquille ? Rôle et identité sur la scène mondiale", collectively under the direction of Bernard Adam, Éditions GRIP, 2011, "Des capacités militaires sans capacités politiques ?", Federico Santopinto, p. 115 and seq.

79. Speech by the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, at the Sorbonne, 26 September 2017, www.elysee.fr

80. See previous note: Strategic autonomy and EU-NATO cooperation: squaring the circle, Jolyon Howorth.

81. US Department of Defence Joint Publication 1-02, Dictionnary of Military and Associated terms, 8 November 2010 (as amended through 15 February 2016), A-52, p. JP 1-02. fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp1_02.pdf

Équipement, Soutien, Entraînement, meaning Doctrine, Organisation, Personnel, Material, Support and Training).[82] Taking all of these factors into account shows clearly that a military tool is a coherent set that is only as strong as its weakest link. In the area of concern to us in this report, that of European defence, we must also take account of the interoperability of the forces and their involvement in frequent exercises, to be able to judge the effectiveness of the European military apparatus as a whole.

To these first two elements we must add the "security of supplies", in other words the possibility of obtaining supplies (and replenishments) of all the elements that come together to ensure the proper functioning of the military apparatus over time. These supplies include munitions, for instance, but also spare parts for military equipment.

It is only when the military autonomy in question is "complete" autonomy that the model of army decided upon must aim to fulfil all strategic functions, i.e.: intelligence, prevention, deterrence, protection and intervention. Only the largest powers aim to fulfil all of the strategic functions entirely on their own. The way these operational functions can be fulfilled gives rise to what are referred to in France as "operational contracts", in other words quantitative capacity objectives.

As for the European Union, let us stress that in a very real sense, the ambition of achieving strategic autonomy has been restricted to the capacity to intervene in the management of external crises, not only through the various treaties (Amsterdam, Lisbon), but also capacity objectives, when put together in the form of "headline goals" (Helsinki 1999, Brussels 2004). However, these quantitative objectives have never been met and the EU is no longer even capable of setting itself any others.

3. The industrial component

At its most succinct, this is the capacity to produce the military equipment necessary to accomplish the military operations referred to above.

It is possible to identify several elements of this industrial autonomy, such as the capacity concerning military equipment, to:

- design it — which requires the presence of a structure (such as the Délégation générale de l'Armement in France or the DARPA in the United States) that is in constant dialogue with the chief of staff and public research units (research and technology bodies) or private ones (industrial) to direct the defence research and technology in its earliest levels of maturity;

- produce it — which includes both the research and development aspect and the industrial production apparatus;

82. "Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations", 28 June 2012, Éléments d'analyse systémique pour la planification opérationnelle, p. 23, www.cicde.defense.gouv.fr

- operate it — which excludes the various restrictions on use, such as those which exist for drones (e.g. MALE Reaper drone) or American military aircraft (e.g. JSF fighter plane);
- deploy it — which presupposes total mastery of the equipment under operational conditions;
- support it — which presupposes the ability to repair it;
- modify it — which presupposes total mastery of all the sub-systems of a weapons system, such as the on-board radar of a fighter plane;
- export it — the act of exporting and armament may in itself be likened to an act of war.

As this component of strategic autonomy has been developed at great length,[83] there is no need for us to elaborate any further. The French White Paper of 2008 set out for the first time in a strategic document the so-called theory of the "three circles" of supply: equipment that France must be capable of building itself, those it builds under European cooperation and, finally, those it can buy on the market.

It is this industrial component that is of great interest to the European Union, particularly in the framework of the defence industry development programme (EDIDP), the regulation on which is currently being adopted by the European authorities. With regard to this, it would appear important to stress that even in its industrial dimension, strategic autonomy is not absolute in its design, merely contingent in terms of the overall strategy and requires us firstly to answer the question: what military apparatus are we aiming to put together?

This refers back to the notion of "critical military industrial capabilities". As a report by the French Senate of 2012 stressed: "the concept of critical military industrial capacity is different in different countries, at different times. And so, the technology and equipment of nuclear deterrent forces are not critical military industrial capacity in Germany, as the country has no nuclear deterrent. This shows the contingent nature of these capacities and their close relationship with the physiognomy of the defence apparatus."[84]

The European Commission, furthermore, has done a lot of work on the concept of key technologies or critical technologies ("Key Enabling Technologies") in the field of civil research, but has never broken the concept down in the military field.

83. See recently: "Coopération européenne, taille critique et autonomie stratégique", Antoine Bouvier in "La Rouge et la Jaune", monthly review of the alumni association of the école polytechnique no. 729, November 2017, www.lajauneetlarouge.com

84. Information report of the Senate of the French Republic on military industrial capabilities, 4 July 2012, p. 22 www.senat.fr/rap/r11-634/r11-6341.pdf

CONCLUSION

Strategic autonomy has become a term that is bandied around at both French and European level and very few authors of important strategic documents do not feel obliged to lay a tribute at its feet.

For France, things could not be clearer. In theory, strategic autonomy is the beginning and end of the defence policy. But in practice, "complete" strategic autonomy would require budgetary resources way beyond the efforts, albeit substantial, made by the new military programming law. This is quite simply because it will be difficult for the French authorities to reconcile the renewal of the nuclear deterrent with maintaining the conventional military apparatus. France therefore needs to consider ways and means of exercising its autonomy collectively; if not within the EU, then at least within a group of European states willing and able to do so. This is undoubtedly the purpose of the "European intervention initiative" of President Macron.

For the European Union, things could be considerably clearer. All European leaders speak of strategic autonomy, but very few of them put the same meaning behind the words. Most of them take the term to mean industrial autonomy only. Very few of them consider it also to encompass military autonomy, but only on condition the term stays vague and does not specify the apparatus to be put into place: expeditionary corps, or protecting the EU and its citizens. Finally, none of the member states seems to see it as a matter of redefining the decision-making processes that would make it possible to circumvent the considerable obstacle of political unanimity and, still less, to define a common budget. We can therefore wave goodbye to decision-making autonomy, without which military autonomy and industrial autonomy are no more than a pipe dream. Most of the European leaders say the words, but have no concept of the virtues behind them.

This is how it is with the Union. Believers in the benevolent powers of "constructive" ambiguity will argue that Europe has always developed in this way and that there is no reason to change now. Those who, like the author of this report, believe on the contrary that ambiguity has become a destructive force, will see a need to push for treaty change, reminding the European leaders of the words of the great Seneca: "there is no favourable wind for one who does not know where he is heading."

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STRATEGIC AUTONOMY UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

The New Holy Grail of European Defence

Strategic autonomy is the latest fashionable concept, in Paris and Brussels alike. It appears no fewer than 24 times in the most recent French strategic review and there is not a single European strategic document, however insignificant, that makes no mention of it.

Beyond political posturing, strategic autonomy has entered the legal field, as it is now set out as one of the objectives assigned to the European Defence Industrial Development Programme. It will, therefore, be one of the criteria used to assess defence R&D projects in contention for European funding.

But what is strategic autonomy?

For the first time, this report carefully retraces the brief history of this fledgling concept born at the end of the 20th century and permanent crossover between French defence planners and the European leaders. Beyond overviews focusing on the politics and the doctrine, the author has attempted to offer a working definition of the concept, in the sense of one that has been crafted by lawyers. It emerges that strategic autonomy is above all a legal standard, such as the concept of due diligence, and that it makes sense only if looked at from a contingent and relative viewpoint. In other words, tell me which war you want to fight and I will tell you what autonomy you will need.

Finally, the author lays emphasis on the "political" component of strategic autonomy. This "political capability", which is obvious and therefore need not be taken into account at national level, is, on the contrary, the first item of equipment that anybody hoping to join the quest for the holy Grail of European defence will need.



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