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Can European Defence Cooperation Build European Deterrence?

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Is the European Union capable of developing a credible European deterrence? This question is more pressing than ever, particularly in light of the second Trump administration and its inclination toward unilateralism. As the war in Ukraine approaches its third year, the EU's efforts in defence cooperation have intensified—but have they been effective in meeting the evolving security demands? The return of high-intensity, technologically advanced conventional warfare to the European continent has underscored the urgency of collective defence preparedness. Even before February 2022, EU member states had embarked on efforts to deepen interstate defence cooperation and, to some extent, defence integration. However, these initiatives have been cautiously readjusted to address the new strategic realities. Russia's war against Ukraine has not only tested European security but has also brought direct threats to neighboring EU states. In response, EU member states have acknowledged—at least on paper—the necessity of multi-domain defence capabilities, culminating in a commitment in November 2023 to enhance their collective military readiness. Yet, has this shift translated into tangible progress toward European deterrence? Have EU states adequately responded to both the new defence imperatives and Ukraine's calls for support? This paper assesses the EU's progress by examining shifts in its strategic culture, actual responses to the war in Ukraine, and changes in defence priorities and military spending. It suggests that while EU member states have taken steps to enhance defence cooperation and provide moderate military assistance to Ukraine, these efforts have yet to translate into a more ambitious strategy with a meaningful deterrent impact. There's a need for a fundamental transformation in European defence thinking and capability-building—one that extends beyond the current trajectory. If deterrence is the ultimate goal, merely strengthening cooperation will not suffice; a more profound shift in strategic culture and operational readiness is essential.

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International Relations/International Security

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No

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