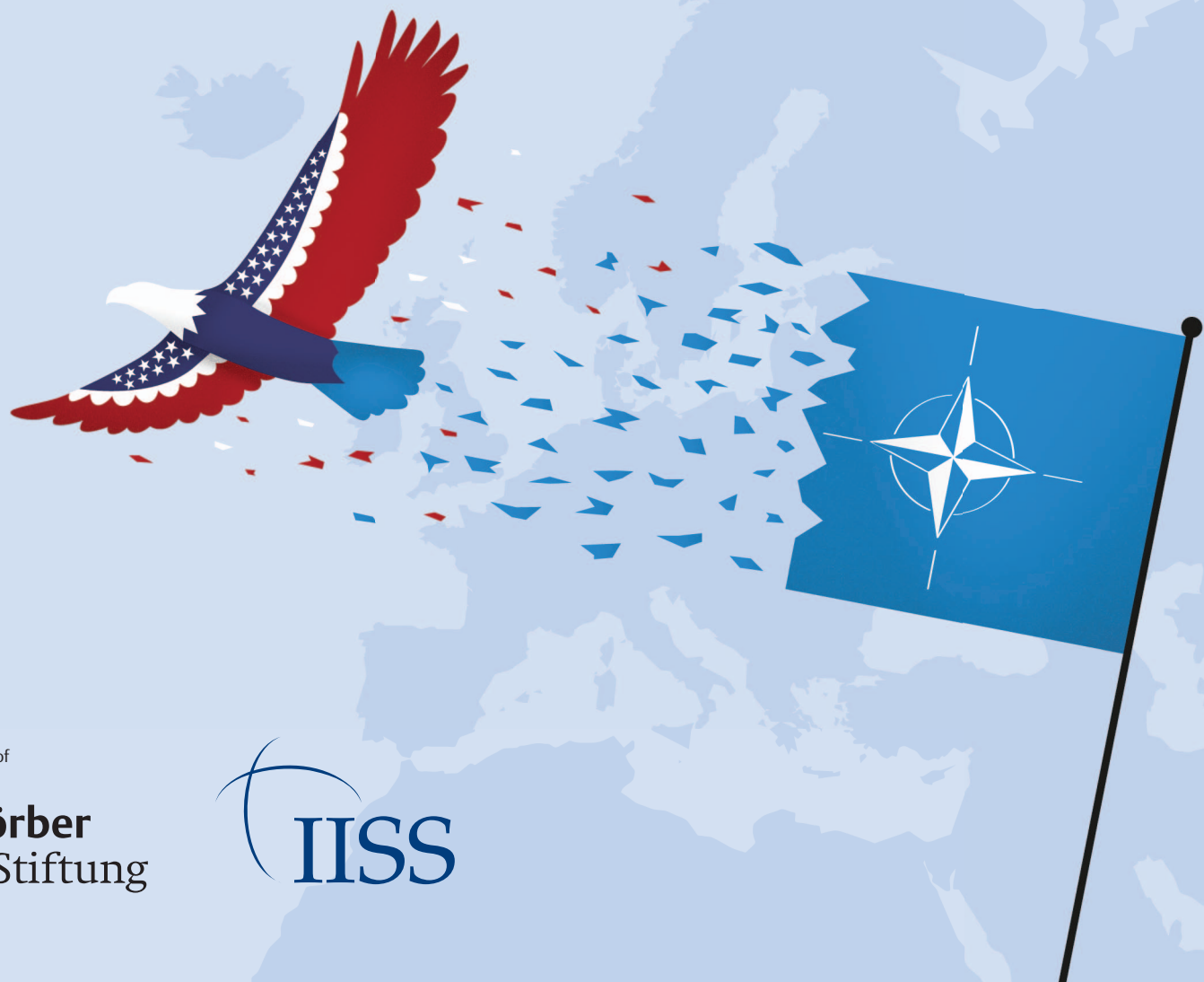


International Dialogue
Körber Policy Game

European Security in Crisis

What to expect if the US withdraws from NATO



A cooperation of

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Introduction



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Recent developments in transatlantic relations have reignited the debate about the need for Europeans to assume greater responsibility for their own security. Yet, efforts by European leaders to substantiate the general commitment to “take their fate into their own hands” are so far lacking sufficient progress.

Against this backdrop, the *Körber Policy Game* brought together a high-level group of senior experts and government officials from France, Germany, Poland, the UK and the US to address a fictional scenario that involves a US withdrawal from NATO, followed by multiple crises in Europe.

How will Europeans organise their security and defence if the US withdraws from NATO? To what extent will future European security be based on mutual solidarity, ad-hoc coalitions or a bilateralisation of relations with the US? Which interests would the respective European governments regard as vital and non-negotiable? What role would the US play in European security after the withdrawal?

The *Körber Policy Game* is based on the idea of projecting current foreign and security policy trends into a future scenario – seeking to develop a deeper understanding of the interests and priorities of different actors as well as possible policy options. The starting point is a short to medium-term scenario. Participants are part of country teams and assume the role of advisers to their respective governments.

The discussions took place in a confidential setting in Berlin in July 2019. This report summarizes the insights and positions generated by the *Körber Policy Game* and was compiled in cooperation with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London. We would like to thank Douglas Barrie and James Hackett for their valuable input and advice in drafting the scenario.

Executive Summary

- ▶ **Transatlantic relations:** The *Körber Policy Game* demonstrated that a transactional relationship with the US could become the “new normal” in US-European relations, with the US slowly drifting out of the European strategic sphere. Whereas Europeans hoped for a continued strategic US interest in Europe and a value-based partnership, the US team focused primarily on a “fair deal” addressing both defence and trade issues.
- ▶ **Divided Europe:** Without US security guarantees, Europeans faced a serious risk of splitting into different camps. Especially those countries that felt most vulnerable and did not trust Europe’s ability to organise collective defence were tempted to conclude bilateral arrangements with the US, leading to a “bilateralisation” of security and defence. For Europeans without nuclear capabilities, the scenario presented an existential security threat.
- ▶ **Wait and see:** During the *Körber Policy Game*, a significant deterioration of the security situation in Southern and Eastern Europe had to take place before Europeans were willing to take proactive steps in security and defence. At first, most teams focused on persuading the US to return to NATO, signalling a willingness for concessions that were unthinkable before.
- ▶ **Article 5 after US withdrawal:** Most teams anticipated that remaining NATO member states would struggle to agree on the invocation of Article 5 in a grey-zone scenario, even when a NATO member state was threatened. This raises serious questions about the credibility of Article 5 and the mutual defence commitment following a US withdrawal from NATO.

- **Nuclear deterrence:** European nuclear deterrence based on French and British capabilities was considered a possibility after a US withdrawal, yet this would entail significant costs. The burden-sharing debate would return to Europe, especially to Germany. Failing this, some teams anticipated the proliferation of nuclear weapons among Europeans.
- **Choice of institutional framework:** Most European teams were adamant that the NATO command structure should be maintained after a US withdrawal. The French team preferred an EU-centred collective defence structure in the long term, but this position was met with scepticism especially from the British and Polish side.
- **UK matters:** A post-Brexit UK would consider itself a leading actor in European security, willing and capable of shaping Europe's future security archi-

ture. Given its significant defence capabilities, the UK team saw its country in a powerful negotiating position and was sceptical of French-German leadership on defence issues.

- **Russian offers rejected:** Throughout the policy game, all teams consistently rejected Russian offers for conflict resolution in exchange for concessions on European security. This demonstrates that Russia was not considered a credible security provider in Europe.
- **European military capabilities:** Shortfalls in European military capabilities, especially in air and missile defence, were acknowledged as serious risks in a short-term crisis scenario. Given that filling these gaps would require long-term investment, Europe would likely remain vulnerable for years to come in such a scenario.

Selected European Equipment Shortfalls

Platform type	Equipment examples	Shortfall (limited conventional war scenario against a state-level opponent)	Cost estimate (acquisition only) US\$bn 2019
Long-range air defence (force protection and protection of critical military infrastructure)	Patriot; SAMP/T	102–120 batteries	88–104
Main battle tanks	Leopard 2A6/2A7; M1 Abrams	2,500–3,750	25–38
Destroyer with anti-ship missiles; hangar; surface-to-air missiles (air defence role)	Type-45; Horizon	16	31–33
Fighter aircraft	Typhoon; Rafale	264	25–31
Infantry fighting vehicles	CV90; Puma; VBCI	2,500–3,750	13–19
Short range air defence	CAMM; Land Ceptor	162–216 batteries	10–14
Destroyer with anti-ship missiles; hangar; surface-to-air missiles (Anti-submarine warfare and general purpose roles)	FREMM; Type-26	7	9–13
Air-to-air missile (radio frequency)	Meteor	2,112	10
Anti-submarine warfare aircraft	P-8	27	9

Source: IISS

Policy Recommendations

1. **Engage the public** in a sustained debate about security and defence in Europe. If the electorate were better informed about threats and how these are likely to affect them, this would facilitate a deeper understanding of the value of cooperation in security and defence. This strategic communication will not necessarily translate into support for specific policy choices advanced by governments, but it will serve as a bulwark against misinformation as well as populist arguments and enhance societal resilience.

2. **Think about the unthinkable.** Two assets that are of critical importance to the ability of Europeans to defend themselves are the NATO command structure and the extended nuclear deterrence provided by the US. If these were to be withdrawn or dismantled, Europeans would immediately have to provide alternatives. Their ability to mount significant military operations or deter state-level opponents would otherwise not be plausible.

3. **Invest in European military capabilities** and the mechanisms to deploy them. This is necessary to hedge against US disengagement while demonstrating European resolve to provide a greater share of NATO's collective capability. Current burden-sharing across the Atlantic is not equitable, but the sole focus on NATO's input target of "2% of GDP on defence" obscures the fact that, in terms of output, Europe's current contribution to transatlantic security and defence leaves much to be desired. By doing more, Europeans would make it less likely that the US decides to leave while also becoming more self-sufficient in case the US does disengage.

4. **Strengthen efforts to reassure** European member states which feel exposed in the East. European solidarity should be expressed in terms of measurable commitments to those countries' security. Given that individual European states are not powerful enough to provide for their own security, the "**bilateralisation**" of security and defence is otherwise a likely consequence. Already, diverging threat perceptions are a source of weakness, both for NATO and the EU. Maintaining unity in the context of a continuously changing security environment will be difficult but of utmost importance.

5. Accept that building European military capabilities and creating a convincing deterrence and defence posture will take more than a decade and will require sustained financial investment. **There are no shortcuts to credibility** and existing vulnerabilities cannot be eliminated immediately. From a military perspective, priority areas for investment are integrated air and missile defence, combat enablers, cyber and space capabilities, anti-submarine warfare, and long-range precision fires.

6. Should Europe face a situation where the US withdraws from NATO, adjusted and strengthened European security structures should provide mechanisms for the US to contribute to European security on a "**plug and play**" basis. In the short term, this will help to keep the US engaged, to maintain Europeans' focus on military interoperability with the US and to ensure a maximum level of transatlantic political cohesion. In the long term, it may lower the hurdles for re-engagement and would serve as an important reminder that even a withdrawal can be reversed.

The Scenario

2021: The US withdraws from NATO

FEBRUARY 2021

A few months after his re-election as President of the United States, Donald Trump declares that NATO has become obsolete and the United States withdraws from the alliance, formally coming into effect as per Treaty provisions one year after notice.

The US Department of Defence and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) confirm that all US forces – military personnel and equipment – including nuclear and missile defence assets will be withdrawn from Europe as soon as possible. This includes the US lead nation battalion within NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland. Henceforth, security guarantees will only be provided in the form of bilateral security partnerships.

Russian President Putin proposes taking advantage of this “window of opportunity” to establish “equal and indivisible security on the continent” and to draft a new legally binding European security treaty based on Medvedev's proposals from 2008.

MAY 2021

A conflict erupts in a Western Balkan NATO member state. An armed group supported by pro-Russian opposition parties occupies the parliament and demands the country's withdrawal from NATO as well as a rerun of recent parliamentary elections. Demonstrations supporting the demand erupt across the country. The Prime Minister, who is being held under house arrest, calls on the EU and NATO to intervene.

Several dozen foreign military servicemen without insignia, identified by locals as Russian military-intelligence officers, have entered the country and are travelling to the capital to support the agitators. Sea ports, strategically located with access to the Mediterranean Sea, are blocked by Russian warships.

The US Secretary of Defence reaffirms that the US will not assume any military role and will instead focus on its ongoing withdrawal from Europe. President Putin warns against Western meddling and offers all European states bilateral security and reinsurance treaties with Russia.

NOVEMBER 2021

All US forces, military units and equipment, including nuclear and missile defence assets, have been withdrawn, leaving only facilities that serve broader US military purposes beyond Europe, such as Ramstein Air Base. All US staff in NATO have left their posts.

The European NATO member states announce a summit in Bruges to discuss the future architecture of European security and defence. Declaring his “disappointment” at the muted response to his proposals, President Putin demands that Europeans “return to compliance with the provisions of the NATO-Russia Founding Act” and withdraw all remaining rotating NATO troops stationed in the Baltic States. Shortly afterwards, Moscow conducts test launches of Iskander short-range missiles stationed in Kaliningrad with a range of 500 km.

In a common statement, the leaders of the Baltic states urge their European partners to substantially increase troop presence, provide missile defence, and extend their nuclear capabilities. In the subsequent weeks, the Russian Defence Minister declares that an extended-range version of the SSC-8 Screwdriver land attack cruise missile with a range in excess of 4,500 km will be stationed in Western Russia. A prominent European newspaper leads with the headline: “This is Europe's Cuban Missile Crisis”.

Interests and Policy Options

Discussing the scenario of a US withdrawal from NATO and Europe followed by crises in Southern and Eastern Europe, the five country teams defined their countries' interests and formulated policy options. The following sections outline the crisis response that each team would recommend to their respective governments in this scenario.

FRANCE: Time for an EU Security Alliance

The French team outlined two main priorities: First, to maintain unity within the European Union in order to prevent individual European countries from signing bilateral security agreements with the US, and second, to keep the US engaged in Europe after the withdrawal. Paris should promote a stronger European defence posture, including higher defence spending, and further develop the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). A post-Brexit UK should be kept fully involved in European security to prevent a bilateral UK-US agreement. In consultation with the UK, France would consider extending its nuclear umbrella to EU members, while upholding the French President's authority over the use of nuclear force. This would come at a significant cost for France and lead to the return of the burden-sharing debate within Europe.

France would counter efforts to stoke unrest in the Western Balkans with an active posture. However, the French team anticipated a lack of consensus among the remaining NATO members on invoking Article 5. Thus, an ad-hoc "coalition of the willing" should lead any form of military action. Possible measures would include the dispatch of French Special Forces and a show of force at sea and in the air, as well as targeted sanctions. The French team recommended seeking de-escalation vis-à-vis Russia through European or bilateral diplomatic channels, yet refrained from offering Russia any concessions on European security.

In the event of an escalation of tensions in Eastern Europe, France should engage in missile defence efforts and seek to fill the gaps left by the US departure, for example as lead nation in Poland within NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. In the short term, dependence on existing NATO structures would continue. For the longer term, the French team expressed a preference for a new, EU-centred security alliance ("EU +"). NATO members that are not part of the EU (Albania, Canada, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Turkey, and post-Brexit UK) could affiliate with the new alliance on a bilateral basis.

**"NATO is dead
without the US."**

Preferred future security framework:

- EU-centred security alliance ("EU +"), including collective defence and nuclear deterrence.

Future role of the US:

- Bilateral security agreement between an EU-centred alliance and the US.

Red lines:

- Full independence in the use of nuclear force, to be authorized by the French President.

“For Germany, this is the worst-case scenario.”

Preferred future security framework:

- Maintaining NATO, complemented by EU defence capabilities, including European nuclear deterrence (“NATO -”).

Future role of the US:

- Keep possibility for the US to “opt in” European security.
- (Nuclear) capacity building in Europe, including Ballistic Missile Defence.

Red lines:

- Due to domestic opposition, German nuclear weapons would remain an unlikely option.
- Appeasement of Russia and the emergence of different zones of security in Europe.

GERMANY: Facing an Existential Security Crisis

The German team defined the safety of Germany and Europe as its primary interest and regarded a US withdrawal from NATO as an existential security crisis. The team suggested that Berlin should use all possible means – including concessions in trade and energy policy as well as an increase in defence spending and procurement – to reverse any such decision. Germany would work towards a common or collectively coordinated European approach to prevent bilateral agreements with the US. The German team suggested exploring the possibilities offered by the Franco-German Aachen Treaty to provide for future nuclear deterrence. To demonstrate its commitment to NATO, Berlin should enhance its military posture in Eastern European member states. The German team also underlined the necessity of having a serious domestic debate on security and defence.

Germany would consider a crisis in a Western Balkan country as a test case for European security, and support the invocation of Article 5 in order to prevent a hybrid war scenario in a NATO member state. Measures to deter Russia from interference should include political pressure, economic sanctions and military action, for example through the mobilisation of NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Berlin would also try to convince the US to contribute to these efforts.

The German team warned against the emergence of different zones of security in Europe in response to Russian actions in Eastern Europe and rejected appeasement. They acknowledged significant shortcomings in air and missile defence that would put Germany and other non-nuclear European states at immediate risk. Berlin should thus ask France and the UK to expand their nuclear umbrellas to other European countries. The German team was undecided about the question of German nuclear weapons given an assumed strong domestic opposition. For the future of European security, Germany would suggest maintaining NATO military structures even without the US (“NATO -”), but complemented in the long-term by further developed EU defence capabilities.

POLAND: Keep the US Engaged on the Eastern Flank

The Polish team defined as its main priorities to preserve a US military presence in Poland and to keep NATO alive. Poland would re-negotiate the presence of the US rotational brigade and regional missile defence based on a bilateral agreement. As a next step, Warsaw would form a regional coalition of the “Bucharest 9” (Poland, Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and the Baltic States) together with the Nordic

countries and encourage Germany and France to commit more resources to the Eastern flank. The Polish team would recommend to preserve NATO's Washington Treaty and military structures as the only credible option. For Warsaw, an open-door policy towards the US to "plug in" any future structures was non-negotiable. Poland understood its role as that of a facilitator of good relations with the US to the benefit of all Europeans.

The Polish team regarded a crisis in a Western Balkan country as part of a wider Russian destabilisation strategy, potentially also affecting Polish security. A resolute response would require a military and diplomatic show of force to demonstrate NATO's willingness and readiness to act. The Polish team suggested consultations on Article 4 or Article 5, followed by measures such as Special Forces operations, securing access to sea routes, and the mobilization of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). The EU should also consider a police mission as well as economic sanctions towards Russia.

A missile crisis in the Eastern neighbourhood would come as no surprise to the Polish team and could only be prevented by the build-up of European missile defence capabilities. Any dialogue with Russia on European security should require as a precondition Russia's withdrawal from Crimea. Poland's primary objective would be to remain part of the US nuclear umbrella. If this were not possible, Poland would want the French and the British to extend their nuclear capabilities to the rest of Europe. Failing this, the Polish team anticipated the proliferation of nuclear weapons among European states.

UNITED KINGDOM: Maintaining a Say in European Security

The British team defined as their primary objectives to maintain a say in European security and, if possible, to delay a US withdrawal from NATO. The UK would reaffirm its commitment to NATO and its European allies. At the same time, London would view proposals for an EU-centred security arrangement with great scepticism. The British team would also recommend to limit opportunities for a Franco-German "go it alone" approach to European security. A bilateral arrangement with the US would remain a fall-back option. They warned against growing isolationist sentiments in the UK's domestic political discourse.

The British team considered a crisis in the Western Balkans as a watershed moment for NATO and recommended a robust and immediate response. This would involve the deployment of UK assets and a strong UK role to deter Russian interference, including the dispatch of British Special Forces, a reinforced naval presence, and targeted sanctions. The British team assumed a lack of consensus within NATO on the use of Article 5, and proposed Article 4 consultations first in order to avoid discrediting Article 5.

"If the US withdraws from Europe, the Eastern flank should be the last place."

Preferred future security framework:

- ▶ Upholding NATO as a security alliance, possibly including Sweden and Finland.

Future role of the US:

- ▶ "Plug in" option for a US return to NATO and Europe, otherwise close partnership.

Red lines:

- ▶ Principles of the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Paris Declaration (1990).

"The UK would design European security, not just sign on a dotted line."

Preferred future security framework:

- ▶ European security alliance separate from the EU ("NATO 2.0"), including a single command structure, collective security guarantees and credible nuclear deterrence ("no talking shop").

Future role of the US:

- Maintain openness towards a return of US forces to Europe (“enabling clauses”).

Red lines:

- Adequate burden-sharing.
- No EU army.
- Autonomy of decision-making over the use of nuclear force.

“Countries who care will find a way to keep us engaged.”

Preferred future security framework:

- “Europe standing on its own feet”, with a specific vision to be defined by the Europeans.

Future role of the US:

- Bilateral negotiations with European countries on a new security arrangement.

Red lines:

- Subsidizing European security.

An escalation in Eastern Europe would lead to an increase in UK military deployments in that region. Rejecting nuclear coercion as a bluff, London would aim to minimise Russia’s role in European security (“no veto option”), especially given an assumed likely German interest in dialogue. The UK should engage with France to establish credible nuclear deterrence for Europe, but would oppose an institutional link to the EU. If the US withdrawal were irreversible, the British team would prefer to retain as much of the existing NATO structures as possible, pending the creation of a successor structure (“NATO 2.0”). Overall, the British team understood the UK’s role in European security as that of a leading actor, designing the future architecture on equal terms with France.

UNITED STATES:

A Transactional Relationship

The US team defined its two primary interests as keeping Europe out of the Russian and Chinese spheres of influence, and shifting the transatlantic relationship towards more equitable terms. The future transatlantic security arrangement should be more advantageous and flexible for the US, allowing for a pivot to the Indo-Pacific sphere in the long term. The US team called on the Europeans to put everything on the table in return for US security guarantees, including trade, investment and energy policy. Europeans should also engage in greater burden-sharing in the Middle East and Africa. In the future, Washington would scale down its outsized global role and avoid long-term deployments.

The US team assessed the situation in the Western Balkans as a primarily European security problem and not as a military crisis that would lead Washington to war. Thus, the US should follow Europe’s lead in conflict management and sanctions, assuming the Europeans formulate a strong policy response that goes beyond consultations. Apart from condemning the coup attempt in the Western Balkans, the US team would consider CIA covert action, provided that Europe reacted accordingly.

An escalation in Eastern Europe would not lead to an immediate US return to NATO, even though the US team expected domestic debate on that question, spurred by Congress. Nevertheless, since the Europeans would remain Washington’s most important partners, the US should demonstrate openness towards re-negotiating a “better deal” with interested countries on three conditions: a comprehensive offer that combines trade and defence issues; support for US policy, for example on Iran; and coordination between Europe and Washington on policy towards China. The US would expect returns on investments in Europe and would not continue to subsidize European security.



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