THE CHALLENGE OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL WILL
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The February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine significantly changed the security landscape in Europe, bringing a major conventional war to the continent and threatening the security of European countries. The invasion also highlighted the importance of two historical challenges to European security: a lack of capabilities to perform military missions and a lack of political will. This report builds on a previous CSIS report, titled The Future of European Military Capabilities and Missions, which analyzed the evolution of European military capabilities. Based on that work, this report examines political will, which includes the proclivity and decision of political leaders to conduct military missions—from peacekeeping operations to large-scale combat. Political will is an important component of a state's decision to initiate—and sustain the use of—force, though not necessarily a determining factor in the outcome of war.

Consequently, this report asks two main questions: What are the primary factors that increase or decrease the political will of European countries? What types of military missions are European states more—and less—likely to possess the political will to conduct? In answering these questions, the report comes to several conclusions.

First, endogenous factors (such as strategic culture and domestic constraints) and exogenous factors (such as alliance dependence and threat perception) will continue to impact the political will of European countries to conduct military missions, even following a rise in the Russian threat. Endogenous factors are particularly difficult to change and will likely complicate the political will of some European countries to conduct out-of-area missions and large-scale combat outside of Europe. Legal limitations on the deployment of forces, requirements for parliamentary approval to deploy forces, domestic politics and logrolling, and imposition of operational caveats on deployments will remain a challenge for some European countries.

For example, Italy announced in March 2022 that it would aim to reach the North American Treaty Organization's (NATO) goal of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense spending in 2028, even though other countries—such as Germany, Belgium, Denmark, and Spain—urgently committed to raising defense spending. Italy's ruling Five Star Movement threatened to veto any spending increase, arguing that the funds would be better utilized to alleviate poverty. In addition, resource constraints and other priorities will likely impact the political will of some European countries to continue missions, such as the French decision to wind down Operation Barkhane in West Africa and the U.S. and European decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. The significant challenges with the Afghan withdrawal and collapse of the Ashraf Ghani government—after nearly two decades of U.S. and European support—may also undermine the political will of some European governments to conduct major out-of-area operations. Finally, a focus on deterring Russia in Europe may weaken the political will of some European governments to conduct out-of-area missions in the Middle East, Africa, Indo-Pacific, and other regions.

Several prototypes of political will also emerge from the analysis. The first are global partners, such as the United Kingdom and France, who generally have the political will to protect their national interests, project power abroad, and use military power to support their political goals. The second are international activists, such as Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Finland, who have the political will to engage in out-of-area deployments, though they lack the power and reach to qualify as global partners. The third are constrained partners, such as Germany, Poland, Romania, Italy, and the Baltic states, who tend to view their international missions as a down payment or tacit bargaining tool to strengthen future security guarantees. The fourth are minimalists, such as Hungary and Iceland, who lack the political will to contribute significantly to missions in Europe or outside of Europe. These prototypes can change. The
Russian invasion may increase the political will of some European countries to conduct military missions—particularly in support of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Second, European states are more likely to have the political will to engage in military missions at the lower end of the conflict spectrum (such as peacekeeping and maritime patrol missions) and less likely at the higher ends of the spectrum (such as large-scale combat), except in cases of significant collective or national defense. The lack of political will to conduct military missions at higher ends of the conflict spectrum is likely caused by several factors. One is that European governments and populations have widely divergent perceptions of threats. While there is more convergence on the threat from Russia today, there are significant difference among European countries about other threats—including China. In addition, domestic constraints can impact political will. Finally, strategic culture can affect political will, including triggering concerns about combat casualties for military missions that have little to do with core national security interests.

In the short term, the Russian invasion of Ukraine will likely increase the political will of European countries to conduct some missions, such as a defense of Europe from Russian attack. Numerous European countries—such as Germany—announced an increase in their defense budget, support for more robust deterrence, and the acquisition of advanced platforms and systems such as fifth-generation aircraft and modernized air defense systems. Additional developments, such as the entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO, may also impact the threat environment and political will of European countries. Over the long run, however, it less clear how the surge in political will of European countries might evolve with wide variations in strategic culture, practical constraints, and threat perception.
INTRODUCTION
The United States’ calls for greater burden sharing in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Europeans’ desire for more independence of action in security and defense matters have been constant refrains in the transatlantic relationship for the last two decades. While there has been progress on both objectives, neither is fully realized today. This unfulfilled ambition can be attributed to two concurrent, interrelated factors: (1) lack of sufficient military capabilities, and (2) lack of political will to use military power in support of specific missions. However, Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine has raised the possibility of an increase in political will to conduct military operations. Germany, for example, announced an increase in its defense budget and the purchase of new military systems and platforms, including F-35A fifth-generation aircraft, though it is unclear whether—and for how long—Germany has the political will to sustain a larger defense budget.

CSIS examined European military capabilities in its 2021 report *The Future of European Military Capabilities and Missions*, which looked at the military capabilities that European allies might possess by 2030. The report concluded that Europeans will likely have the capability to conduct most types of missions at the lower end of the conflict continuum (such as crisis response and limited contingency missions) without significant U.S. military aid. However, the report also determined that European allies lack sufficient capability to conduct missions on the higher end of the conflict spectrum (such as high-end crisis management and large-scale combat operations) without significant U.S. assistance. The report also found that a lack of power projection capabilities would limit the ability of European allies to deploy...
INTRODUCTION

and sustain forces beyond Europe and, in some cases, the Middle East and Africa. For the most demanding missions, including large-scale combat against Russia and China and missions in the Indo-Pacific, Europeans will continue to rely heavily on support from the United States and other countries.

The report’s findings fill an important gap in understanding the output side of the burden-sharing equation and raise important questions about what kind of partners European allies will be in future military operations both in Europe and beyond. Yet even this combined focus on defense spending (input) and military capabilities (output) tells only part of the story. The final element in this equation is allies’ political will.

A look back at recent NATO operations reveals only a few non-U.S. NATO allies who have both the political will and military capabilities to reliably deploy military forces both within the European theatre and beyond. France and the United Kingdom are the most consistent in this regard, though a few smaller allies such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Poland have also been reliable force providers across the board. Infrequent, yet still present, are allies who lack both political will and credible military capabilities. Some of NATO’s newer members, who are still trying to modernize their own militaries and secure stability at home, fall into this category. More representative, however, are allies who lack either the military capabilities or the political will to reliably deploy them.

The former group consists mainly of smaller allies—such as the Baltic states—who are politically willing to deploy forces but require assistance from larger nations to do so. The latter group—namely those who have the required military capabilities but struggle to muster the political will to deploy them—include allies such as Germany and Spain. When these countries do manage to garner the political support needed to deploy, the political leadership often imposes caveats (such as limits on operating area and use of force) on the deploying forces or fails to provide those forces that are more likely to experience casualties with sufficient resources, such as combat forces and force protection units. This deficit in political will is found when deploying at both the low and high ends of the conflict spectrum. NATO, for example, regularly experienced force and capability shortfalls not only for the high-end stabilization operation International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan but also for its smaller missions, including maritime security operations such as Operation Sea Guardian.

Domestic politics, differing threat perceptions, legal limits on deploying forces overseas, and public opinion are just a few of the internal factors that underpin this complex issue of national political will.1 External factors—such as intra-alliance dynamics and vulnerability to influence or retaliation from an adversary—further complicate the political will picture. The objective of this report is to equip NATO allies with a better understanding of these underlying drivers of—and obstacles to—the use of force so that they can approach greater burden sharing and European autonomy in a more informed, deliberate way.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This report asks two main questions. First, what are the primary factors that increase or decrease the political will of European countries? Second, what types of military missions are European states more—and less—likely to possess the political will to conduct? The goal of the report is to examine the conditions under which European countries have the political will to become involved in NATO or U.S.-led military operations.

To answer these questions, the research design involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The report examines primary and secondary
literature to identify factors that can increase—or decrease—the political will of countries. The report also develops a theoretical framework to assess military missions. It divides military missions into three broad categories: (1) crisis response and limited contingency missions; (2) military engagement, security cooperation, deterrence, and assurance; and (3) large-scale combat. Using this framework, the report then examines the types of missions European allies and partners may—or may not—have the political will to perform in the following geographic areas: Europe; the Middle East; North, West, and East Africa; and the Indo-Pacific.

**POLITICAL WILL AND BURDEN SHARING**

As used in this report, *political will* refers to the proclivity and decision of political leaders to conduct military missions—including to fight. Will refers to the act or conscious decision of conducting a deliberate action. In this context, it involves the willingness to conduct military missions—from peacekeeping operations to large-scale combat—to achieve broader political objectives. Politics and war are deeply intertwined. As the Prussian general and theorist Carl von Clausewitz argued, “war is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means.” For Clausewitz, will is an essential component of military operations: “If we desire to defeat the enemy, we must proportion our efforts to his powers of resistance. This is expressed by the product of two factors which cannot be separate, namely, the sum of available means and the strength of the Will.” In addition, economists and political scientists who study the logic of collective action have identified burden sharing as a persistent problem in multinational organizations. Larger, richer allies step up to provide a public good, which leads to free-riding behavior by smaller, less wealthy allies. For NATO, deterrence (and collective defense) became that public good during the Cold War. During this period, there was a close correlation between allies’ GDPs and levels of defense spending. Larger allies were willing to tolerate a degree of free riding in light of the existential, overarching threat posed by the Soviet Union.

Since then, NATO’s security environment has become more complex. Faced with multiple security challenges, allies increasingly pursued private goods (national interests) alongside the public good of collective deterrence and defense through NATO. Recent examples include Greece and Turkey’s competing, self-interested behaviors in the Mediterranean Sea or France’s use of its armed forces for domestic counterterrorism tasks. In this environment, national interests often become a greater driver of allies’ behavior than alliance dependence factors such as a sense of obligation to fellow allies.

Another variable that has changed alliance dependence dynamics in NATO is the rise of other political and security actors, such as the European Union. Once little more than a regional economic association, the European Union has evolved into a global economic, foreign policy, and security actor that magnifies and defends the interests of its member states. The European Union played an essential role alongside other international institutions, for example, in stabilizing and rebuilding the Balkans following the conflicts of the 1990s. Even though NATO and EU competencies are largely complementary, members must still divide their limited human, financial, and materiel resources among them. Taken together, the increase in new security challenges and the rise of new multinational security actors complicate both NATO burden-sharing efforts and allies’ political will calculations.

A final shifting structural factor is U.S. leadership and investment in NATO. Since the United States has
long carried the brunt of the security and defense burden in NATO, it has enjoyed relatively more influence on allies’ political will. The dynamic of alliance dependence in a collective security organization—and overreliance on the most powerful actor in that alliance in particular—has convinced many countries to contribute to tasks and missions beyond their immediate national interests. This suggests that U.S. leadership in NATO may be essential to building coalitions and overcoming deficits of political will in the alliance.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT**

The rest of this report is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 looks at the importance of political will in an alliance framework. It provides a theoretical grounding for understanding how countries behave not only at the national level but specifically as members of a multinational, collective security alliance with the expectations and obligations this entails. It considers the extent to which alliance dependence has been an effective means for surmounting political will issues and whether this is likely to continue in the future. Chapter 2 also identifies several factors that can contribute to—or detract from—political will: (1) *endogenous factors* that originate internal to the country, and (2) *exogenous factors* that are perpetuated by external actors or conditions. These factors, in combination with an understanding of intra-alliance dynamics, provide a common analytical framework for understanding allies’ decisionmaking and assessing their willingness to contribute to the various missions that NATO allies and partners are most likely to undertake.

Chapter 3 examines these factors in six case studies: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Denmark. Chapter 4 considers the implications of political will for military missions. In light of the above factors, it examines to what extent various European allies have the political will to conduct a range of military operations. Specifically, it asks: What types of military missions are European states more likely—and less likely—to possess the political will to conduct? It concentrates on military missions that sit on a conflict continuum that ranges from small crisis response missions to large-scale combat. Chapter 5 brings together the main findings of this report on political will to draw conclusions about the future of transatlantic relations.
FACTORS AFFECTING NATIONAL POLITICAL WILL
In addition to the structural features of a collective security organization that can impact political will, there are factors specific to the countries that are members of the organization that can also contribute to or detract from their political will. These can be broadly characterized as endogenous factors that originate inside the country and exogenous factors that are perpetuated by external actors or conditions.

ENDOGENOUS FACTORS

There are two main endogenous factors that can impact a country’s political will to engage in military missions: strategic culture and domestic practical constraints.

Strategist Colin Gray argues that strategic culture is “the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to [nuclear] strategy.”11 This definition is helpful in that it encompasses not only fixed features—such as a country’s political culture, history, geography, and lived experiences (e.g., occupation, terrorist attacks)—but also learned behaviors, such as a country’s threat perception, tolerance for casualties, sense of duty, and views on the use of force as opposed to other instruments of power.

Yet as some theorists note, there are many reasons to be skeptical that strategic culture is a prime determinant of state behavior: “culture” itself is a wooly concept that is difficult to define; the analytically necessary reduction of a given state’s
strategic culture inevitably belies that no culture is truly monolithic; it is nearly impossible to determine when strategic culture has played the primary role in tipping a decisionmaker one way or another, rather than some other factor such as their personality or sheer realism; and all culture, including strategic culture, can change over time. Nonetheless, the concept has some explanatory and predictive value if used carefully and in combination with other considerations, as done here.

The **domestic practical constraints** that can drive or limit political will are extensive. They can be political, such as the degree of fragmentation within a government or friction between different elements in the bureaucracy. The former is particularly problematic in Europe, where coalition or minority governments are becoming the norm rather than the exception. Some countries attempt to reduce fragmentation and limit “ministerial drift” by locking in their priorities and policies through formal coalition agreements (e.g., Germany) or cross-party defense agreements (e.g., Denmark). In the United States, bureaucratic friction has been a similarly constraining factor in waging operations short of large-scale war, as when elements of the U.S. defense establishment resisted the shift to a focus on small-scale, expeditionary conflicts following the Vietnam War.

While public opinion is often cited as a factor that constrains decisionmakers’ political will, some research shows that the relationship between public opinion and national security decisions, in particular, is variable and context dependent. For example, a government may be more sensitive to public opinion ahead of a tight election. There is also evidence that individual leaders can change or diffuse the influence of public opinion on foreign policy issues, particularly when these leaders work across political lines to establish an “elite consensus.” This is the case with Denmark, which moved from a “neutralist” strategic culture through the Cold War period to an “activist” approach from the 1990s onward thanks to deliberate efforts by its political leadership to shift the policy emphasis toward international engagement. At the alliance level, a study of domestic support for NATO’s ISAF mission in Afghanistan shows that clear, consistent intervention from national and NATO leaders helped reduce public opposition to the mission in allied countries and to sustain that presence even in the face of significant casualties. Indeed, some research has shown that “elite discourse” plays a greater role than the raw number of casualties in determining approval of a military operation.

Domestic practical constraints on political will can also be structural. These include legal limitations on deployment of forces, requirements for parliamentary approval to deploy forces, and imposing operational caveats on deployments. Germany provides a good example of how such domestic constraints can act as a brake on political will, but also how such constraints can be revisited in the face of a changing strategic environment and bold leadership. In 1994, just as NATO was calling on allies to improve their ability to operate “out of area,” Germany’s constitutional court ruled that German forces were allowed to take part in out-of-area operations (German law still requires parliamentary approval for any deployment of armed military forces outside of Germany). While these institutional constraints are a necessary step in overcoming Germany’s historic burdens, they open the door in theory to politicians’ micromanagement of military missions. Indeed, the German parliament has the right to not only grant the initial mandate but also “approval of [rules of engagement] and command and control as well as risk assessments, and the right to visit troops abroad.”

The use of operational caveats is yet another mechanism of constraint. In Afghanistan, only a few countries (e.g., Denmark, Georgia, Poland, the United States, and the United Kingdom) operated caveat-free, with most imposing restrictions on everything from the rules of engagement to the geographic areas in which their forces were able to operate. Critics
maintain that such caveats reduce a commander’s planning and flexibility and, over time, perpetuate a two-tiered NATO alliance of “warrior states” and “ration consumers” in which burdens are not shared equitably. Conversely, others argue that caveats are useful in surmounting a political will deficit and enabling more nations to contribute, in turn increasing a mission’s legitimacy.

Finally, a lack of resources can be a practical constraint on political will. If a country lacks the economic resources, forces, capabilities, or access and basing arrangements to support a specific deployment, it will have to sit the mission out or rely on allies and partners to provide enablers such as combat support, combat service support, and force protection. The danger of NATO relying disproportionately on a few countries for these capabilities became clear to European NATO allies when President Joe Biden announced that the United States would withdraw from Afghanistan by August 31, 2021. Absent the force protection assets and key enablers provided by the United States, allies lacked the capabilities to continue the Resolute Support Mission, though there was likely a lack of public support and political will as well.

To address this problem, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg suggested increasing NATO common funding toward deterrence and defense spending, which could include items such as allies’ deployment costs or investment in multinational capability programs.

In sum, these endogenous factors influence a country’s internal decisionmaking on when to deploy forces and under what conditions. While the basic assumption is that a robust strategic culture increases a country’s political will, whereas domestic practical constraints limit it, the reality is more complicated. Unexpected factors—such as bold political leadership, strategic shocks, or a marked increase in defense resources—can all help overcome lagging political will. Conversely, practical constraints—such as parliamentary oversight or the use of caveats—can help reluctant allies gradually emerge from their inertia.

**EXOGENOUS FACTORS**

Endogenous, or external, factors can also positively or negatively impact a country’s political will. This section focuses on two primary exogenous factors: alliance dependence and threat perception.

Multinational security alliances such as NATO tolerate free-rider behavior and exert, through alliance dependence, a collective pressure on allies that can be helpful in overcoming deficits in national political will. Allies that rely primarily on multinational security arrangements—and on the United States in particular—to reinforce their legitimacy, national security, and international prestige are particularly receptive to this pressure and tend to channel their contributions to those missions of greatest value to the United States and other major allies.

Denmark, for example, aimed to enhance its foreign policy prestige, influence, and security by participating in dangerous missions in Iraq and Afghanistan alongside the United States even as it has yet to meet the NATO defense spending benchmark of 2 percent. Its reputation in Washington elevated, Danish officials enjoyed greater access to U.S. leadership, which gave them more opportunities to inject Danish positions and interests into U.S. thinking. For Norway and Poland, geopolitics and a reliance on NATO’s Article 5 security guarantee explain their willingness to contribute to international military operations outside NATO’s immediate area of responsibility. Both countries’ muted reactions to NATO’s withdrawal from Afghanistan are a reminder of the priority they assign to collective defense. So long as NATO (and a close relationship with the United States) still has value, these external alliance dependence dynamics help offset national deficits in political will.
In an alliance, the lack of common threat perception can detract from political will. NATO’s efforts to identify threats and agree on a level of ambition through documents such as the Strategic Concept and Political Guidance, or the European Union’s current effort to develop a Strategic Compass, are useful in aligning national security interests with NATO and EU collective goals. The 1991 Strategic Concept, for example, was instrumental in successfully reorienting NATO to out-of-area operations at a time when many allies were eager to cash in on the post-Cold War peace dividend. However, insofar as neither Article 5 nor these documents dictate how individual allies have to respond to a given threat, allies’ contributions still fall prey to national tendencies with regard to political will.

An important component of threat perception comes from the role of external actors—namely adversaries—in influencing allies’ political will. In addition to the obvious fears of military retaliation by adversaries, allies are increasingly concerned about economic or political retaliation, particularly given China and Russia’s increased use of economic and malign influence activities. In Greece, China’s COSCO now owns more than 51 percent of the commercial port of Piraeus, which is often used by NATO for port visits, exercise staging, and transport. This dependency raises questions about whether Greece might hesitate to act (or be constrained from acting) in a conflict with China.

Prior to Moscow’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia was the biggest player in foreign direct investment, banking, real estate, and tourism in Montenegro and a significant provider of energy, trade, and tourism for Turkey—all vulnerabilities that could affect willingness to respond in a conflict with Russia. Other allies struggled with the presence of pro-Russian parties in their governments (e.g., Hungary and Slovakia) that could veto NATO action. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, however, European countries have collectively viewed Russia as a significant threat to their security.
CASE STUDIES
Taken together, these endogenous and exogenous factors offer indications as to whether and under what conditions different NATO allies are more or less likely to have the political will to support U.S.-led or NATO military operations. The case studies below were selected as broadly representative of the various strategic cultures, practical constraints, levels of alliance dependence, and adversary influence across NATO. The rest of this chapter is divided into two sections. The first provides case studies of several European countries. The second section organizes countries in four groups based on the analysis: global partners, international activists, constrained partners, and minimalists.

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

This section examines European political will in six countries: United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Denmark.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is one of the few European countries with a strong, independent strategic culture coupled with a global outlook. As a seafaring and trading nation with an expeditionary mindset, the United Kingdom has long seen global engagement as necessary to protect and advance its national interests. Its geographic position in the North Atlantic makes it both an Atlantic and European power, while its 14 British Overseas Territories, three Crown Dependencies, and links to the 15 Commonwealth nations give it global responsibilities. Historically, the experience of surviving two world wars has engendered a respect for the armed forces
and underscored for the United Kingdom the importance of strong alliances and partnerships, as witnessed by its active participation in NATO and permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council. More recently, the shock of domestic terror attacks has increased its counterterrorism engagement at home and abroad. The United Kingdom has a long-established practice of regularly conducting national security and defense reviews to assess the security environment and define the UK approach to safeguarding its interests therein. Since 2010, this review has been a comprehensive, cross-government effort involving the ministries of defense, development, and foreign affairs, the most recent of which is *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: Integrated Review of Security, Defense, Development, and Foreign Policy*. The 2010 Strategic Defense and Security Review established a National Security Council and national security advisor, effectively institutionalizing a top-down, cross-government national strategic process. While the British government and British public broadly support the use of military force to achieve the United Kingdom’s foreign and security policy goals, there is concern that public support has waned in the post-9/11 period. Some blame this on a lack of communication from the government to the public and the government’s preference for ironing out strategy and defense policy in smaller circles between itself and the armed forces. In order to retain support of the public and armed forces concerning the use of force and utility of war, the government needs an open conversation with these groups, including about the changing nature of warfare itself.

The United Kingdom affords extensive power to the executive government, which faces lower practical constraints than most countries regarding control and deployment of armed forces abroad. Interestingly, this practice has its roots in royal prerogative powers, which made the monarch the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and gave him/her considerable power in employing them in the “public good.” With the 1688 Bill of Rights, many of these powers, and the accompanying mindset, transferred to the government executive. Technically speaking, the UK government can declare war and deploy armed forces overseas without the backing or approval of Parliament. In practice, the government’s freedom of action is checked by strong parliamentary oversight, including that of the well-informed House of Commons Defence Select Committee; an active, organized opposition that regularly holds the government majority to task through hearings and inquiries; and an informed public and media. All of these factors create intentional friction in the bureaucracy that enhances accountability and transparency.

During debates on whether the United Kingdom should join the Iraq War in 2003, for example, there was a strong, though unsuccessful, push by Parliament to require its approval for any decision to engage in armed conflict either before or shortly after a deployment. Arguably, the government’s decision to proceed with the Iraq deployment over the concerns of Parliament came back to bite again in 2013 when Parliament rejected a motion from the government of Prime Minister David Cameron to respond militarily to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons on his own citizens. This led some to argue that a parliamentary prerogative, or convention, to decide on the deployment of military forces had been crystallized. However, it is likely more precise to say that the matter remains contested. Parliament still does not legally have an established role in approving deployments, and even the informal convention is unclear. For example, military action was taken in April 2018 against Syrian government chemical weapons sites without requesting parliamentary approval. While consensus seems to be coalescing that Parliament should at least debate deployments, the actual circumstances of when this must happen—and when it need not—seem to remain nebulous.
any case, the United Kingdom is one of the few nations where the executive has the power to deploy forces, and its forces regularly operate without caveats or other operational restraints. Taken together, these endogenous factors—namely a strong strategic culture and low practical constraints—positively impact UK political will.

In terms of exogenous factors, the United Kingdom is moderate in terms of its alliance dependence. On the one hand, its independent nuclear deterrent, professional armed forces, and significant power projection capabilities give it a degree of freedom of action independent of its allies and partners. On the other, the United Kingdom is constrained by the overall size of its military and budget. The United Kingdom seeks to offset this through its active leadership in NATO and a close bilateral defense relationship with the United States, including favorable intelligence sharing and defense trade relationships as well as a degree of reliance on some U.S. capabilities, such as F-35s for its aircraft carrier. Post-Brexit, the United Kingdom is doubling down on this dual strategy of investing in NATO and a close bilateral relationship with the United States. Even when it was a member of the European Union, UK force contributions to EU operations and missions were limited. A more likely avenue for the United Kingdom to reinforce European security outside of NATO would be through mini-lateral “coalitions of the willing and able,” such as the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force or cooperation with Nordic allies and partners.  

Finally, the United Kingdom rates low in terms of adversary influence. Great Britain’s post-imperial rivalry with the Russian Empire has engendered a degree of mistrust and wariness of Russian intentions that persists today—and has only increased following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. For now, the trade balance is in the United Kingdom’s favor, with China exporting more goods to the United Kingdom than it imports, and the United Kingdom not even among the top 15 goods exporters to China. The United Kingdom has been overtly supportive of Hong Kong and willing to speak out on China’s human rights abuses. However, this bears watching post-Brexit, as China has a history of capitalizing on countries’ economic vulnerabilities, including through the use of coercive diplomacy.

France

Much like the United Kingdom, France enjoys a proud military history and strong strategic culture that translates to a global, activist foreign policy. France sees global engagement as necessary not only to protect and advance its own national interests but also to promote its “republican values” worldwide. Its 12 overseas departments, territories, and communities, which are as far afield as the Americas and Indo-Pacific, give it global responsibilities. France retains close ties to many of its former colonies, which has tended to define its overseas military engagement. A prime example was its counterterrorism operation in the Sahel, Operation Barkhane, which was conducted jointly with five former African colonies.  

Unique to French strategic culture is its Gaullist legacy and a tradition of independence. France maintains an arm’s length degree of autonomy even from its closest allies and partners in terms of decisionmaking, defense capabilities, command structure, and its independent nuclear deterrent. This independence is at once complementary to—and in tension with—France’s strong belief in multilateralism. For example, it leads France to view the European Union as an extension of its national foreign and security policy. As a founding nation of the European Coal and Steel Community, a precursor to what is now the European Union, France sees itself as a leader in Europe. It is the chief proponent of greater European integration and EU strategic autonomy, which aspires to give Europe more freedom of decision and action in its own affairs,
particularly in foreign and security policy. While this energy and activism is valued by some fellow EU members, still others—including EU budget hawks and more cautious security doves—see it as dangerous and unpredictable.

While the European Union remains France’s primary multinational framework, it has increased its engagement in NATO and invested in closer bilateral relationships with the United States and other key allies since its return to NATO’s integrated military structure in 2009. In 2021 alone, France concluded bilateral memorandums of understanding on defense cooperation with three European allies or partners—Italy, Greece, and Sweden—in addition to renewing the Elysée Treaty with Germany in 2019. The shock of increased domestic terror attacks led to a shift in French security and defense policy by forcing it to dedicate more military forces toward domestic tasks and increase its counterterrorism engagement in the Middle East and North Africa.

France has an established, if irregular, strategic review process that guides its foreign and security policy and development of its armed forces. The process is generally driven by the president’s priorities. In addition to the White Paper on Defense and Security, last updated in 2021, France utilizes specific regional and functional strategies, such as its 2021 Indo Pacific Strategy and 2019 Space Defense Strategy, to guide its policies. While the French government consults with representatives from government and the armed forces, parliament, academia, think tanks, and industry in crafting these strategies, the final pen is held by a small group of government officials and experts. Despite this rather closed, elite-driven process, there is broad, bipartisan support for the military and the use of military options to achieve foreign policy goals. French leaders consider the armed forces a primary tool for achieving security objectives, as opposed to non-military tools.

Practical, structural constraints to political will are also low. While France prefers to operate with a UN Security Council mandate in place for its overseas operations, it maintains exceptions for Responsibility-to-Protect (R2P) and enforcement of bilateral security arrangements with its former colonies. The latter provided the legal justification for France’s missions in the Sahel, for example. Internally, there are no constitutional provisions restricting executive power regarding the deployment of armed forces, either at home or abroad. Decisionmaking is highly centralized with the president, who works closely with the National Security and Defense Council comprised of the minister of defense, minister of foreign affairs, and the chief of defense. Uniquely, the French president retains strict political control over the armed forces and a high degree of flexibility in the so-called domaine réservé (reserved areas) of defense, security, and foreign policy. There is limited parliamentary control of force deployments, with any constraints coming mainly retroactively, as was the case following President François Hollande’s decision in 2014 to deploy French forces to Mali in less than 24 hours.

France also rates low in terms of alliance dependence. As noted earlier, France prides itself on its self-reliance and independence. This drives defense policy choices such as maintaining an independent nuclear deterrence and allocating resources to high-profile capabilities such as space and special operations forces, however costly. France also seeks to maintain this independence and prestige when participating in multinational operations, as evidenced by its insistence on retaining command and control, use of its own operational headquarters, and pursuit of influential general officer posts. Ideally, France would like to be able to conduct any operation on a national basis if needed, as witnessed by its recent acquisition of strategic lift, refueling aircraft, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. Yet even France remains dependent on the United States and other
allies for high-end crisis management operations as well as collective defense.

The second external factor, adversary influence, is also low for France. While French policy elites may dream of changes to the European security architecture that create a more benign Russia, they are also pragmatic to Russia’s aggressive behavior in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe. In contrast to Germany, for example, France’s utilization of nuclear power makes it less dependent on Russia for its energy needs. Concerning China, France’s overseas departments, territories, and communities in the Indo-Pacific push it toward a harder line in China than many European countries, even if the official rhetoric is more balanced.

All things considered, France’s strong strategic culture coupled with low practical barriers for military action and low adversary influence bode well for political will in NATO. Nevertheless, there are two countervailing factors. The first is France’s low level of alliance dependence, which allows it to be more discerning about contributing to NATO missions. The second is the limited capabilities of the French Armed Forces compared to the high level of ambition set for them in French defense and other strategic documents. France’s most recent military planning document, the 2019–2025 Loi de Programmation Militaire, increased the French defense budget by €7.4 billion (approximately $8.1 billion) more per year on average than during the previous spending window of 2014–2018, suggesting that France is aware of the need to ensure its ambition is matched by sufficient resources.

Germany

Germany is often considered the classic example of a NATO ally with both low political will and lagging military capabilities, though these began to change following Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Since 1990, Germany’s strategic orientation has been characterized by a foreign and security policy nested firmly in the transatlantic community and in Europe. As such, its priorities tend to follow those set at the NATO and EU levels, especially out-of-area peacekeeping and crisis management throughout the 1990s through to a collective defense focus today. In short, Germany has intentionally subsumed its national strategic culture into the multilateral security frameworks of NATO, the United Nations, and the European Union. The burden of its culpability in World War II is the shock that has defined Germany’s strategic culture, driving it to adopt a “defensive and pacifist mindset” that over time has perpetuated an institutional inertia in the country surrounding security and defense issues.

Today, these manifest in interministerial fragmentation, a cumbersome procurement system, and complex decisionmaking processes. Even as fellow NATO allies and EU member states have called on Germany to play a more active role in security and defense, Germany has proven reluctant, and its own ambition and resources have failed to keep pace with those demands.

Another characteristic of German strategic culture is a “culture of military restraint.” Compared to other NATO allies, Germany has an aversion to the use of military force. For example, opinion polls indicate that small percentages of the German public—as low as 14 percent—regard military intervention as a legitimate tool in an external crisis and conflict management. While many point to Germany’s involvement in the military campaigns in Kosovo and Afghanistan as progress in its willingness to intervene abroad on humanitarian or moral grounds, others recall the experience of Libya in 2011, where Germany abstained from the UN Security Council vote mandating intervention. When German forces do deploy, they are usually laden with caveats and subject to tougher rules of engagement than their NATO counterparts.

German political will is also hampered by several structural constraints. Multiple German politicians
have called on Germany to establish a national security council based within the German Chancellery that would be akin to the U.S. and UK National Security Councils or the French Defence and National Security Council, but this has not yet materialized.57 The existing Federal Security Council (Bundessicherheitsrat) acts more as a cabinet committee whose main remit is approval of arms exports.58 Likewise, the German executive has limited power to deploy forces without parliamentary approval. There is an exception for emergency situations. But even then, legislative approval is required as soon as possible—or else Parliament may demand that the troops withdraw.59 The government is subject to strict scrutiny by Parliament, the public, and the constitutional court.

Parliamentary involvement in military deployments outside the NATO area of operations is particularly strong, with Parliament involved in all stages of the deployment—from influencing the initial mandate (including operative details and sometimes even the fundamentals of the government proposal) to approving renewals and withdrawals.60 The influence of the German armed forces in this process is low, which contributes to divides between the political level and the military operational and tactical level.61 The influence of public opinion on foreign and security policy decisionmaking is also growing. Finally, Germany’s constitutional court acts as the final arbiter on security policy through its role as the ultimate interpreter of the constitution, including those articles that govern the use of force. A 1994 decision by the court determined that Article 87a of the constitution would allow for interventions outside of the NATO area, under certain conditions, despite common political interpretations to the contrary.52

Changing this culture of restraint will require bold leadership from German elites, who too often assume disapproval from Parliament, the public, and the constitutional court on foreign and security policy decisions rather than making the case for engagement. One exception to this was in 2015 when then minister of defense Ursula von der Leyen and former foreign minister Frank Walter Steinmeier successfully pushed Parliament on the deployment of German reconnaissance aircraft from Turkey and Jordan into Syria to support the D-ISIS campaign against the Islamic State.63 The constitutional court could also play a helpful role in challenging overly restrictive political interpretations of law, as it did in 1994, and insisting that the German constitution is not inappropriately used as convenient cover for excessive restraint in security policy.

As noted previously, Germany has a high degree of alliance dependence given that its foreign and security policy, as well as its defense posture, is deliberately rooted in multilateralism. Germany is the NATO country whose national defense planning is most aligned with the NATO Defense Planning Process and is one of the biggest contributors to NATO missions, including having the most troops of any U.S. ally participating in the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan before the NATO withdrawal in 2021.64 Germany sees U.S. engagement in Europe as vital. While supportive of improving the European Union’s ability to act on security and defense, German has pushed back on France’s version of strategic autonomy, stressing complementarity and improving European capabilities through NATO.65 Germany’s involvement in Afghanistan and other out-of-area NATO operations can be attributed in large part to this alliance dependence, namely a sense of obligation to maintaining NATO solidarity.

The impact of adversary influence on German foreign and security policy is low, thanks to its grounding in multilateralism as well as an overall pragmatism. Nevertheless, Germany’s own experience of divisions between East and West throughout the Cold War has shaped its approach toward Russia. For example, German leaders tend to assume responsibility for improving Europe-Russia relations and to favor non-military tools for pushing back on Russian aggression.
CASE STUDIES

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THE CHALLENGE OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL WILL

and malign influence. This was evident in Chancellor Angela Merkel’s tenure, during which Germany was central to maintaining EU sanctions on Russia and Merkel herself took on the role of the European Union’s chief interlocutor with Putin. That said, Germany’s approach toward Russia has evolved, particularly following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. Examples include Germany’s leadership of a NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Lithuania and its regular contributions to NATO’s Baltic Air Policing Mission. Following Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, German chancellor Olaf Scholz announced emergency funding for the German military of $112.7 billion and promised to boost defense spending above 2 percent of GDP.

Germany’s relationship with China is complicated given Germany’s dependence on Chinese manufacturing and markets. For example, a 2019 study from a German industry association found that in 2016, “approximately 5,200 German companies comprising over one million employees” were operating in China and many more had “large sums of investments tied up in China” (€76 billion [approximately $83 billion] in foreign direct investment, or 6.8 percent of foreign investment for that year). This situation created dependencies on Chinese supply chains and value creation networks. Under Merkel’s government, Germany pursued a policy of compartmentalization in relations with China by separating human rights issues from economic relations to protect its robust trade relationship with China that helps fuel German economic growth.

Italy

Italy is nestled somewhere between the strong strategic cultures of the United Kingdom and France and the weaker strategic culture of Germany. Italy’s moderate strategic culture was largely shaped by its experience in World War II, which ridded Italy of its fascist regime and forced a reorientation of its foreign and defense policy toward European, transatlantic, and Mediterranean commitments. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Italy took several significant decisions to underpin this new orientation, such as agreeing to host U.S. nuclear weapons as part of NATO’s nuclear umbrella, adopting the European Union’s Maastricht Treaty and Common Security and Defense Policy, and intervening militarily in the Balkans against Serbia.

Like Germany, Italy’s commitment to multilateralism and robust contributions to multinational operations have been instrumental in shedding its post-war stigma. Italy’s defense plan specifies a ceiling for its overseas deployments, which it regularly meets. It was a framework nation for ISAF, its officers regularly command EU operations (to which Italy contributes robustly, especially in the Balkans and Mediterranean), and is a top contributor of military police to UN missions. Italy views these contributions as a way to safeguard its national interests and amplify its influence. While Article 11 of the Italian constitution forbids “war as an instrument of aggression against the freedom of other peoples and as a means for the settlement of international disputes,” it does not outright forbid the use of military force in conflicts in which “there is no direct national interest at stake.”

For Italy, these are usually geared toward one of three objectives: tackling challenges related to collective security, increasing Italian influence in NATO, and serving as a bargaining chip with allies to ensure they contribute to Italy’s security interests—such as in the Balkans. This last element is another unique aspect of Italy’s strategic culture, namely the struggle to balance its national security commitments in the Mediterranean with broader EU and NATO commitments. The instability of its immediate neighborhood is constantly pulling it south and somewhat constraining its ability to contribute to deterrence in the north, for example. Finally, Italy’s desire to maintain a competitive national defense industrial base in
line with NATO standards is a draw for grounding it in NATO and an impetus for joining cooperative European projects.

Yet despite this moderate strategic culture and active participation in multinational operations, Italy falls short in terms of threat perception and its view toward the use of force. Both its budget and strategic review process, for example, are irregular and somewhat ad hoc, which can lead to outdated assessments of the security environment and a mismatch between the level of ambition and available resources. For example, Italy’s most recent white paper on security and defense policy is from 2015 and is underdeveloped in its assessment of state-based threats. Russia and China are not mentioned by name. Likewise, Italy’s current defense planning document for the period 2020 to 2022 contains a significant list of programs that are described as critical but are not fully funded. The use of force is still seen as a last resort, with Italy demonstrating a preference for civilian-military coalitions and international security missions through the European Union or NATO. Rather than assume the leadership role its size and economic power would suggest, Italy is content being a middle power that works with or under others in a multinational framework.

The practical constraints on Italian political will are moderate and reflect the reticence of its political leadership. Politically, a more robust Italian foreign and security policy is hampered by the persistence of alternative views, specifically those of the communist and socialist parties but also remnants of the fascists. The first cabinet of former prime minister Giuseppe Conte, for example, was supported by the far-right Lega and populist Five Star Movement, whose 2018 coalition agreement promised to re-evaluate Italian participation in international missions in terms of their actual relevance to the national interest. Both parties are in the current government. Indicative of this lack of broad-based political support, Italian defense spending, currently at 1.4 percent of GDP, is among the lowest in NATO and below the NATO medium of 1.6 percent. Defense is also funded in a piecemeal way, with procurement funding provided by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and costs for international deployments financed by the Italian Parliament on case-by-case basis. Political elites are highly sensitive to public opinion, which drives the use of operational caveats, a sensitivity to casualties, and even precipitous decisions to withdraw its forces. This was evident in the Prodi government’s announcement upon election in 2006 that it would withdraw Italian forces from Iraq.

Structurally, while the executive branch (i.e., the president) has some room for maneuver, both Parliament and the government provide significant checks and balances. There is no specific law concerning deployment of forces overseas, but established practice is for the government to take a decision via issuance of a “decree law,” which parliament adopts within a 60-day window. Insofar as Parliament controls the financial resources and agrees to finance international missions on a case-by-case basis, it can also exert control in that way. Like most European allies, Italy’s preference is for a UN Security Council resolution or other international legal justification for any overseas missions.

Italy experiences a moderate degree of alliance dependence given its low defense spending and preference for deploying in multinational frameworks. Similar to Germany, it does not consider the European defense commitment an alternative to NATO, but rather sees the two organizations as complementary. Italian strategic culture assumes that NATO takes the lead on collective defense operations, high-intensity conflict, counterinsurgency, and high-end crisis management, whereas the European Union can lead on humanitarian missions, peacekeeping or low-end crisis management in permissive environments, and capacity-building tasks.
The presence of moderate adversary influence in Italy has been somewhat concerning. Italy’s relationship with Russia has been friendlier than most EU countries, and Italy is Russia’s fifth-largest export market (as of 2019). In 2016, Italy prevented the European Union from imposing sanctions on Russia following its bombing campaign against Aleppo, Syria, which killed more than 440 civilians. While this reluctance was due partly to the economic damage Russia sanctions present to Italy’s already fragile economy, it was also characteristic of an overall economic pragmatism, in which Italian businesses that benefitted from operating in Russia—such as energy company ENI, the country’s largest bank, Intesa Sanpaolo, and the export credit agency SACE—applied pressure to politicians to refrain from imposing strict sanctions. But this reluctance began to change in 2022, when Italy supported crippling sanctions against Russia. Italian prime minister Mario Draghi called the Russian invasion a “decisive turning point in European history” and announced that Italy had “adopted an increasingly tough and punitive response toward Moscow.”

Italy has also been reluctant to call out Chinese human rights abuses compared to other EU countries. In 2018, former prime minister Paolo Gentiloni was the only representative of an EU and G-7 country to attend China’s Belt and Road Initiative Forum, and Italy joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) the following year.

Poland

Poland is an interesting case as a newer, rather than founding member, of NATO. Its strategic culture has been honed over centuries by successive strategic shocks, including Poland’s tragic history of occupation by its neighbors throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These experiences have created a pervasive sense of “strategic uncertainty” that drives Poland’s foreign and security policy. Poland’s prioritization of territorial defense, its active membership in both NATO and the European Union, and its limited participation in international operations absent a demonstrated benefit to Poland’s national interests are all hallmarks of Poland’s strategic culture. Since 1999, Poland has had a legal requirement to spend at least 1.95 percent of GDP on defense, possibly reflecting a desire for greater self-sufficiency due to underlying doubts as to whether its NATO and EU allies and partners will come to Poland’s aid in a crisis.

Prior to NATO membership, Poland used its participation in international operations to prove its worth as a viable candidate. Post-membership, this engagement became a way to enhance Poland’s international position and attain status with a view to building political capital with allies, ensuring Polish influence in NATO and EU decisionmaking, and securing greater security benefits and guarantees for itself. Polish leaders point to U.S. force presence on the ground in Poland and NATO’s agreement to develop more robust defense plans as examples that this approach delivers. In recent years, Poland has become more selective about its involvement in out-of-area missions. Public support for NATO’s mission in Afghanistan decreased, with many arguing that the longstanding mission was undermining NATO’s ability to conduct its core business of collective defense. A notable exception, however, is Poland’s consistent engagement with its eastern neighbors. Polish strategic culture includes a strong connection and shared sense of history with Poland’s eastern neighborhood that is evident in the leading role it plays in assistance to Ukraine as well as its pushback on Belarusian autocrat Lukashenka. Positively, both the public and political elites share in this strategic culture and support Poland’s approach to security and defense, including the use of military power, which is seen as a necessary tool for Poland to protect and sustain its national identity.

Consistent with this public and elite consensus on the use of force for home defense, structural barriers to use of force in this area are relatively
low. Poland, like France, affords a special role to
the president in presiding over the armed forces
and safeguarding “the sovereignty and security of
the state.” Per Poland’s constitution, the Council
of Ministers—which consists of the prime minister,
minister of foreign affairs, and minister of
defense—is responsible for foreign and security
policy (to include the deployment of forces
abroad), but the president ultimately decides on
the use of Polish armed forces aboard. While the
president could withhold approval, this has never
happened. The role of Poland’s legislative branch,
namely its upper and lower houses of Parliament,
is similarly constrained and limited largely to its
budgetary vote.

Poland’s alliance dependence is high, which explains
its continued support to out-of-area operations
despite a strong prioritization of territorial defense.
Decades of occupation delayed development of an
independent strategic culture and strategic planning
structures. The strategic culture that emerged after
Poland’s departure from the Warsaw Pact in 1991 is
informed by NATO strategies, concepts, and defense
planning mechanisms; EU frameworks; and a close
bilateral relationship with the United States. Poland
has moved quickly to modernize its capabilities and
forces, but it is still reliant on U.S. and NATO
presence to reinforce deterrence and to support its
troop deployments overseas. While the European
Union has become more of a player for Poland in
terms of foreign and security policy, it is not seen as
a substitute for NATO or, more importantly, bilateral
U.S. security guarantees.

The overall risk of adversary influence on Poland’s
foreign and security policy is low. Given its history
and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which borders
Poland, Polish leaders remain highly skeptical of
Russia’s intentions and have opposed measures that
increase European dependence on Russia, such as
Nord Stream 2. Poland has also made great progress
in divesting itself of Soviet-era military equipment
and reducing its dependence on Russia energy. The
latter includes cooperation with Denmark on
construction of a Baltic pipe project to link Poland
with Norway’s oil fields and diversification through
an agreement with the United States to import
liquified natural gas.

In contrast, Poland’s relationship with China is
somewhat more concerning, though less so than
three years ago. Like many Central and Eastern
European allies, Poland joined China’s 17+1 format
and endorsed the BRI in 2015. Since then, however,
Polish skepticism of China has grown due to the
failure of these agreements to deliver the promised
economic benefits as well as suspicion over China’s
handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Denmark**

Denmark is a unique example of an ally that has
rebuilt a strong strategic culture. Once a great power
with a proud warrior, crusader history, Denmark was
surpassed by neighbors and rivals in the seventeenth
century. After a brief period acting as a balancing
power among more powerful countries that led to
further loss of territory as well as occupation, Denmark
retreated to a position of neutrality. This was not
neutrality in the Finnish sense of active resistance and
military self-reliance but rather adoption of a pacifist,
de-militarized stance from the late-nineteenth
century up to World War II. Although Denmark
joined NATO as a founding member in 1949, this came
with caveats. These caveats included a prohibition on
any bases, stationing of nuclear warheads, or military
activity on Danish territory, with the notable exception
of Greenland.

It was only at the end of the Cold War that Denmark
began to move from this neutralist tradition to an
activist one with regard to international security.
This was brought about by the actions of Danish
political leaders who deliberately worked to shift the
balance in favor of engagement. Initiated under the
center-right government, with Minister of Foreign
Affairs Uffe Ellemann-Jensen in the lead, the effort was carried on by the subsequent Social Democratic government under the leadership of Minister of Defense Hans Hækkerup. This constituted the beginnings of a Danish elite consensus supporting “international activism,” which was characterized by “liberal aims such as democracy, human rights, and development with hard-headed action.” The shift included legal changes such as revision to the basic law of the armed forces in 1993 to emphasize international operations as their primary task.

Danish participation in NATO operations in Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), and Iraq (2003) followed. By the time of the Libya intervention in 2011, what started as the consensus among a centrist, internationalist majority had extended to every party in the Danish Parliament, including the right-wing populist Danish People’s Party and former communists, who all supported the intervention. This military activism has enhanced Denmark’s profile as a small state and given it influence and access it might not otherwise have enjoyed, such as securing the prestigious positions of NATO secretary general and chairman of the NATO Military Committee.

This broad consensus, which continues today, has become part of Danish identity, processes, and law. The Danish Defence Agreement, for example, is a cross-government agreed document that sets the level of ambition, priorities, and funding levels for Danish defense. It is formulated with a high level of parliamentary and public engagement, which builds support for its objectives. While Denmark supports the use of military force, there is always a strong humanitarian and development strain to its foreign policy, with stabilization as a consistent feature of military Danish operations. As expressed by Danish prime minister Mette Frederiksen in a recent foreign policy speech, “The only way to secure our democracy and Danish values—Denmark’s safety and security—is to take responsibility.”

Practical constraints to Danish political will are moderate. As explained, significant effort is dedicated to building elite and public consensus, to include through active debate—as was the case in deciding whether Denmark should join the Iraq War. While the Danish constitution gives the government executive privilege in the conduct of foreign affairs, the government (often a minority government) needs the support of Parliament to stay in power. This has engendered a tradition of consultation and consent between the government and Parliament. Overseas deployments require the support of two-thirds of Parliament, with the Foreign Affairs Committee playing a useful role in helping to build consensus.

As a result of this upfront investment in consultation and cross-party consensus building, Denmark operates without caveats, and its commitment is arguably firmer than that of allies who have less transparent, inclusive processes. Like most NATO allies, Denmark sees NATO and the European Union as complementary in security and defense. In fact, Denmark is constrained from participating in EU military operations or cooperating on development and acquisition of military capabilities in an EU framework due to a defense “opt-out” agreed in exchange for its approval of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, however, Denmark announced it would hold a referendum to decide whether to remove that opt-out.

In terms of external constraints, Denmark’s level of alliance dependence is high. Financial and size constraints mean that Denmark will always be reliant on multinational frameworks and close bilateral and regional partnerships to augment its national capabilities. For out-of-area operations, Denmark prefers to deploy with larger framework nation countries, often the United Kingdom, but does possess key enabling capabilities of its own such as fighters and ISR.

Adversary influence in Denmark is low. There is a general skepticism toward Russia, which only
increased following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and low levels of internal corruption coupled with high levels of transparency act as a guard against malign influence. Denmark’s economic relationship with China is limited, and it is particularly wary of Chinese intentions in Greenland and the Arctic. Alongside Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom, Denmark recently joined the U.S.-led Export Controls and Human Rights Initiative, which is designed to stem the flow of sensitive technologies to authoritarian governments such as China.

**PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR**

Several prototypes of European political will emerge from these case studies, influenced by the endogenous and exogenous factors that affect a country’s strategic culture and ability to act as well as the push-pull dynamics of alliance dependence and adversary influence. These patterns of behavior can then be used to deduce what missions a given country is more or less likely to support and under what conditions. Based on political will, European countries can be organized into four groups.

The first are *global partners*, such as the United Kingdom and France, for whom global engagement is deeply entwined with their national interests. They prioritize protecting their national interests and projecting power abroad, and they are willing to use military power in supporting these goals. Occasionally, these national and collective interests compete with one another for resources, as highlighted by France’s decision to fight domestic terrorism at home rather than leading counterterrorism missions abroad. Such global partners tend to have strong strategic cultures that are characterized by a high level of ambition, established national security architectures (e.g., executive-level national security councils and active parliamentary foreign and security policy committees), and defined strategic planning processes (e.g., regular defense and security reviews tied to budgeting processes). Structurally, their executives have relative freedom of action to set foreign and security policy priorities and deploy forces. Thanks to their independent strategic cultures and regular investment in forces and capabilities, their levels of alliance dependence are relatively lower than most allies. Nevertheless, these allies are still middle powers and therefore have some reliance on allies and partners to magnify their power and reach, particularly in more demanding missions or in regions farther from home. Finally, while not immune to adversary influence, the United Kingdom and France are resilient and confident enough in their national identities that they are not easily swayed by such attempts.

The second group might be referred to as *international activists*. This group encompasses allies such as Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands, as well as NATO partner Finland, for whom engagement in international military missions is a manifestation of statehood and a sign that the country can live up to its responsibilities to the international community. These countries share many of the same characteristics as the global partners in terms of their strategic cultures, but they lack the mass and reach to qualify as global partners. Compared to global partners, their strategic planning and budgeting processes are more inclusive (e.g., agreed cross-party, involving consultations with academia). Likewise, executive power exists but is tempered by strong, regular parliamentary involvement.

The alliance dependence of this group is high given their size and reliance on larger, framework nations to deploy forces at any distance or for extended periods of time. This applies equally to NATO partner Finland. Though not a member of the alliance at the time this report was published, Finland relies on the perception of its close relationship with NATO and the United States to augment its robust national defense forces and
capabilities. While willing to use military force when necessary, the international activist group countries are advocates of a comprehensive approach to security and defense, namely bringing to bear all instruments of power. As such, they focus heavily on and devote significant resources to humanitarian and development aid and training and capacity building.

The third group are constrained partners and include countries such as Germany, Poland, Italy, Romania, and the Baltic states. Like the international activists, these countries view their engagement in international missions as a signal that they can meet their international responsibilities. However, they also see their engagement as a way to increase the likelihood other allies will come to their aid when their national security interests are threatened. They view their participation in international missions as a down payment or tacit bargaining tool to strengthen future security guarantees in support of their own interests. This line of thinking has been a useful driver in securing NATO force commitments for out-of-area operations, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the connection to a country’s national interest is not immediately apparent. The strategic cultures of the constrained partners are often more nascent, as in the case of Poland and Romania, or deeply subsumed into multinational structures, as in the case of Germany. This group has a high level of alliance dependence and counts on NATO to augment their national defense capabilities.

A fourth and final group are the minimalists, which include those allies who expect little from—and contribute little to—NATO. This includes countries such as Hungary and Iceland. They have modest strategic cultures and levels of ambition, with most of their effort focused on national defense and limited contributions to either NATO efforts at home (e.g., air policing) or international missions. This is due less to any structural or organizational barriers to force deployment than to lagging political will. So long as they can continue to benefit from the collective security guarantees provided by NATO without contributing more, this group is unlikely to go the extra mile to increase its contributions. Adversary influence appears most pronounced among this group, suggesting some of them may be keeping a low profile to avoid alienating countries such as Russia and China.
MILITARY MISSIONS
As the previous section highlights, there is considerable variation in the political will of individual European states—such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany—to use military force because of endogenous and exogenous factors. This section broadens the scope of the analysis by examining the willingness of European states to perform a range of military missions. It asks: What types of military missions are European states more likely—and less likely—to have the political will to conduct?

As used here, a military mission involves a military task to complete an action with a specific purpose. An important metric of military power is the ability of forces to successfully implement a variety of missions. Military missions are often categorized by their focus, such as noncombatant evacuation, foreign humanitarian assistance, security force assistance, counterterrorism, and large-scale combat missions. In addition, this section also discusses military operations, which include specific military actions to carry out strategic, operational, tactical, or other objectives. As used here, missions refer to the general tasks that militaries are asked to perform, while operations refer to specific, named efforts. Named operations include such examples as Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, Operation Unified Protector in Libya, Operation Concordia in the former Yugoslavia, and Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean.

Since most European military missions are multilateral rather than unilateral, it is important to understand how European states conceptualize political will for multilateral missions. Consequently, the use of military force is deeply intertwined with politics and political will.
TYPES OF MILITARY MISSIONS

There has been a significant focus on how countries translate military capabilities into outcomes, either through unilateral or multilateral missions. But assessing military performance is a complex undertaking. How a state—or states—perform in conducting military missions can include a wide range of factors, such as strategy, tactics, morale, numerical preponderance, technology, combat motivation, force employment, leadership, and materiel. Other factors are also important, such as readiness, sustainability, modernization, and force structure. To complicate matters, military forces frequently perform a wide range of missions, such as countering terrorists, deterring aggressors, conducting peacekeeping efforts, enforcing sanctions, performing freedom of navigation missions, and training foreign police and soldiers. Proficiency in one or several missions does not indicate proficiency in all or even most.

To better understand military missions, this section divides them into three categories: (1) crisis response and limited contingency missions; (2) military engagement, security cooperation, deterrence, and assurance missions; and (3) large-scale combat. These categories can be differentiated by their scale and scope. Crisis response and limited contingency missions, for example, sit at one end of the conflict continuum and generally include small-scale efforts and limited or no combat. Large-scale combat missions sit at the other end of the conflict continuum and can involve joint, multidomain operations involving air, ground, maritime, cyber, and space. Most military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence missions sit somewhere in the middle. NATO’s three core tasks—collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security—are captured in this framework.

Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the types of military missions and examples of current and historical operations involving European countries. The appendix provides a more complete list of specific military operations involving European states between 1994 and 2021, including those under the auspices of NATO and the European Union.

The first category—crisis response and limited contingency missions—sits at one end of the conflict continuum. These missions include noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs), peacekeeping, and foreign humanitarian assistance efforts. NEOs involve situations in which military forces attempt to evacuate noncombatants from foreign countries when their lives are endangered by war, civil unrest, or natural disaster. Peacekeeping consists of military support to diplomatic, economic, or other efforts to establish or maintain peace in areas of potential or actual conflict—often to support such regional or international institutions as the United Nations or African Union. As highlighted in the appendix, historical examples involving European countries include Operation Concordia and Operation Allied Harmony in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and numerous operations in support of UN peacekeeping efforts across the globe. Finally, humanitarian assistance involves the use of military forces to reduce human suffering, pandemics, disease, or hunger. Examples of foreign humanitarian assistance include the European Union Force Chad and Central African Republic (EUFOR Tchad/RCA) and NATO’s humanitarian relief efforts in Pakistan following the October 2005 earthquake, which killed an estimated 53,000 people.

The second category—military engagement, security cooperation, deterrence, and assurance—includes a wide range of activities to establish, shape, and maintain relations with other nations. The general objective is to protect national interests by building or maintaining support to partner nations, enhancing their capability to provide security and maintain stability, and establishing operational access.
### FIGURE 4.1: OVERVIEW OF MILITARY MISSIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MISSIONS</th>
<th>TASKS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES INVOLVING EUROPEAN COUNTRIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRISIS RESPONSE AND LIMITED CONTINGENCY MISSIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncombatant evacuation operations</td>
<td>Evacuate endangered noncombatants from locations within countries to safe havens.</td>
<td>Operation Amaryllis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacekeeping</td>
<td>Provide military support to diplomatic and other efforts to establish or maintain peace.</td>
<td>Operation Concordia, Operation Allied Harmony, Operation Atthea, Kosovo Force (KFOR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign humanitarian assistance</td>
<td>Conduct military activities to directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, or hunger.</td>
<td>EUFOR Tchad/RCA, NATO operations in Pakistan following the October 2005 earthquake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MILITARY ENGAGEMENT, SECURITY COOPERATION, DETERRENCE, AND ASSURANCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security force assistance</td>
<td>Build or improve the capacity of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions, including foreign internal defense, election security, border security, and other actions.</td>
<td>NATO’s Resolution Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan; Kosovo Force (KFOR); NATO Mission Iraq (NMI); a range of smaller operations such as EUFOR RD Congo, EUCAP Somalia, EUTM Mali, EUFOL Afghanistan, EUBAM Libya, EUTM Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counternarcotics</td>
<td>Detect, monitor, and counter the production, trafficking, and use of illegal drugs.</td>
<td>EUFOR RCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter weapons of mass destruction</td>
<td>Curtail the conceptualization, development, possession, proliferation, use, and effects of weapons of mass destruction.</td>
<td>Operations in support of the 1999 WMD Initiative, Operation Sea Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter illegal migration</td>
<td>Detect, monitor, and counter the movement of illegal migrants.</td>
<td>EUNAVFOR MED, Operation Triton, Operation Themis, Operation Mare Nostrum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterterrorism</td>
<td>Prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorism (offensive actions) as well as reduce the vulnerability of individuals and property to terrorist attacks (defense actions).</td>
<td>International coalition to defeat the Islamic State, Operation Barkhane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber</td>
<td>Conduct offensive and defensive cyber activities.</td>
<td>Operations to protect 2017 French presidential election, 2019 EU parliamentary elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air patrol</td>
<td>Protect navigation, overtight, and related interests in the air, such as air policing, air patrols, interdiction, and no fly zones.</td>
<td>Operation Eagle Assist, Operation Deadeye, Baltic Air Policing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime patrol</td>
<td>Protect navigation, overtight, and related interests on, under, and over the seas, such as freedom of navigation, protection of shipping, interdiction, enforcement of arms embargos, naval patrols, and counterpiracy.</td>
<td>Operation Sea Guardian, Operation Active Endeavor, Operation Allied Protector, Operation Ocean Shield, Operation Atalanta, Operation Mare Sicuro, Operation Curmbe, Operation Irini, Operation Themis, Operation Poseidon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deterrence</td>
<td>Persuade an adversary not to initiate a war or activity because the expected costs and risks outweigh the anticipated benefits.</td>
<td>Operation Atlantic Resolve, Black Sea Region Deterrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>Support an ally or partner’s government and population and communicate a credible message of confidence in the dependability of its security commitment.</td>
<td>NATO’s air policing operations over Albania, Montenegro, Slovenia, and the Baltic region; NATO assurance operations in support of Turkey (including airborne warning-and-control systems, as well as Patriot and SAMP/T air defense systems); Operation Sea Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis management</td>
<td>Conduct expeditionary air, land, and maritime deployments out of area, particularly large-scale ones that involve multiservice military deployments.</td>
<td>Operation Allied Force, Operation Deliberate Force, Operation Unified Protector, Operation Serval, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LARGE-SCALE COMBAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unilateral or multilateral combat</td>
<td>Integrate major efforts and campaigns that involve one or more countries.</td>
<td>Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ research and analysis.
Security cooperation involves military interactions with foreign security agencies to build or maintain defense relationships, develop their capabilities, and provide access. Large-scale crisis management missions include efforts to conduct expeditionary air, land, and maritime deployments. Many of these specific operations—such as Operation Allied Force, Operation Deliberate Force, and Operation Unified Protector—involve multiservice military deployments that require several thousand personnel. NATO’s Operation Unified Protector, for instance, had three components: the enforcement of an arms embargo in the Mediterranean, the enforcement of a no-fly zone to prevent aircraft from bombing civilian targets, and air and naval strikes against those military forces involved in attacks or threats to attack Libyan civilians and civilian-populated areas.

These types of activities can also involve deterrence (which includes actions to persuade an adversary not to initiate a war or other military activity because the expected costs and risks outweigh the anticipated benefits) and assurance (which include actions to support an ally or partner’s government and population and communicate a credible message of confidence in the dependability of its security commitment). Assurance measures might involve flying airborne warning and control systems (AWACS), deploying Patriot air defense systems, conducting enhanced air policing, and utilizing surface-to-air, medium-range platform terrain (SAMP/T) systems. NATO created the tailored Forward Presence to help reassure Bulgaria and Romania and establish a Black Sea presence.

The third category—large-scale combat—lies at the other end of the conflict spectrum from crisis response. Large-scale combat involves a series of tactical actions, such as battles, conducted by combat forces to achieve strategic or operational objectives. It can include a range of activities, from world wars among great powers to wars in specific countries or regions involving a combination of multidomain air, ground, maritime, and other capabilities. These types of missions generally require substantial power projection capabilities, including the ability to deploy and employ military forces rapidly, over long distances, and for sustained periods. Historical examples involving European countries include Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

POLITICAL WILL AND MILITARY MISSIONS

Based on this framework, what types of military missions are European states more—and less—likely to have the political will to conduct? To answer this question, this analysis involved reviewing current and historical European military operations (highlighted in the appendix) and case studies (highlighted in Chapter 3). The evidence suggests that most European governments are more likely to possess the political will to engage in military missions at the lower end of the conflict spectrum (e.g., peacekeeping and maritime patrol missions) and much less likely at the higher ends of the spectrum (e.g., large-scale combat). As highlighted below, however, there are important caveats, such as a major threat to collective or national defense.

As Figure 4.2 illustrates, one-quarter of European military missions were at the low end of the conflict continuum (Crisis Response and Limited Contingency Operations), nearly three-quarters were in the middle of the conflict continuum (Military Engagement, Security Cooperation, Deterrence, and Assurance Operations), and only 2 percent were at the high end (Large-Scale Combat).

Variation in political will to conduct high-end missions such as large-scale combat is tied to several factors: threat perception, domestic constraints, and strategic culture.

First, European governments and populations have widely divergent perceptions of threat, one of the main
exogenous factors. For example, some polling shows that there is widespread agreement among European countries when it comes to non-military threats, such as climate change and pandemics. On issues related to hard power, European populations tend to be most concerned about terrorism and instability stemming from illegal migration. Military missions to deal with these problems are generally at the low to medium end of the conflict continuum, such as counternarcotics and counterterrorism missions.

But views diverge dramatically when it comes to large-scale combat, especially for out-of-area operations. For example, a majority of Europeans are opposed today to engaging in conflict with China. Similarly, a majority believe they are not in any type of a Cold War with China. The populations of Sweden and France are most concerned about China, while those in Poland, France, and Sweden have traditionally been most concerned about Russia. A substantial percentage of Europeans (36 percent) consider China to be necessary partners. Only 12 percent of all respondents in Europe see China as an adversary. Up until recently, survey data showed that there is a lack of agreement among Europeans over whether an existential threat even exists. Some polling also suggests that a large majority of European populations would prefer to remain neutral in a conflict between the United States and China.

However, Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine has changed European perceptions of Russia, which will likely impact political will. As NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg remarked following Russia’s invasion, “Russia has chosen the path of aggression against a sovereign and independent country. This is a grave breach of international law, and a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security.”

Germany is a useful example. During the Cold War, the West German government and population supported NATO’s preparations for large-scale combat against the Soviet Union. The West German military deployed combat troops and equipment, including Leopard tanks and Marder armored personnel carriers, near the intra-German border in case of a Soviet and Warsaw Pact invasion. West Germany also pledged F-4 Phantoms, Alpha Jets, and other aircraft to help establish air superiority. After the Cold War, however, German views evolved with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In a 2021 poll, for instance, only 10 percent of Germans believed the country needed a U.S. security guarantee from external threats. But Germany’s political will evolved again after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, as German chancellor Olaf Scholz promised to boost defense spending above 2 percent of GDP and announced the purchase of more sophisticated platforms and systems such as the fifth-generation F-35A. Still, Germany’s sclerotic contracting procedures could create challenges in implementing some of these changes.

Second, domestic constraints can impact political will. Legal limitations on the deployment of forces, requirements for parliamentary approval to deploy forces, domestic politics and logrolling, and imposition of operational caveats on deployments will likely remain a challenge for some European countries.
For example, Italy announced in March 2022 that it would aim to reach the NATO goal of spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense spending in 2028, even though other countries—such as Germany, Belgium, Denmark, and Spain—urgently committed to raising defense spending. Italy’s ruling Five Star Movement threatened to veto any spending increase, arguing that the funds would be better utilized to alleviate poverty. In addition, domestic resource constraints and other priorities will likely impact the political will of some European countries to continue missions, such as the French decision to wind down Operation Barkhane in West Africa and the U.S. and European decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. The significant challenges with the Afghan withdrawal and collapse of the Ashraf Ghani government—after nearly two decades of U.S. and European support—may also undermine the political will of some European governments to conduct major out-of-area operations absent a major collective or national threat. Finally, a focus on deterring Russia in Europe may weaken the political will of some European governments to conduct out-of-area missions in the Middle East, Africa, Indo-Pacific, and other regions.

Another manifestation of domestic constraint is the collective action problem, which is more acute for missions at higher ends of the conflict continuum. Even if European governments could agree on the wisdom of conducting a dangerous military mission, such as large-scale combat, individual incentives often encourage free riding. Free riding occurs for at least two reasons. A government may hope or believe that others will perform the job or conduct the mission that it would like to see done. In addition, a government may fear that if it contributes toward the common good, others will free ride on its efforts. These two reasons likely provided European governments an incentive to abdicate responsibility for initially intervening in the Balkans between 1991 and 1994. Some surveys suggest that European populations want other countries—not their own—to become involved in high-end military missions, except in cases of national or collective defense. They would prefer that others risk the lives of their soldiers and spend money.

Third, strategic culture can impact political will. One example is casualty aversion among some European governments—such as Austria, Belgium, Greece, and
Hungary—especially for missions that have little to do with core national security interests. As one study that examined German operations in Afghanistan assessed, “casualty aversion [was] the top priority for German officers in Afghanistan, guiding decisions on helicopters, operations, and the like.” Another study concluded that “in Belgium, among other countries, a sense of obligation to participate in multinational operations sits uneasily next to a heightened sense of avoiding casualties because of an open reluctance of the population to endorse the offensive use of military force.” Some of these concerns led to domestic constraints on deployments, including operational caveats.

During the debate about intervening in Syria after the country’s descent into civil war, surveys showed that nearly 75 percent of European respondents rejected any military intervention. For many Europeans, the war in Syria had little bearing on their national security, creating little political will to risk the lives of their soldiers. As Figure 4.3 highlights, European states were much more likely to approve operations with little likelihood of casualties—such as security force assistance (44 percent of European operations), maritime patrol (13 percent), and counter illegal migration (9 percent)—under military engagement and related missions.

CONCLUSION

As Figure 4.4 highlights, European states are more likely to have the political will to engage in military missions at the lower end of the conflict spectrum (such as peacekeeping and maritime patrol missions) and less likely at the higher ends of the spectrum (such as large-scale combat), except in such cases as a major threat to collective or national defense. Figure 4.4 also shows that political will is lower for out-of-area operations—such as in the Middle East, Africa, and Indo-Pacific—as illustrated by Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and France’s Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane in Africa. The figure is not meant to be exact, but rather to convey a general sense of whether European states have the will to conduct a range of military missions. In addition, there is likely to be variation in the political will of individual countries to perform specific missions. Nevertheless, there is utility in analyzing broad trends in European political will.

A number of factors were considered in assessing European political will to perform missions in each region. For “high” (or green), the authors judged that a significant number of European states have the requisite political will to undertake and sustain a specific mission. Missions that European nations already frequently engage in—for example, conducting maritime patrols or countering illegal migration in nearby regions—are given a “high” designation, if there is no discernible reason why they should cease. Political will is also deemed high for low-end missions where core European interests are at stake and there is a minimal risk of casualties, such as evacuating European citizens from a conflict area or a disaster scenario.

For “medium” (or yellow), the authors judged that there was a moderate probability that European states have the political will to conduct and sustain a specific mission. This may mean they occasionally undertake such missions but that there is good reason to doubt they will continue, as with counterterrorism operations in the Sahel. A “medium” designation is also given where it is clear a certain mission would only be undertaken in specific circumstances. The most crucial example is large-scale combat in Europe. European NATO countries would likely fight to defend a fellow NATO ally, per their Article 5 obligations. However, European governments might might not engage in high-end combat against Russia and risk escalation to nuclear war to defend a non-NATO partner, as highlighted by the unwillingness of European countries to directly fight Russia in Ukraine.
For “low” or “red,” the authors judged that there was a low probability that European states have the political will to conduct and sustain a specific mission. A number of variables, which are discussed elsewhere in this report, factor into a low political will designation: threat perception, domestic constraints, strategic culture, and even geographic proximity to Europe. Finally, missions that only “global partners” are likely to do, such as counter-WMD missions in the Indo-Pacific or offensive cyber operations, are also given a “low” designation.

Despite these challenges of political will, however, there are several important caveats. First, a major threat to one or more European states in the future could increase the political will of some leaders to conduct military missions—including at the high end of the conflict continuum. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is perhaps the most recent example. When threatened by aggressors and the stakes are high, states are more likely to possess the political will to use force. The stakes might include “existential stakes” (when defeat could lead to the end of a state, including annexation) or “vital stakes” (when defeat would significantly undermine the security of a state). European states supported Operation Enduring Freedom—the overthrow of the Taliban regime—following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. In 2013, France conducted Operation Serval, with support from the United States and other NATO countries, to stop al-Qaeda advances in its former colony, Mali, and to counter a terrorist threat to France from West Africa. In both cases, one or more European governments assessed that the threats were significant and required a military response.

**Figure 4.4: Overview of European Political Will to Perform Missions**

![Figure 4.4: Overview of European Political Will to Perform Missions](image)

Source: CSIS analysis from multiple sources.
Indeed, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and concerns about Russia’s use of chemical, biological, and even nuclear weapons may increase the political will of European countries to conduct some types of military missions—particularly in support of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Numerous European countries—such as Germany—announced an increase in their defense budget, support for more robust deterrence, and the acquisition of advanced platforms and systems such as fifth-generation aircraft and modernized air defense. More than two-thirds of Germans in a March 2022 opinion poll worried that Russia’s invasion would spark a new war in Europe, causing 68 percent to support the transfer of additional Bundeswehr units to Eastern European NATO countries and 65 percent to support buying modern weapons for the Bundeswehr.157

Second, there is some evidence that populations may be willing to accept casualties—and states may have greater political will—when national leaders effectively explain the need and consequences of missions.158 The public takes its cue, in part, from how national leaders characterize and justify military missions. Leaders, in turn, need the support or acquiescence of their cabinets and parliaments.159 Consequently, leadership can play a crucial role in influencing how the public responds to casualties and how willing the population may be to support military force.160 With effective leadership, democratic populations may be more willing to tolerate casualties.161 In addition, there is some evidence that populations may not always require a direct threat to national or allied security or other vital interests to endorse the use of armed force.162 Instead, democratization, humanitarian assistance, and the cultivation of a favorable international environment may be helpful justifications, particularly for the “international activists” and “constrained partners” highlighted in Chapter 3. Consequently, Europeans may be motivated by considerations of both national interests and idealist international aspirations, including:

- Defense of the homeland against attack;
- Defense of allies;
- Protection of major interests, such as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or protecting access to global commons;
- Punishing aggression against third parties, especially when the threat is clear-cut and unprovoked as in Ukraine;
- Preventing genocide and ethnic cleansing; and
- Providing humanitarian assistance.163

Third, U.S. military involvement may increase European political will to participate in missions at the higher end of the conflict continuum. European populations continue to have concerns with the United States, including the health of U.S. democracy and the United States’ willingness to be a global leader.164 Nevertheless, significant percentages of European populations still believe the U.S. military is the most powerful in the world and rely on U.S. leadership to rally other allies.165 Without the United States, European states also lack capabilities for high-end crisis management and large-scale combat. The United States has been involved in virtually every large-scale combat or crisis management mission since the end of the Cold War.
CONCLUSIONS
Political will refers to the willingness and decision of political leaders to conduct a deliberate action—in this case a range of military missions, including to fight. Political will is an important component of a state’s decision to use force, though not necessarily in the outcome of war. While not the focus of this report, political will can also refer to other actions in the defense world, such as the political will to increase defense budgets. The findings reached earlier in this report lead to several conclusions which can be divided into four categories: strategic culture, domestic practical constraints, alliance dependence, and adversary influence. These conclusions provide guideposts for how the United States and its European partners should think about—and influence—political will.

STRATEGIC CULTURE

- A strong strategic culture is conducive to, but not sufficient, to have the political will to engage in military missions. Strategic culture derives from shared historic experiences and shocks, but it can be reinforced through shared narratives and regular processes, such as strategic reviews.

- Strategic culture and its associated processes are useful in providing the rationale for military actions, consolidating threat perceptions, aligning levels of ambition with resources, and helping secure public buy-in. National security councils that bring together interagency equities can be helpful in this regard. In coalition governments, coalition agreements or cross-party defense agreements and strategies can help limit ministerial drift or sudden, uncoordinated policy shifts.
In a multinational context, European countries can take steps to facilitate political will by building a shared strategic culture. These steps include conducting shared threat analysis, sharing intelligence, and developing collective response options. NATO processes such as regular issuance of a Strategic Concept and Political Guidance help build this in NATO, and improving European strategic culture was one of France’s goals in setting up the European Intervention Initiative.

Crafting a narrative that is linked to a country’s national interests can be helpful in securing support for overseas deployments and retaining that support despite countervailing tendencies such as casualties or an aversion to use force.

Strategic culture can be built or rebuilt organically—as in the case of Denmark and, to some extent, Poland. Developing strategic culture requires leaders who are willing to engage in deliberate consensus-building processes and challenge established views, address fears, and make the case for engagement.

There is no definitive link between defense spending levels and deployments, as highlighted by the contrasting examples of Greece and Denmark. But countries with strong strategic cultures are typically able to invest more significantly and consistently in defense. Heightened national or territorial defense concerns drive increases in national defense spending, as illustrated by Greece, Turkey, Poland, and France. These concerns have also led to increased NATO defense spending, including real-term increases in NATO defense spending for seven consecutive years, which began in 2014 following Russia’s annexation of Crimea.

A high level of practical constraints, such as excessive parliamentary oversight, can weaken political will. These constraints risk politicizing deployments and can lead to delays or restrictions on deployments. Such caveats and restrictive rules of engagement have a negative operational impact.

Transparency and regular communication with parliament and the public—including where the executive has a high degree of autonomy, such as France, Poland, and the United Kingdom—is essential to retaining trust and autonomy and averting calls for additional oversight.

Allies where the defense ministry and armed forces are marginalized in decisionmaking, such as Germany, generally exhibit lower levels of political will.

Creating a legal requirement to maintain a certain level of defense spending can be helpful in driving political will toward a certain level of ambition. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania all have national laws or political agreements requiring 2 percent of GDP to be spent on defense annually. A legal requirement can also help protect the defense budget from being raided to fund other priorities and provides budget certainty over a number of years, which is critical to defense planners.

Alliance dependence has been an effective means for surmounting political will issues. Many allies have justified their overseas deployments as needed to secure NATO—and specifically U.S.—support for their security needs. Insofar as NATO’s collective security guarantee is underpinned by the United States, reduced U.S. engagement in
NATO and Europe would likely reduce alliance dependence and, hence, allies’ willingness to contribute to international missions that are not seen as directly related to their national security. Making this link to national security will be key to securing many allies’ participation in the Indo-Pacific theater.

- While additional security actors such as the European Union have increased their role in security and defense, allies generally do not see these as viable alternatives to NATO. Even so, they have the potential to compete with and siphon limited resources from NATO efforts, as highlighted by EU Operation Sophia and NATO Operation Sea Guardian.

**ADVERSARY INFLUENCE**

- While allies have different threat perceptions, including of China, these variations have not significantly impacted their willingness to host NATO forces or participate in NATO missions. This willingness is likely due to an alliance dependence dynamic and the desire to retain NATO as an insurance policy.

- Longer term, Chinese investments in infrastructure in Europe could have a practical and direct impact on readiness and military mobility—and potentially political will to conduct military missions against China.\(^{167}\)

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

European behavior over the past several decades suggests that most European governments are, all else equal, more likely to possess the political will to engage in military missions at the lower end of the conflict spectrum (e.g., peacekeeping and maritime patrol missions) and much less likely at the higher ends of the spectrum (e.g., large-scale combat). The lack of political will to conduct military missions at higher ends of the conflict continuum is likely tied to several factors: widely divergent threat perceptions; strategic culture and domestic practical constraints, which have caused an aversion to combat casualties among some European populations and governments; and a collective action problem in multinational contexts.

Despite these factors, however, the Russian invasion of Ukraine could mark a significant watershed moment—at least regarding European political will to conduct actions against Russia. Chapter 4 concluded that a significant increase in a foreign threat could increase political will to engage in military missions, including high-end combat. Preliminary data suggests there may be a rise in the political will of some European countries to defend the continent—and even Ukraine—against a revanchist Russia.\(^{168}\) As NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg remarked in March 2022, “Moscow should be in no doubt. NATO will not tolerate any attack on Allied sovereignty or territorial integrity.” He continued, “Today we have tasked our military commanders to develop options across all domains—land, air, sea, cyber and space.”\(^{169}\) While there may be a temporary surge in political will in response to a rising threat from Russia, it is unclear whether this will evolve in the long term with wide variations in strategic culture and practical constraints among European countries.
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## APPENDIX

### Military Operations Involving European Countries, 1994–2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Operation</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Multilateral Institution / Country (E.g., European Union, NATO)</th>
<th>Main Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EUPOL COPPS</td>
<td>1-Jan-06</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Palestinian National Authority</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Palestinian Civil Police/criminal justice reform, and improve prosecution-police cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUFOR ALTHEA</td>
<td>2-Dec-04</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support EU Comprehensive Strategy for BiH, support BiH authorities to ensure a Safe and Secure Environment (SASE), and organize training exercises with armed forces of BiH.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUBAM – Moldova and Ukraine</td>
<td>7-Oct-05</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Contribute to peaceful settlement of Transnistrian conflict, assist implementation of Integrated Border Management, and assist fight against cross-border crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Ukraine</td>
<td>22-Jul-14</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Advise civilian SSR efforts, support reform implementation, and coordinate between Ukrainian and international actors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUMM Georgia</td>
<td>1-Oct-08</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Prevent resurgence of conflict along Abkhazia/South Ossetian border, protect rights of border communities, and inform EU policy with respect to Georgia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EULEX – Kosovo</td>
<td>4-Feb-08</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Monitor selected trials in Kosovo justice system, build capacity of Kosovo Correctional Service, and support Kosovo Police on crowd/riot control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUBAM RAFAH</td>
<td>25-Nov-05</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Palestinian National Authority</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Assist with border management activities at Rafah Crossing Point (on standby since 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUAM – Iraq</td>
<td>17-Oct-10</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Provide strategic-level advice to Office of the National Security Adviser and Ministry of Interior for SSR in Iraq, and support EU Member State SSR activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUNAVFOR MED (“Operation IRINI”)</td>
<td>31-Mar-20</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Central Mediterranean</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Implement UNSC arms embargo on Libya, and support conditions for permanent ceasefire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUCAP Sahel – Mali</td>
<td>15-Apr-14</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Provide SSR assistance to police, gendarmerie, and national guard, conduct trainings for civilian law enforcement, and coordinate other international partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUCAP Sahel – Niger</td>
<td>8-Aug-12</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Nigerien security sector interoperability, strengthen capacity to fight organized crime/terrorism, and support capacity to manage migration flows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUTM RCA</td>
<td>1-Jul-16</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Assist restructuring of Central African defense forces, and provide operational training and leadership education to officer and NCO corps.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX

**The Challenge of European Political Will**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Implementer</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUTM Somalia</strong></td>
<td>7-Apr-10</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Strengthen Somali federal defense institutions, educate Somali General Staff, and build capacity of Somali Defense Ministry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUCAP Somalia</strong></td>
<td>1-Jul-12</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Somali maritime authorities, and strengthen maritime criminal justice processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EU NAVFOR – Somalia (“Operation Atalanta”)</strong></td>
<td>1-Dec-08</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Protect WFP, AMISOM vessels from Somali-based piracy, deter general piracy, monitor fishing activities off Somali coast, and support maritime security capacity-building efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUBAM Libya</strong></td>
<td>1-May-13</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Libyan authorities to develop Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategy, and train border officials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUPM – Bosnia and Herzegovina</strong></td>
<td>1-Jan-03</td>
<td>30-Jun-12</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Train BiH police, build capacity to fight organized crime, and ensure police-prosecution cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUPOL Afghanistan</strong></td>
<td>1-Jun-07</td>
<td>31-Dec-16</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Train BiH police, build capacity to fight organized crime, and ensure police-prosecution cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUPOL PROXIMA/ FYROM</strong></td>
<td>15-Dec-03</td>
<td>14-Dec-05</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Republic of North Macedonia</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Assist in consolidation of law and order, fight against organized crime, and aid implementation of Ministry of Interior reforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUPAT</strong></td>
<td>15-Dec-05</td>
<td>15-Jun-06</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Republic of North Macedonia</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Assist in consolidation of law and order, fight against organized crime, and aid implementation of Ministry of Interior reforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EU SSR Guinea-Bissau</strong></td>
<td>1-Jun-08</td>
<td>30-Sep-10</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Strengthen aviation security at Juba International Airport, and advise Ministry of Transportation in establishment of aviation security organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUFOR Tchad/ RCA</strong></td>
<td>28-Jan-08</td>
<td>15-Mar-09</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support civilian protection, facilitate humanitarian assistance, and protect UN personnel/installations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUJUST LEX- Iraq</strong></td>
<td>1-Jul-05</td>
<td>31-Dec-13</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Professionalize Iraqi criminal justice system, deepen collaboration in criminal justice, and train Iraqi legal authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUVSEC South Sudan</strong></td>
<td>18-Jun-12</td>
<td>17-Jan-14</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Strengthen aviation security at Juba International Airport, and advise Ministry of Transportation in establishment of aviation security organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ARTEMIS/DRC</strong></td>
<td>12-Jun-03</td>
<td>1-Sep-03</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Stabilize conflict in Ituri Province/Bunia, and provide civilian/UN personnel protection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUPOL RD Congo</strong></td>
<td>1-Jul-07</td>
<td>30-Sep-14</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support and advise Congolese police leaders in drafting restructuring/reform plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUSEC RD Congo</strong></td>
<td>1-Jun-05</td>
<td>1-Jun-16</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Congolese authorities on SSR efforts to comply with democratic/humanitarian standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUPOL Kinshasa (DRC)</strong></td>
<td>1-Apr-05</td>
<td>1-Jun-07</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support MONUC operations to secure 2006 Congolese elections, with particular focus on Kinshasa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Name</td>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>End Date</td>
<td>Region(s)</td>
<td>Force(s)</td>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUFOR RCA</td>
<td>10-Feb-14</td>
<td>15-Mar-15</td>
<td>Africa Central</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Secure Bangui against armed rebel actors, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief and the return of IDPs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aceh Monitoring Mission</td>
<td>15-Sep-05</td>
<td>15-Dec-06</td>
<td>Asia Indonesia</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Monitor implementation of Aceh Peace Agreement, and facilitate insurgent disarmament.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolute Support</td>
<td>1-Jan-15</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Asia Afghanistan</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Support rule of law/good governance, force generation, recruitment, and training for Afghan security forces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo Force (KFOR)</td>
<td>1-Jun-99</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe Kosovo</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Professionalize multiethnic Kosovo Security Force, and support EU dialogue between Belgrade/Pristina.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea Guardian</td>
<td>1-Oct-16</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Support maritime situational awareness, counterterrorism, and capacity-building.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO Mission Iraq</td>
<td>1-Jul-18</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East Iraq</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Provide counterterrorism training to Iraqi security forces to prevent re-emergence of the Islamic State.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Protector</td>
<td>1-Mar-09</td>
<td>1-Aug-09</td>
<td>Africa Gulf of Aden</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Conduct counterpiracy, and improve commercial maritime safety in Horn of Africa.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean Shield</td>
<td>17-Aug-09</td>
<td>15-Dec-16</td>
<td>Africa Gulf of Aden</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Conduct counterpiracy and capacity building for counterpiracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Endeavour</td>
<td>1-Oct-01</td>
<td>1-Oct-16</td>
<td>African Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Counter terrorist activities in Mediterranean, secure trading routes, and engage in civilian rescue operations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)</td>
<td>1-Aug-03</td>
<td>28-Dec-14</td>
<td>Asia Afghanistan</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Support ANSF operations, build capacity of ANSF, and contribute to reconstruction efforts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I)</td>
<td>30-Jul-04</td>
<td>31-Dec-11</td>
<td>Middle East Iraq</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Train, mentor, and assist Iraqi Security Forces, and develop long-term NATO-Iraq cooperation framework.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan Earthquake Relief</td>
<td>11-Oct-05</td>
<td>1-Feb-06</td>
<td>Asia Pakistan</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Establish air bridges to deliver aid to Pakistani earthquake victims, run field hospital to provide medical assistance, and provide engineering support for infrastructure reconstruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Distinguished Games&quot; Olympic Support</td>
<td>1-Jun-04</td>
<td>1-Sep-04</td>
<td>Europe Greece</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Provide CBRN assets to secure Olympics and AWACS support for security and surveillance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display Deterrence</td>
<td>1-Feb-03</td>
<td>1-May-03</td>
<td>Middle East Turkey</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Conduct AWACS flights to defend Turkish airspace, and defend airspace with PATRIOT missile deployments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Harmony</td>
<td>16-Dec-02</td>
<td>31-Mar-03</td>
<td>Europe Republic of North Macedonia</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Provide advisory elements to ensure country-wide stability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber Fox</td>
<td>27-Sep-01</td>
<td>15-Dec-02</td>
<td>Europe Republic of North Macedonia</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Protect international monitors overseeing peace plan implementation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential Harvest</td>
<td>27-Aug-01</td>
<td>26-Sep-01</td>
<td>Europe Republic of North Macedonia</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Disarm ethnic Albanian groups operating in North Macedonia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Force</td>
<td>24-Mar-99</td>
<td>10-Jun-99</td>
<td>Europe Serbia</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Conduct coercive airstrikes against Serbian forces to prompt withdrawal from Kosovo.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Guard/ Joint Forge</td>
<td>20-Dec-96</td>
<td>2-Dec-04</td>
<td>Europe Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Deter resumption of hostilities, promote climate that facilitates peace, and support select civilian organizations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Endeavour</td>
<td>16-Dec-95</td>
<td>20-Dec-96</td>
<td>Europe Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Implement and enforce conditions of the Dayton Peace Accord.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Deliberate Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-Aug-95</td>
<td>20-Sep-95</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Conduct airstrikes against Bosnian Serb army positions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Deny Flight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-Apr-93</td>
<td>20-Dec-95</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Conduct aerial monitoring and compliance for no-fly-zone, provide close air support to UN troops, and conduct air strikes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Barkhane

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Aug-14</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Prevent re-establishment of jihadist safe havens, train partner forces, and support humanitarian projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Serval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-Jan-13</td>
<td>31-Jul-14</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Halt jihadist advance in Mali, restore Malian territorial integrity, and secure French expats/hostages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chammal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-Sep-14</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Contribute to Operation Inherent Resolve, and support local forces in counter-Islamic State activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Épervier

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Feb-86</td>
<td>1-Aug-14</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Protect French interests and expats in Chad, and provide logistical support to the Chadian armed forces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Licorne

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-Sep-02</td>
<td>21-Jan-15</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Protect French interests and expats in Cote d’Ivoire, and support United Nations Peacekeeping Mission and UNSC resolutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tamour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Aug-12</td>
<td>27-Nov-13</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Perform surgical operations, provide medical consults, and run vaccination campaigns in support of Jordanian humanitarian response efforts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Amaryllis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-Apr-94</td>
<td>14-Apr-94</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Evacuate 1,250 civilians from Rwanda during 1994 Rwandan Genocide.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Triton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Nov-14</td>
<td>31-Jan-18</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Italy with border control, surveillance, and search and rescue in the Central Mediterranean.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mare Nostrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-Oct-13</td>
<td>31-Oct-14</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Counter illegal migratory flows, safeguard human life, and engage in law enforcement operations against human traffickers and migrant smugglers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Themis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Feb-18</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Italy with border control, maritime interdiction, and search and rescue operations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2017 French presidential elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7-May-17</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Secure and deter attacks against May 2017 French presidential election.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2019 EU parliamentary elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>28-May-19</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Secure and deter attacks against May 2019 European Union parliamentary elections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Deadeye

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30-Aug-95</td>
<td>31-Aug-95</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Neutralize Bosnian Serb air defenses and SAM sites to attain air superiority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mare Sicuro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-Mar-15</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Ensure maritime security vis-à-vis Libyan-based terrorist threats.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Corymbe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Atlantic Resolve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar-14</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Eastern Europe/Baltics</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Demonstrate continued commitment to NATO collective security, and deter Russian aggression.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Black Sea Deterrence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014 (est)</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Black Sea</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Demonstrate commitment to Black Sea security, and deter Russian aggression.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Enduring Freedom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Iraqi Freedom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-Mar-03</td>
<td>31-Dec-09</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>U.S.-led Coalition</td>
<td>Topple Ba’ath government in Iraq.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NATO air policing over Albania, Slovenia, and Montenegro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Jan-04</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Assure collective air defense of NATO territory, and scramble fighters in response to threats.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NATO air policing over BENELUX</td>
<td>1-Jan-17</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Assure collective air defense of NATO territory, and scramble fighters in response to threats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO air policing over Baltic States</td>
<td>1-Jan-04</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Assure collective air defense of NATO territory, particularly with regard to Russia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO air policing over Iceland</td>
<td>1-May-08</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Assure collective air defense of NATO territory, and scramble fighters in response to threats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailored Assurance Measures for Turkey</td>
<td>18-Dec-15</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Assure security in light of security challenges in Turkish border, provide AWACS flights, engage in ISR activities and information sharing, and conduct maritime activities in Mediterranean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libelle</td>
<td>14-Mar-97 to 14-Mar-97</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evacuate German citizens from Tirana, Albania, following outbreak of riots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palliser</td>
<td>8-May-00 to 30-May-00</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evacuate British civilians from Sierra Leone during civil war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poseidon</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Greece with border surveillance, migrant registration, and criminal interdiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minerva, Indalo</td>
<td>1-Jul-12</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Mediterranean Sea</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>Support Spain with border checks, migrant registration, and criminal interdiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kipion</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Persian Gulf</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Detect and destroy maritime UXO in the Persian Gulf,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patwin</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Support humanitarian response to Typhoon Haiyan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Interim Force in Lebanon</td>
<td>19-Mar-78 to 30-May-78</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>Monitor cessation of hostilities, and accompany Lebanese armed forces on southern deployments, including along Blue Line, to monitor Israeli withdrawal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus</td>
<td>4-Mar-64</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>Prevent recurrence of conflict, supervise ceasefire line, and maintain buffer zone between Cyprus National Guard and Turkish Cypriot forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Disengagement Observer Force</td>
<td>31-May-74</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>Maintain ceasefire in the Golan Heights, and supervise implementation of the disengagement agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 WMD Initiative</td>
<td>23-Apr-99</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>Counter WMD proliferation, and support NATO cooperation/education efforts to that end.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSIS research and analysis.
**Chapter 1: Introduction**


5. Ibid., 104.


7. Ibid.


**Chapter 2: Factors Affecting European Political Will**


THE CHALLENGE OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL WILL

Chapter 3: Case Studies


31 Ibid.


33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.


41 Ibid.

42 Bastien Irondelle and Olivier Schmitt, “France,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 126.


44 Irondelle and Schmitt, “France,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 125.


50 Ibid.


52 Julian Junk and Christopher Daase, “Germany,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 146.

53 Ibid., 139.

54 Kerry Longhurst, Germany and the Use of Force (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

55 Junk and Daase, “Germany,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 147.

56 Ibid., 148.


58 Junk and Daase, “Germany,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 143.

59 Ibid., 142–43.


61 Junk and Daase, “Germany,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 142.

62 Ibid., 143–44.

63 “Syria conflict: German MPs vote for anti-IS military


51 Marrone and Di Camilio, “Italy,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 200–201.


57 Marcin Tertikowski, “Poland” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 269.

58 Ibid., 272.

59 Ibid., 272–73.


64 Ibid.

65 On “international activism,” see Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Udenrigsministerens åbningsdåd ved Udenrigskommisjonens [The Foreign Minister’s Opening Speech at the Foreign Affairs Commission], Betænkning nr. 1209 (Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 17, 1989); On “liberal aims such as democracy . . .” see Rynning, “Denmark,” in Strategic Cultures in Europe, 86.

66 Danish Ministry of Defence, Lov om forsvarsrets formål, opgaver og organisation m.v. [Act on the Purpose, Tasks and


101 Ibid.

102 Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas, eds., Strategic Cultures in Europe.

103 Ibid.

Chapter 4: Military Missions


111 Biddle, Military Power, S.


115 This framework was based, in part, on U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Operations. Many of these specific operations included multiple types of missions.


117 On peacekeeping, see U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Operations, xxi.

118 See, for example, James Dobbins et al., Europe’s Role in Nation-Building: From the Balkans to the Congo (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG722.html; and James Dobbins et al., The UN’s Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005), https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG304.html.

119 U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Operations, 86.

120 “Pakistan Earthquake Relief Operation,” NATO, October 27,
THE CHALLENGE OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL WILL

ENDNOTES


112 Ibid., VI-3.

113 Small-scale crisis management missions include smaller deployments, such as peacekeeping and foreign humanitarian assistance. These missions are individually broken out, as highlighted in Figure 3.1.


115 See, for example, Chivvis, Toppling Qaddafi.


117 There are other types of operations that European and other states can perform, such as “hedging” (conducting actions to avoid an explicit confrontation with a potentially adversarial state, such as strengthening economic cooperation, while preparing for military confrontation by increasing military capabilities or posture) and “shaping” (conducting actions to help counter adversary actions, such as conducting influence operations).

118 These operations might also include “adaption” measures, such as the NFU, Standing Naval Maritime Force, Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense, CAOC, and logistics center.


120 Biddle, Military Power, 6.


123 Ibid.

124 See, for example, Donald A. Carter, Forging the Shield: The U.S. Army in Europe, 1951–1982 (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2015).


129 See, for example, Glenn Snyder, Alliance Politics (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 50–51.


132 See, for example, the discussion of casualties in Heiko Biehl, Bastian Giegerich, and Alexandra Jonas, eds., Strategic Cultures in Europe (Potsdam, Germany: Springer VS, 2013), 27, 34, 39, 155, 157, 162, 170, 264, 390.


134 Biehl, Giegerich, and Jonas, eds., Strategic Cultures in Europe, 398.


154 McNerney et al., National Will to Fight, 42.


159 McNerney et al., National Will to Fight, 43.


165 Wike et al., What People Around the World Like—and Dislike about American Society and Politics.

Chapter 5: Conclusions


