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Beyond the Garrison State: Remodeling European Security for Peace Through Creative Diplomacy, Human Solidarity, and Grand Alignment

I. Introduction and Context

The contemporary discourse surrounding the consolidation of NATO's "European pillar" is heavily dominated by cold, hard-power metrics: gross domestic product percentages devoted to defense budgets, artillery shell production capacities, and the physical readiness of combat brigades along the Eastern Flank. When safety is reduced to an equation of steel, hardware, and fiscal allocations, international relations risks losing sight of the political imagination and human solidarity required to construct a durable peace. If the United States pillar of the transatlantic alliance is in doubt—whether through shifting domestic political impulses in Washington or a strategic pivot toward the Indo-Pacific—a purely military response remains an incomplete strategy for continental stability. Security cannot be sustained by the apparatus of a garrison state alone. Rather, genuine resilience is forged through adaptable political architecture, creative diplomacy, and an explicit recognition of interconnected human fates.

Strengthening the European pillar requires acknowledging that Europe, in its moral and strategic sense, extends beyond the institutional perimeter of the European Union and NATO. History demonstrates through tragic, unheeded warnings that the security of the European continent is indivisible. A direct, tragic thread links to the geopolitical failures of the past two decades. Had revisionist aggression been met with decisive diplomatic, political, and strategic deterrence in Georgia in 2008, the illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of the Donbas in 2014 might never have materialized. Had the international community stood firm in 2014, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 would not have unfolded.

This domino effect presents an existential question to European statecraft: Where will the next structural fracture occur if regional vulnerabilities remain unaddressed? The peace of Vilnius, Tallinn, Berlin, or Paris is structurally bound to the stability of the Western Balkans, the Aegean, and the South Caucasus. To build a European pillar capable of enduring strategic uncertainty, Europe must undergo a remodeling of its geopolitical and diplomatic frameworks. Rather than waiting for slow, exclusive bureaucratic integration, the continent must deploy flexible external frameworks to construct a diplomatic shield that protects its shared European home.

II. The Tragic Domino Effect: Historical Inaction and Indivisible Security

The foundational premise of a human-centric European security architecture is the absolute indivisibility of peace. Security behaves as a living, continuous web across a geography; when a single strand is severed at the periphery, the structural integrity of the center is compromised. The historical arc extending from the 2008 Russo-Georgian War to the full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022 provides stark evidence of the systemic costs associated with diplomatic passivity and strategic fragmentation.¹

In August 2008, the military invasion of Georgia tested the collective resolve of the Euro-Atlantic community. The international response was characterized by rapid diplomatic mediation aimed at halting immediate hostilities, followed quickly by a return to business-as-usual relations with the aggressor state. By treating the violation of Georgian sovereignty as an isolated, peripheral dispute rather than a fundamental challenge to the post-Cold War European security order, Western policy embedded a dangerous moral hazard into continental relations. Revisionist actors deduced that gray-zone coercion, territorial fragmentation, and the creation of "frozen conflicts" carried acceptable long-term political and economic costs.

This pattern repeated itself in 2014 with the illegal annexation of Crimea and the instigation of conflict in eastern Ukraine. The international community's fragmented stance and reliance on incremental sanctions failed to establish a credible deterrent. The systemic failure to recognize that a threat to the territorial integrity of a state in Eastern Europe constitutes an existential threat to the broader European security environment directly enabled the scale of the 2022 invasion. The humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine, marked by millions of displaced citizens,

¹ Gvalia, G., Siroky, D.S., Lebanidze, B. and Iashvili, Z., 2013. Thinking outside the bloc: Explaining the foreign policies of small states. *Security Studies*, 22(1), pp.98–131.

destroyed urban infrastructure, and loss of life, represents the ultimate human cost of treating regional security as divisible.

A fragmented outer perimeter invites revisionist powers to employ hybrid coercion, energy blackmail, cyber warfare, and disinformation campaigns designed to destabilize democratic institutions across the continent.² Protecting the European homeland requires cultivating a shared consciousness among citizens, diplomats, and military strategists alike: an assault on the sovereignty of a neighbor—regardless of its formal membership status in the EU or NATO—represents a direct challenge to the security of the European family. A resilient European pillar must derive its strength from proactive deterrence, extending political solidarity and security guarantees across the full length of Europe's geographic perimeter.

III. Institutional Innovation via the European Political Community and the Lessons of Ankara

If European security is indivisible, the mechanisms used to operationalize that security must match the speed and fluid dynamics of modern geopolitical threats. Traditional European Union enlargement has historically functioned as a powerful instrument for stabilizing democratic transitions. However, as currently structured, EU accession is a multi-decade process governed by strict regulatory compliance, technical legal harmonization, and susceptibility to internal veto bottlenecks.³ When single member states can paralyze collective foreign policy decisions or delay aid to front-line nations to extract domestic political concessions, the "EU trap" risks reducing the continent to a passive observer during fast-moving crises.

To strengthen the European pillar, Europe must embrace flexible institutional innovations that bypass administrative gridlock. The European Political Community (EPC), launched in 2022 in response to the war in Ukraine, offers a strategic blueprint for this agile approach. Operating outside the institutional machinery of the EU treaties, the EPC brings together over forty European nations—including EU member states, non-EU allies such as the United Kingdom,

² R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2016, p. 112.

³ Grant, C., 2022. *Macron is serious about the 'European Political Community'*. Policy Insight. London: Centre for European Reform.

candidate countries like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, and vital regional partners across the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus.⁴

The strategic value of the EPC lies in its informal, peer-to-peer structure. Free from the constraints of formal legislative bargaining and unanimity voting requirements, head-of-state summits allow for immediate alignment on critical security issues, energy corridor protection, cyber defense, and physical infrastructure resilience. By providing an unweighted forum where smaller states along the geopolitical periphery sit as equal partners with major Western European powers, the EPC bridges the gap between formal alliances and practical security integration.

The practical necessity of this flexible architecture was clearly demonstrated during the NATO Summit in Ankara earlier this month. The proceedings at Ankara partially validated the core thesis of a self-sustaining European pillar: European allies demonstrated unprecedented willingness to assume greater defense responsibility, committing over \$50 billion to joint procurement and defense technology transfers, including localized air defense production initiatives in Ukraine. However, the outcomes of the Ankara Summit also revealed the limitations of a purely defense-industrial approach. While fiscal spending targets and equipment production advanced significantly, the broader vision of a human-centric diplomatic outer-defense ring remained unfulfilled. The summit focused heavily on traditional rearmament while treating regional diplomatic mediation—such as stabilizing the South Caucasus or settling Eastern Mediterranean maritime frictions—as secondary concerns. Thus, Ankara proved that while Europe can mobilize industrial capacity, it has yet to fully realize the creative, proactive diplomacy needed to prevent conflicts before they require military solutions.

Furthermore, institutional flexibility allows Europe to integrate key non-EU actors whose military, intelligence, and diplomatic capabilities are indispensable to continental defense. The United Kingdom, possessing a blue-water navy, nuclear deterrent capabilities, and an expansive diplomatic footprint, remains an anchor of European security regardless of its departure from the EU. Similarly, integrating Ukraine's battle-tested armed forces into broader European defense planning provides invaluable tactical experience and operational depth. By leveraging lightweight, inclusive platforms like the EPC, Europe can transform its security architecture from a closed bureaucratic club into a dynamic defense network capable of rapid, decisive collective action.

⁴ B. Emmott, *The Fate of the West: The Battle to Save the World's Most Successful Political Idea*, London, Profile Books, 2017, p. 88.

IV. Healing Internal Fractures: Proactive Diplomatic Mediation

A European security pillar cannot withstand external pressure if its internal foundations remain fractured by historic rivalries, territorial disputes, and political friction. External revisionist powers consistently exploit internal European divisions, using "divide and rule" tactics to stall consensus, weaponize energy dependencies, and paralyze decision-making within NATO and the EU.⁵ To build genuine strategic autonomy, Europe must move beyond reactive crisis management and commit to proactive, dedicated mediation of its internal regional disputes.

A primary area requiring diplomatic intervention is the persistent standoff in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean between Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. Maritime boundary disagreements, continental shelf claims, and disputed airspace have periodically brought two NATO allies to the brink of military confrontation. These tensions undermine NATO's southern flank and create vulnerabilities that external powers exploit to disrupt Mediterranean energy security. European statecraft must prioritize structured, long-term arbitration mechanisms that balance international maritime law with the economic and security interests of all littoral states, transforming the Eastern Mediterranean from a zone of friction into an integrated energy and security hub.

Concurrently, Europe must play a direct, constructive role in safeguarding the durable peace settlement currently taking shape between Armenia and Azerbaijan. With Yerevan and Baku actively engaged in a peace process—supported by breakthroughs in Washington—the region stands at a critical juncture. Rather than letting outside powers exploit long-standing disputes over regional border demarcations, Europe can help protect and solidify this momentum by offering credible security assurances, technical assistance with border demarcation, and economic incentives for cross-border transit integration.⁶ Securing stability in the South Caucasus preserves sovereign democratic pathways in the region while safeguarding the Middle Corridor—a vital trade and transit route connecting Europe directly to Central Asia while bypassing adversarial territory.

Finally, European institutions and member states must actively resolve political frictions along the Eastern Flank, such as the tensions between Ukraine and Hungary regarding minority

⁵ P. Barga  s-Pedreny, *Deferring Peace in International Statebuilding: Difference, Resilience and Critique*, London, Routledge, 2020, p. 145.

⁶ N. Tocci, *A Green and Global Europe*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2023, p. 201.

rights, bilateral trade, and transit policies. These disputes have repeatedly stalled vital financial aid packages, military assistance pipelines, and diplomatic coordination at the European level. Direct, high-level mediation aimed at guaranteeing minority protections while upholding the imperative of collective support for Ukraine is essential. Resolving these internal rifts removes the primary levers used by external adversaries to weaken European solidarity from within.

V. Synchronizing the Global "Influence Map"

Strengthening the European pillar requires projecting stability outward by building a coordinated network of international partnerships. Individual European nations possess distinct historical ties, diplomatic channels, and cultural connections in different regions of the globe. A humanistic security strategy recognizes these unique relationships not as isolated historical artifacts, but as complementary strategic assets. By weaving these varied footprints into a single, synchronized "influence map," Europe can generate significant strategic depth, secure critical supply chains, and advance peace beyond its immediate borders.

A prominent example of this strategic alignment is the diplomatic and cultural vector connecting Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the nations of Central Asia. Turkey's and Azerbaijan's deep linguistic, historical, and economic ties across Central Asia position them to act as stabilizing diplomatic forces in a region undergoing geopolitical realignment. Collaborative engagement along this axis secures vital energy and logistical transit routes, fostering economic independence and political resilience among Central Asian states without relying on adversarial powers. Rather than viewing Turkish regional diplomacy with skepticism, European strategy should align with these efforts to reinforce stability across Eurasia.

Similarly, the United Kingdom's global maritime presence, intelligence networks, and close defense relationships within the Commonwealth and Five Eyes alliance afford Europe significant diplomatic reach in the Indo-Pacific, the High North, and the South Atlantic. Concurrently, nations such as the Baltic states and Nordic countries bring specialized expertise in counter-hybrid warfare, societal resilience, and total-defense models that serve as a blueprint for whole-of-society security across the continent.

Synchronizing these distinct diplomatic advantages creates a multi-layered security infrastructure. When the United Kingdom secures Northern Sea lines of communication, Turkey and Azerbaijan stabilize Eurasian transit corridors, and Central-Eastern European nations anchor deterrence on the Eastern Flank, Europe establishes an interconnected defense network. This

global influence map enhances Europe's capacity to protect open sea lanes, secure critical raw materials, and uphold international law in an increasingly multipolar world.

VI. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The crisis of confidence surrounding NATO's American pillar presents an urgent imperative for the European continent. However, responding to this challenge purely through the lens of military expenditures and rearmament risks treating the symptoms of geopolitical instability rather than its root causes. While military deterrence along the Eastern Flank remains vital, a European pillar capable of preserving peace must be built upon political imagination, human solidarity, and a recognition that European security is indivisible.

To achieve this "creative remodeling" of continental defense, European leaders, diplomats, and institutions should prioritize three primary policy directives:

1. **Institutionalize Flexible Security Frameworks:** Expand the operational capacity of the European Political Community (EPC) by creating dedicated working groups focused on rapid intelligence sharing, joint energy infrastructure protection, and cross-border cyber defense. The EPC should serve as the primary bridge between the EU, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and partners in the Western Balkans and South Caucasus, ensuring immediate security alignment unencumbered by institutional veto bottlenecks.
2. **Establish Active European Mediation Mechanisms:** Create a permanent European Diplomatic Arbitration Taskforce tasked with proactively resolving internal and regional frictions. This body should prioritize mediating maritime and airspace disputes in the Aegean, supporting border demarcation and transit guarantees between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and settling bilateral disputes along the Eastern Flank that jeopardize European unity.
3. **Operationalize a Joint Global Influence Map:** Formally coordinate member state diplomatic, economic, and strategic assets across key geographic vectors. By integrating British maritime networks, Turkish-Azerbaijani Eurasian transit initiatives, and Baltic counter-hybrid defense strategies into a cohesive continental policy, Europe can secure vital supply lines and project stability across its broader neighborhood.

By moving beyond the narrow confines of the garrison state and embracing an inclusive security architecture, Europe can build a resilient, human-centric pillar. In doing so, the continent will honor the legacy of leaders like Dr. Karl A. Lamers, ensuring that peace, freedom, and democratic sovereignty remain secure for generations to come.

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