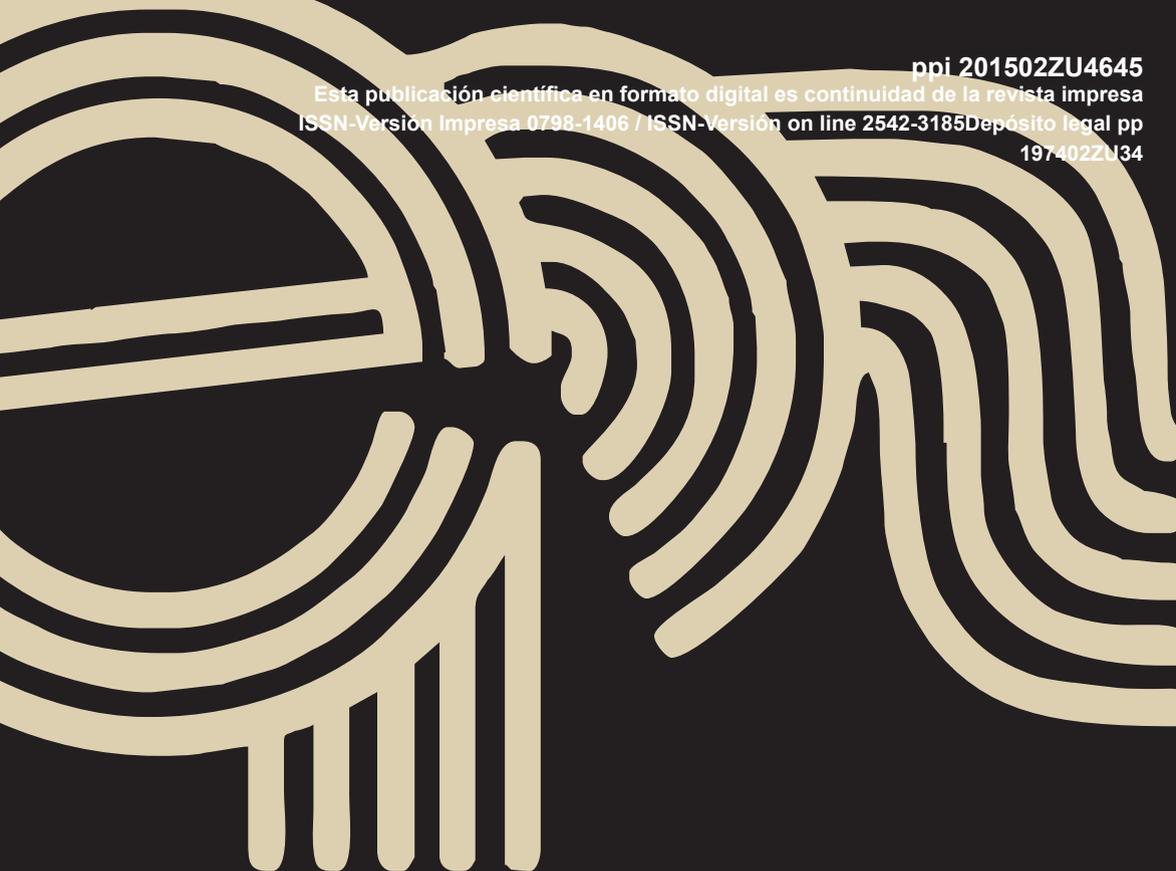


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The role of the USA in the Western Europe's security policy making

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Abstract

The article aimed to determine the role and place of the United States as a key factor influencing the definition of Western European security policy, in the context of existing threats. The research methodology was based on the determination of the general geopolitical situation in the countries of the European Union EU and the United States, a comprehensive analysis of existing risks, a graphical analysis of the total defense costs, an analysis of the main approaches to the security policy of the European Union, with a view to the influence of the United States. Everything indicates that the U.S. is basing its position on the construction of an autonomous system to ensure the defense capability of the European Union. It is concluded on the need to strengthen the EU security implementation system based on the expansion of military potential will enhance the capabilities of NATO, which will allow the U.S., radically respond to other global threats.

Keywords: security policy-making; Western Europe; military threats; transatlantic relations; geopolitics in the 21st century.

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El papel de los Estados Unidos en la elaboración de políticas de seguridad en Europa Occidental

Resumen

El artículo tuvo como objetivo determinar el papel y el lugar de los Estados Unidos como un factor clave que influye en la definición de la política de seguridad de Europa Occidental, en el contexto de las amenazas existentes. La metodología de investigación se basó en la determinación de la situación geopolítica general de los países de la Unión europea UE y Estados Unidos, un análisis exhaustivo de los riesgos existentes, un análisis gráfico de los costes totales de defensa, un análisis de los principales enfoques de la política de seguridad de la Unión Europea, con miras a la influencia de los Estados Unidos. Todo indica que EE.UU., basa su posición en la construcción de un sistema autónomo para asegurar la capacidad de defensa de la Unión Europea. Se concluye en la necesidad de reforzar el sistema de implementación de la seguridad de la UE basado en la expansión del potencial militar mejorará las capacidades de la OTAN, lo que permitirá a los EE. UU., responder de manera radical a otras amenazas globales.

Palabras clave: formulación de políticas de seguridad; Europa occidental; amenazas militares; relaciones transatlánticas; geopolítica en el siglo XXI.

Introduction

Until recently, the prevailing opinion was that the end of the Cold War would stop devastating conflicts, and the main issues would be related to climate change, the fight against infections or the control over terrorist activities. The regional security in Western Europe was ensured by the alliance with the USA for a long time, which was gradually expanding.

Accelerating globalization, the emergence of new rival contenders, and uncertainty about US global leadership have made concerns about the permanence of the US international order-maintaining role more acute. A superficial understanding of the nature of modern threats has led to a decline in the defence capabilities of European countries and underfunding of military expenditures.

Russian military aggression against Ukraine caused radical changes in the security policy of the North Atlantic Alliance. Leaders of states and military agencies drew attention to the inadequacy of collective defence and the need to build resilience to threats in the context of a military conflict on the European continent.

The need to develop an integrated concept of a sustainable society in NATO, as well as in the European Union, suggests that this should become a key concept in the development of European and Atlantic security policy. The recent events have urged the need to prepare for both non-military (cyber threats, pandemics) and military threats associated with Russian military aggression against Ukraine, and the use of military tools in international relations (Wywiał, 2022).

The academic literature has a certain gap on issues of changing the nature of alliances or the orientation of individual state strategies, including the EU. The existing studies address issues of alliances in conflict and cooperation (interaction between exclusive mechanisms of collective defence and inclusive institutions of collective security) (Prokopenko *et al.*, 2023; Rynning and Schmidt, 2018). Many other studies of alliance politics focus on US activities. Separate studies examine the security activities of US allies in determining the nature of the changing regional order and US influence on security dimensions.

The aim of the article is to determine the role and place of the United States in Western Europe's security policy making based on real modern threats. This implies the need to identify the main threats that individual countries represent; determine the list of allied countries; comprehensive identification of potential threats to EU countries; analysis of the state of defence financing of individual countries and associations; identification of the problems of the US and EU defence policy; selection of the main approaches to resolving contradictions that have arisen in the relations between the US and the EU in the field of security policy.

1. Literature review

Signing of the Joint Declaration in July 2016 has marked a new phase in the EU-NATO relations, as the EU launched several defence initiatives. Closer relations with NATO were a necessary step for the EU in order to strengthen the security environment. The EU published its Global Strategy in June 2016, which prescribed the association to implement autonomous defence and deterrence capabilities of its member states (European Council, 2016).

In June 2020, EU defence ministers agreed to develop a Strategic Compass to set operational objectives and identify capabilities. But these discussions caused the differences between the USA and the EU. NATO has positively perceived the EU defence initiatives (PESCO) in the case of their addition to the NATO potential (NATO, 2020). NATO's agenda has been extended to 2030 (Ringsmose and Rynning, 2021). Unfortunately, the UK's withdrawal from the EU has made the problem of coherent dialogue more acute (Ewers-Peters, 2021).

In the face of the growing power of some countries, the US are expected to work together with the EU to balance the rising powers and maintain its global and regional power. On the other hand, the behaviour of Russia and China could potentially also challenge EU unity and therefore weaken their relationship (Riddervold and Rosén, 2020).

In 2021, with D. Biden's accession to power, the issue of European ambitions as a NATO competitor begins to subside. In turn, NATO members reached a compromise on PESCO, maintaining a dialogue with the EU. The combination of the NATO mission and the EU security policy is a complex issue of forming a certain model. It should be expected that international organizations with significant institutional potential and autonomy will also be able to establish separate duplicative entities (Schuette, 2022).

Most American presidents followed the effort of US geopolitical accents to define NATO as a basis for internal changes in the EU to serve as a guarantee of continental stability (Poast and Chinchilla, 2020). NATO's capability to create an integrated Europe and spread democratic foundations in post-communist countries could unite Eastern and Western European states into a single security system. Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union is the basis of the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which obliges to provide assistance to victims of armed aggression on its member state territory.

The creation of new defence entities is problematic as all major EU member states are also NATO members. This strengthens the possibility of providing NATO's protection everywhere it is assigned a key role. But the European Union lacks the NATO level of operational activity. So, the USA and NATO supplemented by EU security entities remain the key actors in European defence (Virkkunen, 2022; Colbourn, 2020).

Maintaining order on the European continent, which is based on regional integration through the EU and NATO, remains an important driving force behind Germany's joining the USA. Germany's foreign policy is based on the need for European strategic autonomy. Only Poland seeks to create an alliance with the US to ensure its survival among neighbouring countries. The Baltic states are wary of Western Europe's attempts to be autonomous from US-led arrangements.

Allies and partners are trying to use the US to achieve their own national goals. Besides, the network of alliances is likely to become fragmented as disagreements between allies and partners grow over the role of the US and the changing international order. The choices and actions of allies can affect regional dynamics and order. More countries want to form their autonomies, revise their relations with the US, and shape regional and global orders (Goh and Sahashi, 2020).

The events of 2022 evidence that the founding principles of the OSCE, including refraining from the threat or use of force, the inviolability of borders, the territorial integrity of states and the peaceful resolution of disputes, are more important than ever. There should also be an institutional connection with NATO — an important guarantor of the continent's security with the USA (Jones, 2022).

2. Methods

The research methodology is based on several stages. The first stage involved determining the general geopolitical situation of the EU countries and the United States based on the analysis of the general policy regarding the acceptance of other countries as threats or allies of the EU countries and the United States in accordance with the Munich Security Report (Bunde *et al.*, 2023). The next stage was a comprehensive analysis of existing risks based on the use of international indices (GPI — Global Peace Index, Global Risk Report, Fragile States Index) (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022; The Fund for Peace, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023). This was followed by a graphical analysis of the total defence spending in 2014-2021 of the main geopolitical players — EU, USA, Russia, China (European Defence Agency, 2022b). The last stage provided for the analysis of the main approaches of the European Union to security policy taking into account the US influence on the basis of current research and international agreements in the field of security. The research methods used primarily included the analysis of source materials (documents of international institutions), studies and publications of government bodies on security issues.

3. Results

Considering the general perception of individual countries as a threat or an ally, it should be noted that the year 2022 caused major changes in the security system of the European Union and its partners (the USA). Russian military aggression against Ukraine identified Russia as one of the biggest threats, while Ukraine significantly strengthened its perception as an ally by other countries (Table 1). In the table, the “-” sign reflects an increased threat compared to November 2021, the “+” sign reflects a strengthening of the position as an ally relative to November 2021. The BICS countries include Brazil, India, China and South Africa. At the same time, China is also positioned by the EU countries and their partners as a significant threat.

Table 1. Perception of other countries as threats or allies (change between November 2021 and October–November 2022), group average (Bunde *et al.*, 2023).

| Global perception | | Perception among G7 countries | | Perception among BICS countries | |
|-------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------|-----|
| Ukraine | +22 | Ukraine | +29 | Ukraine | +10 |
| Poland | +11 | Poland | +12 | Estonia | +10 |
| Estonia | +8 | United Kingdom | +8 | USA | +9 |
| USA | +7 | Estonia | +7 | Poland | +9 |
| United Kingdom | +7 | USA | +6 | Hungary | +7 |
| Finland | +6 | Finland | +6 | United Kingdom | +6 |
| Germany | +5 | Germany | +5 | Finland | +6 |
| Italy | +5 | Italy | +5 | France | +5 |
| Hungary | +4 | Hungary | +3 | Germany | +5 |
| China | -4 | China | -12 | Italy | +5 |
| Russia | -20 | Russia | -30 | Russia | -3 |

In France, the perception of Russia as a threat has risen sharply from 25th place to first. However, French respondents are less concerned than their European counterparts about the risks posed by nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. In Germany, Russia is similarly seen as a threat and received a risk index of 78 points, which is higher than in any other European country. Other risks (use of nuclear, biological, chemical weapons) rose by 20 points or more.

The risk posed by Russia to Italy has increased by 22 points, but with an index of 67, it still ranks only sixth among Italian respondents. This is the second lowest score among all the G7 countries surveyed, after the US (where it has 66 points). Great Britain ranks only second after Ukraine in perceived inevitability of the Russian threat. Russia has jumped to the top of US respondents' perceived risk, having risen 13 positions in just one year (Bunde *et al.*, 2023).

NATO published its new Strategic Concept at the Madrid Summit of 2022, where it calls Russia a direct threat to the security of the Alliance members, as well as to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. NATO members also announced the strengthening of military measures on the eastern flank, as well as an increase in the high-alert force from 40,000 to 300,000 servicemen. The 2023 Munich Security Index is evidence of significant changes in security policy marked by a sense of insecurity (Bunde *et al.*, 2023). Such a change in threats involves the implementation of immediate measures to adjust the security policy, which should be

combined both in the system of cooperation between NATO countries, and in the adequate response by the European Union directly.

For a more detailed analysis of the security situation and response, the security situation in the countries of Western Europe according to the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022), the Fragile States Index (The Fund for Peace, 2022) and the global risk report (World Economic Forum, 2023) will be considered comprehensively (Table 2).

Table 1. Comprehensive indicators of the state of security of EU countries.

| | Fragile States Index | Global Peace Index | Global Risk Report, ranking of importance/substance |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Austria | 25.4 | 1.3 | 4 Geoeconomic confrontation 5 Geopolitical competitions for resources |
| Belgium | 31.9 | 1.526 | 5 Geoeconomic confrontation |
| Bulgaria | 51.6 | 1.541 | 4 Interstate conflict 5 Disintegration of the state |
| Czech Republic | 39.9 | 1.318 | 4 Geopolitical competitions for resources 5 Interstate conflict |
| Denmark | 18.1 | 1.296 | 4 Geoeconomic confrontation |
| Finland | 15.1 | 1.439 | 1 Geoeconomic confrontation 4 Interstate conflict |
| Estonia | 37.7 | 1.662 | 2 Geoeconomic confrontation 3 Interstate conflict |
| France | 30.9 | 1.895 | 3 Social cohesion erosion |
| Greece | 55.8 | 1.838 | 5 Interstate conflict 5 Geoeconomic confrontation |
| Spain | 44.4 | 1.603 | 5 Geopolitical competitions for resources |
| The Netherlands | 22.1 | 1.522 | 3 Geoeconomic confrontation 3 Geopolitical competitions for resources |
| Ireland | 20.8 | 1.288 | 3 Geoeconomic confrontation |
| Lithuania | 38.6 | 1.724 | 2 Interstate conflict 4 Geoeconomic confrontation |
| Latvia | 42.8 | 1.673 | 2 Interstate conflict |
| Romania | 50.8 | 1.64 | 2 Geoeconomic confrontation 3 Interstate conflict |
| Slovakia | 37.1 | 1.499 | 4 Interstate conflict |

| | | | |
|----------|------|-------|--|
| Germany | 23.6 | 1.462 | 3 Interstate conflict 4 Geopolitical competitions for resources |
| Poland | 42.2 | 1.552 | 3 Geoeconomic confrontation 5 Interstate conflict |
| Slovenia | 27.7 | 1.316 | 2 Geoeconomic confrontation 5 Geopolitical competitions for resources |
| Sweden | 20.9 | 1.564 | 5 Geoeconomic confrontation |
| Hungary | 50.8 | 1.411 | 3 Geoeconomic confrontation |
| Italy | 43.4 | 1.643 | 2 Interstate conflict |

(Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022; The Fund for Peace, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023)

As the results show, despite the relatively satisfactory indicators of the Global Peace Index and the Fragile States Index, almost all EU countries have risks related to interstate conflict, geoeconomic confrontation, and geopolitical competition for resources. Moreover, all the specified risks occupy positions from 1 to 5 in terms of the degree of threat.

EU defence spending increased to €214 billion in 2021 (up 6% from 2020) and is estimated to increase by a further €70 billion by 2025 (European Defence Agency, 2022a). Compared to the 26 EU member states, other international players, namely the US, Russia and China, consistently allocate a larger share of their economic resources to the defence sector. The share of GDP allocated by EU member states has fluctuated between 1.3% and 1.6% over the past two decades.

During the same period, US defence spending ranged between 3.4% and 5.2% of GDP, Russia spent up to 4.8% of GDP, China — from 1.6% to 2.3% of GDP. In absolute terms, the US spent €686 billion on defence in 2021, China — €241 billion, the EU 26 Member States — €214 billion, and Russia — €56 billion (European Defence Agency, 2022b). European policy has led to certain problems in the development of the armed forces, and this is evidenced primarily by the level of defence spending in the EU. Figure 1 presents data on the share of GDP allocated to defence by individual countries and interstate associations.

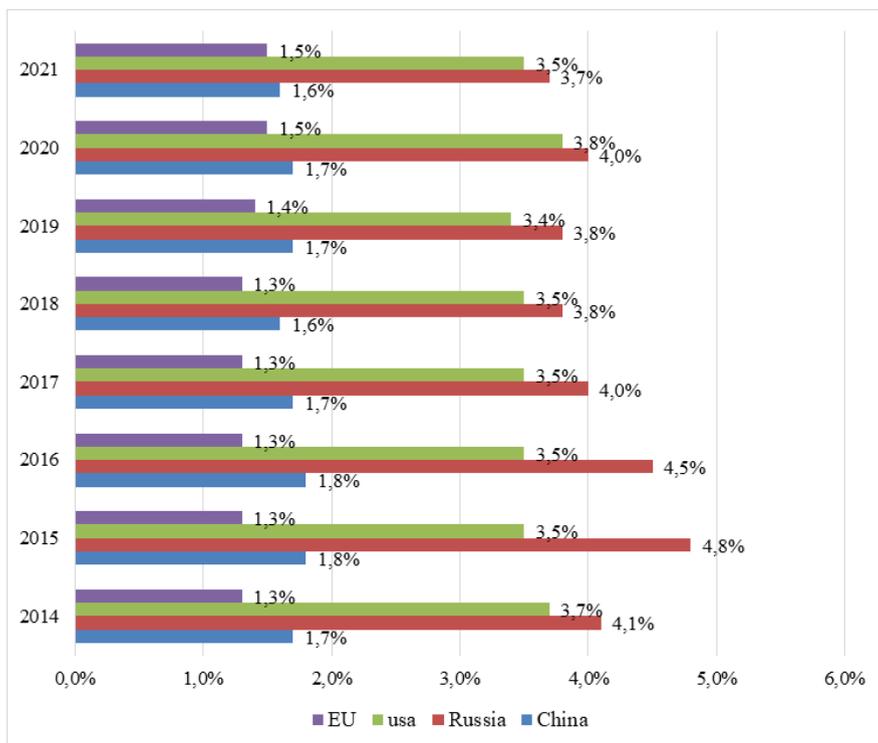


Figure 1: Total defence spending as % of GDP, 2014-2021 (European Defence Agency, 2022b).

The level of European defence spending and the size of its collective forces should make it a global power with one of the strongest armies in the world. But Europe does not act as a single entity in defence. This was the defeat of the American strategy towards Europe after the Cold War. Europe's dependence on the US for its security means that the US has a de facto veto power to block the European Union's defence ambitions. This political approach was a strategic mistake that weakened NATO in military terms, and contributed to the relative decline of Europe's global influence. As a result, one of America's closest allies is not as powerful as it could be.

The US response to a certain military incapacity of the EU involved encouraging the majority of European NATO member states to increase defence spending. For several decades, the US has tried to force European countries to expand NATO's technical and financial capabilities.

Accordingly, making a coherent security and defence policy would be a balanced approach to the integration of defence capabilities in the EU. It should be noted that these actions are implemented quite slowly. NATO's key role is to unite the armed forces of the Allies in a military alliance for the purpose of joint action.

Unfortunately, qualitative changes in the security system cannot be achieved due to a simple increase in costs, which are distributed among the participating states. Moreover, the transformational processes of Europe require certain adaptations from NATO. US policy reflects the need for greater activation of the EU in the field of defence, although the defence system of the EU and NATO should strengthen each other. The tasks of the US and NATO should be to focus on the integration of the defence efforts of the European Union into NATO and the integration of the EU into the Atlantic model.

But the enormous activity of the USA in European defence matters is also undeniable. The USA opposes the fragmentation of European foreign and defence policy at the EU level. The American support for European proposals initiated the European project.

A united and strong Europe is needed in the era of renewed US geopolitical competition. Today, Europe remains partially dependent on the US military for the purposes of ensuring security in Europe. Continued US support and involvement in EU defence can lead to real progress.

Russia's armed attack on Ukraine has raised more concerns about the state of European security. Back in 2014, the NATO summit decided on defence spending at the level of 2% of GDP (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). Given the prerogative of European countries to ensure their own security within NATO, problems arise regarding significant duplication of functions, fragmentation and inefficiency of spending by EU member states. The essential dependence of European countries on the USA for any active defence activity is manifested.

Russia's military aggression in Ukraine has radically changed the EU's approach to intensifying defence initiatives and actions related to military support for Ukraine. Recent years have demonstrated the EU's ability to create security institutions, which have strengthened the overall capacity and contributed to the expansion of autonomy. One of the significant results of the EU in the field of security was the creation of PESCO in 2017 for defence cooperation between member states, and the European Defence Fund (EDF).

Control over PESCO is exercised by the European Commission, as well as by an intergovernmental body (EU Council), which includes EU member states. Commitments on investment income and the implementation of joint defence initiatives have been agreed by 25 member states (PESCO,

2023). A security assistance programme — the European Peace Facility (EPF) — has also been created, which should ensure that the EU acquires and supplies weapons to partner countries. This programme provides for the allocation of €5 billion during 2021-2027.

Further development of the EU's military potential may lead to the duplication of certain NATO actions. Although the active actions in the field of security could improve the EU coordination with NATO. Strengthening the defence capabilities of the EU will allow NATO to focus on existing global threats (for example, China, Russia). It may seem to the American partners that the manifestation of the EU as an active participant will complicate transatlantic relations and cause problematic relations in NATO. In fact, the strengthening of the EU will be a positive moment for the US in light of the expanding geopolitical struggle against the ambitions of autocratic states.

In case of intensifying competition with China, the US should redistribute resources not in favour of European interests. This could weaken the alliance, given the refocusing of US actions, and European NATO partners will turn to finding options for guaranteeing security. The Asian interests of the EU are not fundamentally established, therefore, barring of NATO members belonging to Western Europe from US policy is possible. In the case of increased US demands for assistance from European partners in the confrontation with China, it is possible to assume that the alliance will end.

US policy towards NATO is currently creating significant instability and unsustainability in a region that is poised for an unprecedented level of stability, in part due to previous US efforts. In this regard, the J. Biden's administration should consider the possibility of developing directions with the aim of significantly reducing the US presence in the security sphere through NATO.

Against the background of growing calls to strengthen the alliance's presence on the eastern flank because of deteriorating relations with Russia, the US government should encourage European NATO members to bear the primary responsibility for defence commitments, shifting the burden of defence in Europe to high-powered states in the region to reduce US defence commitments.

It should be realized that the implementation of US policy aimed at ensuring European security must be of a fundamental nature in the current difficult conditions, because threats to European allied countries directly or indirectly affect the US security. The joint statement of the leaders of NATO countries at the end of 2019 regarding the danger of Russian aggression for the entire Euro-Atlantic bloc confirms that. As long as the debate on the need for a strategic vision of European defence autonomy continues, an understanding of the current state, when European and American positions

on actions in the field of security are similar, is emerging more and more clearly. This causes the need for the US to eliminate the existing weak points of the joint security policy with due regard to complex geopolitical challenges.

4. Discussion

The study of the general state of risks and dangers associated with military conflicts in the countries of Western Europe has certain limitations and reservations. As an example, the perception of other countries as threats or allies relies on the answers of respondents engaged in different types of activities, which are mostly not related to either political or military analysis. That is, it has a certain percentage of subjective result. Besides, the available data contain only a limited number of countries (21), which primarily does not show the full picture regarding the EU countries and NATO member states.

The problems of European security have a structural nature, which requires a comprehensive consideration when shaping US policy in the field of European security. There are critical structural problems that hinder the development of European defence capabilities and weaken NATO. Improving the situation of the transatlantic alliance requires concerted action to solve structural problems.

The US must shape new models in the defence system of Western Europe, which will involve stimulating the EU's defence efforts by directing it to adopt innovative approaches and promoting closer cooperation between NATO and the EU. The goal of the US strategy should be to create a strong European support within NATO, organized and led by the EU and included in the global Euro-Atlantic structure.

The study confirmed the assertions of researchers (Ringsmose and Rynning, 2021; Colbourn, 2020) on the need for continued US defence efforts to develop the EU's common defence potential. This could strengthen the current state of European defence and the EU. The main strategic reason for supporting the EU's defence efforts is that the US needs the EU as a strong global actor in the security system, adjusting its own approaches to security policy.

Given the need for a significant military capability in geopolitical conflicts, US policy should encourage the EU to strengthen its own role as a defence player while anchoring it in NATO and the transatlantic alliance. The US position regarding actions to activate and encourage the EU to build a modern powerful model of its own defence seems to be important. As certain actions, the US can use its own influence on the countries of Eastern

Europe, with which it closely cooperates and can influence the support of EU initiatives.

As the EU strengthens, it becomes expedient for the US to reorient its diplomatic influence on ensuring strategic alignment between the US and the EU. The leading strategic goal of US foreign policy should be to ensure close cooperation between the US and the EU. This will ensure that the EU's defence achievements lead to both a stronger EU, and a stronger transatlantic alliance. The study proves that the constant coordination of security issues between the USA and the EU gradually weakens the mentioned activity, taking into account a certain policy of autonomy towards the USA on the part of the EU member states. A similar conclusion was drawn in the work of Riddervold and Rosén (2020).

At the same time, attention should also be paid to the opinions of other researchers who show a different side of the US security policy. A review of possible models of US actions in choosing strategic areas of security demonstrates an orientation to events related to China's policy (actions around Taiwan or the South China Sea).

This could direct US efforts to the Eastern region, which would lower the level of US interaction with Europe and reduce the role of European actions in relations. The development of relations with the EU, apart from China-related issues, would not find support in the US. Faced with this position, EU member states will need to independently resolve political differences regarding strategic autonomy (Martin and Sinkkonen, 2022).

The US position provides for further actions to strengthen the EU's institutional capacity and transform it into a more significant global participant in security activities. For the EU to become a stronger geopolitical player, it must develop its powerful military potential, which will not pose any threat or challenge to NATO.

The EU working to strengthen European defence could strengthen NATO and transatlantic relations. In fact, taking into account the new challenges, the EU, becoming a powerful defence force, could gradually secure a central place in NATO and the transatlantic alliance.

There is a need to expand the political responsibility and actions of the USA in Western Europe. The United States have undertaken certain obligations, both domestic and international, and there is a certain disappointment of the European members of NATO with the political actions of the United States.

This becomes one of the factors regarding changes in the EU's defence initiatives to strengthen its own capabilities. At the same time, this strengthening of the EU will enable reducing the active patronage of the USA. The problems of US defence issues should also shift to other regions,

where there is a need for appropriate influence and control, which will rationally distribute resources and allow more globalization of NATO's influence in the world.

Conclusions

The research on the implementation of strategic and current security policy objectives has become extremely relevant in view of the unprecedented change in the situation in the field of defence, in which the NATO and the countries of the European Union found themselves because of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. The complex roles distributed between NATO allies and EU member states have caused certain inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the performance of the collective security and defence functions of the EU countries.

The results of the study confirmed the thesis that the concept of sustainability occupies a very important place in NATO's security policy. This is primarily their response to the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation (military aggression against Ukraine, NATO threats, attempts to destabilize the situation in other regions of the world). NATO realized the need to build effective mechanisms of collective defence and resistance to military and non-military threats.

So, the research covered the problem of determining the role and place of the USA in the Western Europe's security policy making based on real current threats. Analysis of changes regarding potential allies and countries that represent threats, determination of potential risks in EU countries demonstrated existing geopolitical problems, which primarily come from Russia and China. Against this background, the problems of underfunding of the EU defence system, substantial duplication of functions, fragmentation and inefficiency of EU member states' expenditures were revealed.

In turn, the US position regarding the organization of the EU's security sphere is based on constant stimulation of the EU countries to create a more autonomous system in ensuring their own defence capabilities. Strengthening the EU as a geopolitical player by expanding its military potential can improve NATO's capabilities, and enable the US to significantly focus on existing global geopolitical threats.

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