

The European Security and Defence Policy

Introduction

Established at the Cologne European Council in June 1999, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has, in the 7 years since its inception, given rise to countless debates and discussions. Whereas some commentators regard the ESDP as an overall success story, others voice doubts. The current discussion about whether the EU should send peacekeeping troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo during elections this June seems to crystallise these doubts. Only three EU member states would be capable of leading such a mission, and two of them, France and the United Kingdom, are currently unwilling and unable to mount an international deployment because of their respective involvement in Iraq and the Ivory Coast.

After months of discussion, Germany eventually agreed at the EU External Affairs Council on 20 March 2006 to lead the military operation to the Congo from headquarters in Potsdam. Nevertheless, opposition to a Congo mission is still strong in Berlin, with considerable scepticism even within the governing parties. It is still unclear whether the German government will be able muster enough votes in the Bundestag (which has a right of veto on the mission) to send soldiers to Congo.

Such uncertainty is not calculated to increase Europe's standing and military credibility in the world. On the other hand, the European Security and Defence Policy has undoubted successes to its credit. The creation of a Rapid Reaction Force, the gradual evolution of the EU Battlegroups and the European Police Force and the EU's first major security mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina have exceeded the expectations of the cynics. Political, financial and material problems continue to plague the ESDP, but there has undoubtedly been progress over the past seven years.

Background

A European Security and Defence Policy has been a European ambition for some decades. However, the legal basis for such a policy was only laid down with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991, which instituted the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) 'including the eventual framework of "a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence"'. In 1997, the Amsterdam Treaty changed this provision to envisage the 'progressive' framing of a common European defence policy.

The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties provided however only the treaty framework for an emerging European Security and Defence Policy. The ultimate launch pad for its establishment was the EU's dismal performance during the Balkan crises of the 1990s and the Bosnia and Kosovo conflicts in particular, when it was the United States and NATO who contributed decisively to the pacification of a region 'on the European Union's doorstep'. This humiliating experience generated increasing frustration from the EU's member states over Europe's military impotence and dependence on the US. In particular, it served as a catalyst for bringing the UK and France closer together on defence questions.

In December 1998, at a Franco-British summit in Saint Malo, the two member states released a Joint Declaration, in which for the first time it was stressed that the EU must have 'the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces'. Following this meeting, the Cologne European Council of June 1999 agreed to implement this Joint Declaration and give reality to the concept of a European Security and Defence Policy.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the twenty-sixth in a series of regular *European Policy Briefs* produced by the Federal Trust. The aim of the series is to describe and analyse major controversies in the current British debate about the European Union. Other Policy Briefs are available on the Federal Trust's website www.fedtrust.co.uk/policybriefs.

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Helsinki Headline Goal

Prior to the European Council summit in Helsinki in December 1999, French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair held another meeting, at which they urged the EU to strive for the capacity to deploy rapidly and then sustain combat forces which could be militarily self-sufficient up to corps level. These Anglo-French recommendations were accepted by the member states at the Helsinki European Council of 1999, at which it was agreed to launch the Helsinki Headline Goal, calling for the creation of a functioning Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) of up to 60,000 troops with naval and air support by 2003. The Rapid Reaction Force should be deployable at full strength within 60 days of a deployment decision and be sustainable in the field for at least one year. Furthermore, the RRF must be able to act upon the full range of the so-called 'Petersberg tasks', including humanitarian missions, peace-keeping, and combat tasks in crisis management, including the making (not merely the maintenance) of peace.

In order to meet the Helsinki Headline Goal two catalogues were drawn up in the wake of the Helsinki Council: the first listed the capabilities required to achieve the Headline Goal, the second the units voluntarily earmarked by the member states at a Capability Commitment Conference held in Brussels in November 2000. When both lists had been completed, it was clear that an enormous gap existed between the required and the actual offered capabilities. Accordingly, at a further conference held in Brussels in November 2001 the EU member states adopted a European Capability Action Plan (ECAP) 'incorporating all the efforts, investments, developments and coordination measures executed or planned at both national and multinational level with a view to improving existing resources and gradually developing the capabilities necessary for the Union's envisaged activities in ESDP'.¹

When the first phase of the Capability Action Plan was concluded in May 2003, further disappointment awaited the member states. It became clear at that date that little real progress had been made on moving the Rapid Reaction Force closer to reality. This was mainly because the European Capability Action Plan had allowed considerable flexibility to the member states, permitting them to decide on an ad hoc basis when and how additional capabilities should be allocated. Despite these shortcomings, the EU defence ministers declared in May 2003 that the EU now had initial operational

capability across the full range of Petersberg tasks, although they acknowledged that the capabilities were limited and constrained, particularly in the key areas of rapid deployment, sustainability and concurrent operations. For their part, the member states recognised failings in the implementation of the Action Plan and agreed on improvements including regular reviews during each Presidency of progress made (or not) towards capability improvement. Critics noted that national governments still retained for themselves a large measure of discretion in the future implementation of the Plan. These critics also pointed out that most of the armed forces allocated to the EU can only be deployed to observer and peacekeeping missions of low intensity, with specialised combat troops being in noticeably short supply. Moreover, strategic lift assets are still lacking, causing difficulties of deployment and sustainability, especially for distant missions.

Headline Goal 2010

Against this background, the Council proposed in its ESDP Presidency Report 2003 that 'in addition to the outstanding capability shortfalls against the Helsinki Headline Goal', the EU should now 'set new goals for the further development of European capabilities for crisis management with a horizon of 2010'.² The new goals should take into account the current limitations and constraints and, more importantly, the new European Security Strategy. The European Security Strategy, which was adopted by the European Council in December 2003, was designed to show that the EU could become a strategic actor, to promote a common understanding within the EU regarding security risks the EU is facing today, and to provide the means to confront these challenges. At the European Council summit in June 2004, the EU member states agreed to adopt the new Headline Goal 2010, which should focus on the qualitative aspects of capability development, in particular interoperability, deployability and sustainability. These three factors should be at the core of member states' efforts to improve military capabilities.

Since only part of the European armed forces can currently be deployed at high readiness as a response to a crisis, the Headline Goal 2010 envisages in particular further development of the EU's capacity for rapid decision-making in the planning and deployment of forces. 'The ambition of the EU under the Headline Goal is to be able to take the decision to launch an operation within 5 days of the approval of the Crisis

Management Concept by the Council'.³ 'The relevant forces should be able to start implementing their mission on the ground no later than 10 days after the EU decision to launch the operation'.⁴

The battlegroup concept

Central to the EU's aspirations under the 2010 Headline Goal is the battlegroup concept, a British-French-German proposal. In February 2004, the three states jointly submitted a 'Food for Thought Paper', which suggested producing a 'catalogue of high utility force packages that can be tailored rapidly to specific missions'.⁵ These 'packages' rapidly came to be known as 'battlegroups' and the concept was officially launched at the 2004 Capability Commitment Conference. Each battlegroup is based on a combined arms, battalion-size force (1,500 troops) reinforced with combat support and combat service support. Since the battlegroups should be sustainable in the field for 30 days, extendable to even 120 days, they will be capable of stand-alone operations or for the initial phase of large operations. Battlegroups will be employable across the full range of both the Petersberg tasks as listed in the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) Art.17.2 and those identified in the European Security Strategy. They are designed specifically, but not exclusively, to be used in response to a request from the UN. Battlegroups can be either national or multinational, i.e. composed of troops from one or more member states. Interoperability will be the hoped-for key to their military effectiveness.

At the Capability Commitment Conference of 2004, member states made an initial commitment to the formation of 13 battlegroups. Four member states (UK, France, Italy and Spain) provided their national battlegroups at an early stage of the programme, and in 2006 a German-French battlegroup with contributions from Belgium, Luxembourg and Spain had achieved partial operational capability for evacuation and extraction. From January 2007, the EU will have the full operational capability to undertake two battlegroup-size rapid response operations, including the ability to launch both operations almost simultaneously. Only Denmark and Malta are currently not participating in any battlegroup. In February 2006, Ireland's Minister of Defence Willie O'Dea signalled Ireland's future participation in the battlegroups.

Many in and outside Europe hope that the battlegroups will spur the EU member states to increase capabilities, since the battlegroups are not based simply on re-

arranging existing capabilities, but also on producing new ones. Questions, however, remain as to the long-term viability of the concept. Transport and political decision-making when troops are confronted with a rapidly changing situation on the ground are areas of likely especial difficulty. The substantial political will shown until now for the realisation of the battlegroup concept gives ground for hope that these problems may gradually be capable of solution.

Problems

The rapid reaction force and the battlegroups are definite, if limited steps towards a more credible role for the EU in global crisis management. There are, however, still a range of shortcomings to address before the EU can meet its objectives as set out in the European Security Strategy. The most obvious obstacle derives from the relatively low overall level of military expenditure by the EU's member states. In 2004, the US alone spent more than twice as much on defence as all the EU member states combined. Defence spending also varies unevenly among the member states. About 80 per cent of total EU spending and 98 per cent of military R&D expenditure are covered by the six most important arms-producing countries, the so-called Lol-states (UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden).

Moreover, some European defence spending is not invested to the best possible effect. Although a degree of military restructuring has taken place among the member states since the end of the Cold War, they still spend too much on personnel and too little on the acquisition of new equipment and on R&D. Accordingly, most of the forces of EU member states are still in-place forces. When it comes to waging war away from their home base, the European capacity for autonomous action is very limited. In such cases, they must rely on external actors. The recently created European Defence Agency may help the member states eliminate waste in their defence budgets and enhance the effectiveness of existing budgets: the Agency's job is to identify gaps in capability and make recommendations on how those gaps could be filled. The Agency is of course a newcomer among the European Union's institutions. It remains to be seen how far it can achieve its mission and significantly support the member states in their effort to improve European defence capabilities in the field of crisis management.

Powerful objective arguments can be advanced in support of the proposition that the best way for EU member states to increase their military capabilities would be through the greatest possible degree of defence integration. Budget pressures and increasing ambitions in the defence field are natural pointers towards national specialisation and pooling of limited resources. According to the European Security Strategy, 'systematic use of pooled and shared assets would reduce duplications, overheads, and, in the medium-term, increase capabilities.'⁶ Pooling has proven especially attractive to some member states since it allows them to preserve national autonomy whilst generating cost-effective solutions. Specialisation in 'niche' capabilities is attractive in particular for smaller European countries.

As always, the EU's member states will need over the coming decade to decide what is the balance they wish to strike in the defence field between national independence and the enhanced collective capacity generated by further integration. The balance sought will not necessarily be the same for the governments of all member states, although polls suggest that public opinion throughout the European Union is strikingly willing to accept further integration in the sphere of security and defence policies.

Civilian Capabilities

The creation of the European Security and Defence Policy has put pressure on the classic notion of the EU as an exclusively civilian power. But in parallel to its military capabilities, the EU's civilian capabilities have also evolved in recent years, capabilities that have a definite contribution to make to the global actions of the European Union. For instance, at the Feira European Council summit in June 2000, the EU member states listed four priority areas in which the EU should acquire civilian capabilities: police, the rule of law, civil administration and civil protection. The Council's goal was that by 2003 a police force of up to 5,000 personnel contributing to international missions across the range of conflict prevention and crisis management operations should be set up.⁷ Rapid progress towards this goal was made after the Feira summit and in consequence the EU was able to take over from the UN's International Police Task Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina in January 2003.

At the European Council summit in December 2004, a Civilian Headline Goal 2008 was

endorsed by the EU member states. This Headline Goal envisages the deployment of civilian ESDP capabilities within 30 days of the decision to launch a mission. Examples of activities the civilian operations should carry out include security sector reform and support to disarmament and demobilisation processes.⁸ In the ESDP Presidency Report 2005, consensus was reached on a concept for setting up and deploying civilian response teams with the initial goal of a pool of up to 100 experts by the end of 2006. The objectives of such teams are early assessments of a crisis situation, support for the establishment of civilian ESDP missions and support to an EU special representative or an ongoing civilian operation. The teams should be mobilised and deployed within 5 days of a request.⁹

Besides the development of separate military and civilian capabilities, the EU has recently attempted to co-ordinate both these capabilities better. In the ESDP Presidency Report 2005, UK, Austria and Finland set out an approach by which civil-military co-ordination would be taken forward during their Presidencies. In parallel, the Political and Security Committee introduced a Concept for Comprehensive Planning, which addresses the need for effective co-ordination of activity by all relevant EU actors in crisis management.¹⁰ Post-Cold War conflict response certainly requires an effective marrying up of both civilian and military aspects in the operational phase. The Union is aware of this need, even if opportunities to run such integrated missions have not yet presented themselves.

EU Operations

With 4 completed and 10 ongoing operations, the EU has proved that it is able to carry out military or civilian operations in a number of different regions of the world. The first-ever mission launched was the ESDP police mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, mentioned above. The first military mission, which took place in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, put the 'Berlin-plus' agreement between NATO and the EU into practice, with the EU drawing on NATO assets and capabilities during this operation. The so-called Concordia Mission lasted from March to December 2003. During that time, the EU was able to create a stable and secure environment in Macedonia.

A real turning point for the EU was Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which lasted from July to September 2003.

Not only was it the first autonomous military mission and the first operation in Africa, but the EU also managed to act quickly and effectively. Within a week after the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan asked the EU to help, the Council had approved the mission, with troops on the ground a few days later. Although Operation Artemis involved only 1800 (mostly French) soldiers and lasted a mere 2 months before the EU handed full responsibility back to the UN, the operation was in all respects a success. The mission restored the security situation and disarmed local militias, allowing a large number of refugees to return. Most importantly, the EU showed through Operation Artemis that its decision-making and military planning organs were able to execute rapidly a purely EU operation in a case of an emergency situation in a demanding theatre of operation.

Out of the three military missions the EU has conducted so far, Operation Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the largest one. A robust force of 7,000 troops was deployed in December 2004 to Bosnia-Herzegovina to take over from NATO's SFOR. Although the operation is being carried out with recourse to NATO assets and capabilities on the basis of the 'Berlin plus' agreement, Althea can be regarded as a new step in the development of ESDP in terms of size and ambition. The objectives of the still ongoing operation are to provide deterrence, to uphold security and stability, and to ensure compliance with the Dayton Peace Accord. The military mission is also linked to the police mission already in place in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This attempt to co-ordinate the civilian and military approach potentially marks the beginning of an encouraging new phase in the EU's crisis management. Optimists about the future development of the ESDP point out that in Bosnia-Herzegovina the European Union has replaced the former dominant power, the United States. The European Union may wish and need in coming years to act as a guarantor for stability in a number of areas where the United States has until now performed this role.

Conclusion

Because the European Security and Defence Policy is primarily intergovernmental in character, its development depends crucially upon the continuing political will of the EU member states, notably the bigger member states. Despite real successes, there are still political, doctrinal and financial problems which may hinder unless resolved the ESDP from meeting its own ambitions set out in the European Security Strategy. For

example, the accession of the former Eastern Bloc countries has cast new light on the debate about crisis management. The new member states tend to regard NATO as the most important military alliance in which they participate and can sometimes see ESDP as a distraction from, or even a threat to, the all-important Atlantic link. Some such thinking can also on occasion be discerned in the ranks of 'old Europe'.

Moreover, the European Union still lacks an overall strategic concept for crisis management. Its operations have been episodic and occasional, with no clearly defined statement of long-term objectives or geostrategic analysis. The adoption of the European Security Strategy was a step in the right direction, but its focus was contemporary rather than oriented towards the shaping of a future world in a way most reflective of European interests and aspirations. The suspension of the Union's ratification process for the Constitutional Treaty is an undoubted setback towards this goal, since the Treaty, with its new concept of 'structured so-operation' in the military field, would have been a forceful spur to further reflection and analysis.

Finally, and inevitably, questions of finance remain for the ESDP's operation. To date, the EU has strictly separated purely or mainly civilian operations, which are charged to the budget of the Community, and 'operations having military or defence implications', which are charged to the member states in accordance with a GNP-scale, unless the Council unanimously decides otherwise (Art.28 TEU).¹¹ Since today peace building tasks require a mix of military and civilian components such a separation is artificial and unsustainable. In reality, individual missions of the EU under ESDP have been financed on an ad hoc and unpredictable basis. Political will has proved superior to real but essentially secondary problems of accounting and contributions.

Ironically, the future of ESDP, an initiative designed to reassert Europe's leading position in the world, may crucially depend upon events outside Europe and particularly upon the conclusions drawn by future American administrations from the problems posed for the United States by the current political and military impasse in Iraq. If, as is entirely possible, events in the Middle East lead the United States fundamentally to reassess its position in the world and to opt for a more isolationist posture, then the pressure upon the European Union to take up at least some of the burden abandoned by an ailing superpower may well become irresistible. Even now, the present American administration seems to view more

favourably than it did three years ago the prospect of a global role for the European Union in some respects comparable to that of the United States. Far from ushering in an unending era of American global predominance, the invasion of Iraq may well turn out to be the last act in the drama of a self-confidently hegemonic United States, sole superpower after the end of the Cold War.

The persistence with which Europe's leaders have followed what sometimes seemed to be the chimera of a Common Security and Defence Policy may well over the coming decade prove to be a far-sighted laying of the groundwork for an enhanced European role in a multipolar world, which the United States not merely tolerates, but actively welcomes. If the European Union wishes genuinely to play the role which the rhetoric often associated with ESDP proclaims, it still has much work to do. But enough has been done and the probable political circumstances of the coming decade may well be such as to keep open the real possibility that the European Union is on the right road to becoming the global actor which it aspires to be.

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¹ General Affairs Council Meeting, 'Statement on Improving Military Capabilities', 19-20/11/2002, p.1, <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/European%20Capability%20Action%20Plan%20-%20Excerpt%20Press%20Release%20November%202001.pdf>

² General Affairs and External Relations Council, 'ESDP Presidency Report 2003', 09/12/2003, p.4, http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/misc/78343.pdf.

³ Headline Goal 2010, p.2, <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/2010%20Headline%20Goal.pdf>.

⁴ Headline Goal 2010, p.2, <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/2010%20Headline%20Goal.pdf>

⁵ The battlegroup concept – UK/France/Germany 'food for thought' paper, <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/Battlegroups.pdf>.

⁶ European Security Strategy, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', 12/12/2003, p.13 <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

⁷ Santa Maria da Feira European Council, 'Presidency Conclusions', 19-20/06/2000, http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00200-r1.en0.htm.

⁸ Brussels European Council, 'Presidency Conclusions', 16-17/12/2004, p.20, http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/83201.pdf.

⁹ General Affairs and External Relations Council, 'ESDP Presidency Report 2005', 19/12/2005, p.14, <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/05/st15/st15891.en05.pdf>.

¹⁰ General Affairs and External Relations Council, 'ESDP Presidency Report 2005', 19/12/2005, p.15, <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/05/st15/st15891.en05.pdf>.

¹¹ Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the European Union, Art.28, http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/en/treaties/dat/12002M/htm/C_2002325EN.000501.html.