

# European strategic autonomy – can Europe go alone? A summary of the discussion held during the Warsaw Security Forum

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One of the many discussions held at the Warsaw Security Forum 2020 focused on **the possibility for a shift in Europe's ability to become less reliant on its allies and operate more independently**. The panel was chaired by international journalist Ali Aslan, and the Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of Defence Thomas Silberhorn, the State Secretary at Sweden's Ministry of Defence Jan-Olof Lind, and the State Secretary at the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence Baroness Goldie DL participated in the discussion. The discussion started with Mr. Aslan posing the question of whether the result of the US Election, where Joe Biden is bound to become the 46th President, would signal a change in the US-EU Security Partnership. **Mr. Silberhorn began by stating that the change in the administration brings new hope from Europe that common interests and shared values will be more promoted, and that there will be bipartisan support on security matters.** Baroness Goldie continued the answer by stating that the new administration's position will be based on ongoing challenges and threats, as well as Asian-Pacific dynamics, while NATO's collective defence and security forum are major strengths. **She also added that the US understands these threats, that members must work 'in concert' with one another, and that the UK will proceed to work with the US on security matters.** Mr. Lind reasserted the strength of the Sweden-NATO partnership and is looking to enhance transatlantic links as well. **However, they find it regrettable that the US withdrew from the 'Open Skies' agreement and that they will operate on a 'wait and see' premise as they push to enhance their relationships.**

Mr. Aslan continued by quoting the German Defence Minister saying that it is time to "end the illusion of European autonomy." The quote generated a debate as to what it is meant by 'strategic autonomy', with Mr. Silberhorn emphasising that Europe is dependent on the US and Canadian support, but that this relationship is mutually beneficial. **He continued by saying that NATO remains the only apparatus that can provide full-scale military support, but that Germany and other members must do more in terms of investments and efforts as well and that they must take the US's pressures seriously.** Baroness Goldie underlines that EU's security threats are UK's, and vice versa due to geographical proximity; that EU as a whole cannot defend Europe despite its development platforms, and that **NATO and EU must synergise and work together on threats such as disinformation, hybrid warfare and more.** She was echoed by Mr. Lind stating that Europe must not use this terminology as a mean to construct an isolated 'European fortress', something Sweden does not support.

When confronted with the question of Brexit's impact on security cooperation with EU, Baroness Goldie stated that the **UK remains committed to Europe's security**, and that EU's security institutions should not be an obstacle when the UK can work with EU through NATO channels.

The question of challenges in spending Germany's defence budget during a pandemic was addressed to Mr. Silberhorn. The State Secretary says that Germany learned that 'saving has severe consequences', where it cut 5 billion euros from its budget, decreasing personnel and equipment, in an attempt to save during the 2008 Economic Crisis and resulted in reduced know-how and industrial capability, respectively. Offering as an example the extension of the 'Tornado' fighter jet's service by five years, Germany would have to spend 7.7 billion in return; more than it has saved.

From the Forum's Young Leaders, Teodora Shaedas proposed the question of how NATO and China would offer an incorporated response to the pandemic. Mr. Lind stated that the pandemic had a 'strong input' but did not change Sweden's defence spending. **He has highlighted there were cases of disinformation, some originating from China, and that a multilateral approach must be agreed upon, as both sides have similarities and differences in their responses.** Baroness Goldie also added that there is a responsibility to ensure that enemies do not exploit the pandemic and that NATO must remain 'clear-sighted' and constructive in its approach to China, and that NATO must ensure that focus remains on defending the 'rules-based international order', as well as critical infrastructure and other elements.

Finally, the second Young Leader question was asked by Amina Latroce and raised the issue of how France's proposal for the European nuclear umbrella impacts the US-EU dynamics. While considering the US's grievances with NATO defence spending and Europe's reluctance to host an US umbrella, both Baroness Goldie began by focusing on what would remain the same: such as NATO's commitment and its nature as a 'nuclear alliance', as well as UK's commitment to Trident and the US's to NATO as a whole. She also added that UK, Germany, and France remain committed to being responsible NPT signatories and that members must work in tandem to support each other. Mr. Silberhorn also added that it is unlikely for Europe to 'go alone' both in terms of conventional or nuclear capability.

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