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Analytical Review Article

EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY VS. U.S. HEGEMONY

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Abstract

The debate over European strategic autonomy reflects growing efforts by the European Union to act independently in global affairs while maintaining its long-standing partnership with the United States. This article explains the concept of EU autonomy, contrasts it with U.S. hegemony, and analyzes how Europe positions itself in contemporary conflicts through diplomacy, economic tools, and selective security engagement.

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Introduction

For decades, European security and foreign policy were closely aligned with the United States, particularly through institutions such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization. However, changing global dynamics, including geopolitical competition and regional crises, have encouraged the EU to pursue a more independent strategic role. This shift does not imply separation from the U.S. but rather an effort to achieve greater decision-making autonomy.

Methodology

This review synthesizes recent academic literature, policy documents, and institutional reports published between 2020 and 2026. Sources were drawn from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and official EU and NATO publications. The analysis focuses on comparative evaluation of U.S. hegemony and European strategic autonomy across security, economic, and political domains.

Concept of European Strategic Autonomy

European strategic autonomy refers to the EU’s ability to act independently in political, economic, and security matters without excessive reliance on external powers. It includes:

- Independent foreign policy decision-making
- Development of defense capabilities
- Economic and technological self-reliance

Table 1: Dimensions of Strategic Autonomy

Dimension	Description	Objective
Political	Independent diplomacy	Global influence
Military	Defense cooperation	Reduced dependency
Economic	Trade and financial systems	Strategic resilience
Technological	Digital and industrial capacity	Innovation leadership

This concept aims to strengthen Europe’s role as a global actor rather than a regional partner.

U.S. Hegemony and Transatlantic Relations

United States has historically played a dominant role in global security and governance. Its leadership in NATO and influence over global institutions have shaped European security policies.

Table 2: Features of U.S. Hegemony

Feature	Description	Impact on Europe
Military Leadership	Global defense presence	Security dependence
Economic Influence	Dollar-based system	Financial integration
Political Influence	Leadership in alliances	Policy alignment
Global Institutions	Control over governance frameworks	Limited autonomy

While this relationship has provided stability, it has also limited Europe's independent strategic decision-making.

Drivers of European Strategic Autonomy

Several factors have encouraged the EU to pursue a more independent position. These include shifting global power dynamics, uncertainty in transatlantic relations, and the need to respond to regional crises more effectively.

Key drivers include:

- Desire for independent foreign policy
- Need for stronger defense coordination within Europe
- Economic competition and technological sovereignty
- Reduced predictability in global alliances

These factors highlight Europe's effort to balance cooperation with independence.

EU Positioning in Global Conflicts



The EU increasingly positions itself as a diplomatic and economic power in global conflicts rather than a purely military actor. Its approach focuses on:

- Diplomatic mediation and negotiations
- Economic sanctions and trade policies
- Humanitarian assistance and crisis management
- Multilateral cooperation through international institutions

This strategy allows the EU to influence global outcomes while avoiding direct military confrontation.

Comparative Analysis: EU vs U.S. Approach

Table 3: Strategic Comparison

Dimension	European Union	United States
Strategy	Diplomacy and economics	Military and alliances
Military Role	Limited and cooperative	Strong global presence
Influence	Norm-based and regulatory	Power-based and strategic
Approach	Multilateralism	Leadership-driven

This comparison shows that the EU and U.S. adopt complementary but distinct approaches to global security.

Conceptual Figure — Strategic Balance Model

U.S. Hegemony → Security Leadership
EU Autonomy → Diplomatic & Economic Influence
→ Combined Effect → Transatlantic Balance

This model illustrates how both actors contribute differently to global stability.

Implications for Global Order

The rise of European strategic autonomy has significant implications for global geopolitics. It contributes to the emergence of a multipolar world, where power is distributed among several actors. It also strengthens Europe’s ability to respond independently to crises and reduces overreliance on external powers.

At the same time, differences between EU and U.S. approaches may create challenges in coordination, particularly in rapidly evolving conflicts.

Future Prospects

Future developments will depend on Europe’s ability to translate policy ambitions into practical capabilities. Advances in defense integration, digital sovereignty, and energy independence will shape the trajectory of autonomy. At the same time, U.S. engagement in global affairs will influence the balance between cooperation and independence.

Recommendations

Strengthening European defense capabilities, investing in technological innovation, and enhancing internal cohesion are essential for achieving strategic autonomy. At the same time, maintaining strong transatlantic cooperation is critical for addressing global challenges such as security threats, climate change, and economic instability.

Conclusion

European strategic autonomy represents an important shift in global politics, reflecting the EU's ambition to act as an independent and influential global actor. While the United States continues to play a dominant role in security and global leadership, Europe is increasingly asserting its own position through diplomacy, economic power, and multilateral engagement.

This evolving balance does not signal a complete break from transatlantic relations but rather a redefinition of roles. A stable global order will depend on how effectively the EU and the United States coordinate their strategies while respecting each other's priorities in an increasingly complex and multipolar world.



Review Typology and Reporting

Review designs were classified into standard categories (scoping, umbrella, rapid, qualitative, and mixed-methods), with reporting aligned to established guidelines (PRISMA-ScR, PRIOR, PRISMA-RR, ENTREQ, and PRISMA/MMAT) to ensure methodological rigor and transparency.

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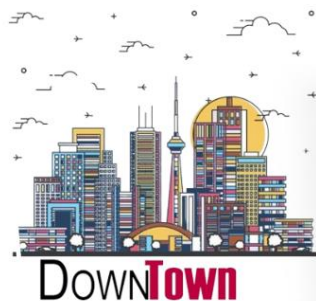
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