



It's smart defense, stupid!

The European Common Security and Defense Policy

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1. Introduction

The year 1945 saw two revolutions: US and Soviet forces met near Torgau on the Elbe River and divided the continent and only months later the US dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan. Europeans could pursue the path of economic prosperity made possible by a generous US security umbrella. Economic crisis looms these days, the Euro as a common currency is in danger and chaotic crisis management did not show Europe at its best, nor its transatlantic partner. Nevertheless, the story of economic and social success goes hand in hand with European disarmament.

Yet, the member states of the EU have combined a larger standing army than the US, but are unable to convert the theoretical capabilities into actual ones and project any significant force. The post Cold War conflicts have shown the - at best- auxiliary contributions of European states. Mr. Rasmussen was right when he called for “smart defense” in an age of austerity and for the sharing of resources and a combination of efforts.¹ How can Europe combine its huge economic power and social attractiveness with military assets into true smart power (Nye)? Has it taken successful steps in the right direction of more efficient European security planning? How can Europe and the US master together the power shifts to come and maintain the indispensable strategic partnership efficiently in the 21st century, what role does NATO play in this relationship?

2. Common Security and Defense Policy

One way to increase their military effectiveness is the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). The idea was to share and pool capabilities to have “less [costs] and

¹ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_70400.htm

better” abilities.² However, it was clear from the start that the effectiveness of the efforts relies on the political will of the member states. One motto was to “think globally, act locally”, thus, a focus on one’s neighborhood and the “frozen conflicts” in Europe and the need for international organizations and local partners in faraway conflicts.³

The general idea is clear: in the 21st century no power can “do it alone” and therefore a combination of efforts is not only desired but needed to combine effective mobile forces, long term engagements, diplomacy, civilian post crisis management and trade politics. An emphasis is always on multilateralism and the combination of values and rights of the individual while creating public security internally in the EU by combining it with external security.⁴ Prevention and anticipation should form a part of the “pro active intelligence-led approach”.⁵

One example of improvement and the de facto implementation of pooling and sharing are the EU battlegroups (EUBG). It can be seen as an effort to increase operational readiness, i.e. fast deployable forces to a combat zone that can operate for a given amount of time until reinforcements are sent.⁶ Valentino argues that early and fast interventions in domestic conflicts that have genocidal characteristics do not require a large force if they help the threatened civilians to escape and to force a regime change.⁷ The potential for force employment is thus much higher, as training and practice in these units have preference over experiments with new technologies which may not even be useful in non-conventional efforts and thus claim time and

² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/esdp/127066.pdf

³ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> , p.6, 9

⁴ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st05/st05842-re02.en10.pdf> ,p. 4

⁵ Ibid., p.11

⁶ Richard Betts (1995). *Military readiness*. Brookings: Washington D.C., p. 40

⁷ Benjamin Valentino (2004). *Mass killings and genocide in the 20th century*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca , p.243-245

resources from training and doctrine.⁸ Furthermore, the possibility to specialize the groups for mountain purposes, for example leads to a broader spectrum of possibilities.⁹ The interoperability of the groups does not harm any other commitments or plans but shares the costs of high operational readiness among many and leads to technical and political benefits for all.¹⁰

3. Libya - all in vain?

However, US critiques see the CSDP as a way to diminish the role of NATO and as a waste of resources by duplicating structures that are already existent, without improving capabilities.¹¹ In addition, the CSDP is said to neglect important security threats like Iran and Iraq and even if it acts it needs to rely on NATO help and is in essence born out of jealousy and anti-Americanism and should refocus on its NATO commitments.¹² Robert Gates famously and rightly “encouraged” Europeans to spend more on defense and warned that the “demilitarization of Europe...has gone from a blessing in the 20th century to an impediment to achieving real security and lasting peace in the 21st.”¹³ Last June, he complained again about a lack of coordination in military expenditures and stressed the need for interoperability and the inadequate contribution of some NATO members to the efforts in Libya. Also the

⁸ See Stephen Biddle (2006). *Military power*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, p.202-203

⁹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/1222503/110106%20factsheet%20-%20battlegroups%20-%20version%207_en.pdf , p.3

¹⁰ <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cp097.pdf> , p. 64

¹¹ <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2007/07/the-european-security-and-defense-policy-a-challenge-to-the-transatlantic-security-alliance>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/24/world/europe/24nato.html>

economic crisis is taken as an argument against increased European security commitment. However, the argument here is not for a European “two-war” strategy or renewed militarism, but “smart” regional conflict resolution.

The Libyan example showed the problems of implementing the CSDP into action, "the mightiest military alliance in history is only 11 weeks into an operation against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country, yet many allies are beginning to run short of munitions, requiring the U.S., once more, to make up the difference."¹⁴ Even though close airfields were benefitting the European efforts, they still had to rely on US intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), for targeting and air refueling. However, many problems are tackled by the pooling and sharing efforts and the experience gained in Afghanistan and compared to the Balkans one has to note the increased European will to “police” the own neighborhood with the US leading from behind.

At the core of EU defense problems is the willingness of the nation states to spend more on defense and “this cannot be done by institutions and treaties”.¹⁵ However, Mr. Menon misses the fact that pooling and sharing reduces the costs of military spending, and so it is more a question of willingness to share and to give away legitimacy. This in turn is more likely in an age of austerity where tight budgets need to be overcome by cooperation. Pragmatism is a daily routine, the “necessity of the impossible” of a EU27 makes the EU more fit for such an enormous task than NATO. Political control, legitimacy and moral authority are far higher and can be translated into the collective security approach of the CSDP.¹⁶ Institutions and

¹⁴ http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/06/10/gates_to_euroopenato_pull_it_together_people

¹⁵ Anand Menon (2011): European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya, Survival, 53:3, 75-90, p. 86

¹⁶ Even the often mentioned “legitimacy gap” in the EU (Commission etc.) does not change this

alliances can be used for *realpolitik* and legitimacy and moral authority are key assets in the psychological dimension of power.¹⁷

4. A conclusive historical perspective

For the first time in history, the whole continent cooperates in military efforts and is not driven by expansionist or militaristic goals. Imagine the possibility of a joint armament programme like the Eurofighter 100 years ago. One has to put that in context to the often clumsy European bureaucracy and the many deficiencies in European military capabilities. Civilian values were predominant since 1945 for good reasons. Commerce, the rule of law and culture defined nations and the supra national body whose promise was peace and prosperity.¹⁸ Sheehan calls this the “super civilian state”, a European anomaly, that is made by and made for peace and has ever diminishing willingness to use force.¹⁹

The CSDP is a clear example of improved readiness, i.e. the ability to convert potential military power to actual power by mobilization in a specific time and for specific needs.²⁰ The structural readiness of most European forces had to be rebuilt and adopted to the 21st century, ironically by wars and doctrines (Afghanistan and Iraq) that could remind one of the decolonization conflicts of the 1950s and 1960s. However, the EU developed a strong appeal and soft power capabilities through its process of peaceful integration, multilateralism and internationalism. Joseph Nye

¹⁷ http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2003/01/01/think_again_power

¹⁸ James Sheehan (2008). *Where have all the soldiers gone?* Houghton Mifflin: Boston., p. 173

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221

²⁰ Following Betts (1995), p.28

notes the unique experience of Europeans in sheer endless talks and its power *with* others through institutions.²¹

The US should not regard the CSDP as a threat or a rival to NATO but rather as a positive contribution and a relief for US forces and the military budget with the EU stemming more burdens in times of budget cuts and dangers of “imperial overstretch”. The cognitive dilemma remains as long as the US calls for more European defense efforts and complains at the same time about its own initiatives in fear of a possible rivalry. US involvement in South East Asia will become more important and a strong EU preventing a power vacuum in its neighborhood is a realistic outcome of the common CSDP.

The US could cut down its operational readiness levels in Europe and cut costs by “leading from behind”, as the Libyan example has shown. It will take some more time till the EU can fulfill such missions as NATO-light without US help on its own. The short-term goal has to be the potential to independently wage a campaign similar to Kosovo or Libya without US help. The EU has global interests, but should first become a reliable and powerful regional actor, capable of solving crisis in the neighborhood.

Partnering and division of tasks is in no way new and the US should remind itself of the task shifting in the late 19th century, when Britain “handed over” the Western hemisphere informally to the US in order to be able to match responsibilities in other parts of the world. The “Rise of the Rest” poses higher threats to international security and liberal democracy than the CSDP or clumsy European bureaucrats. NATO has become an organization of collective security and hence could also include Russia, so that besides the US another other semi-European power is

²¹ Joseph Nye (2011). *The future of power*. Public Affairs: NY, p.160-163

included. Turkey is an additional key player for effective neighborhood policy and fostering a permanent institutionalized dialogue between the EU, Russia and Turkey is vital to keep the EU united, Russia post imperial and Turkey European.²²

Ad omnia paratus – the motto of the “Nordic” EUBG composed of EU members that are not in NATO and vice versa, can be a splendid example of pragmatism and progress for liberal realism. The European Union has far more legitimacy than NATO and a higher appeal to lead by persuasion and attraction. NATO restructuring can only lead to a smarter use of hard power but not true smart power and an effective and preventive neighborhood policy. The outlined military reforms in the EU enhance its soft power initiatives and capabilities for conflict prevention and resolution. It does not undermine the role of the UN but acts, as many other EU programs, as a complementary and regional tool.

²² See the brilliant ECFR study on the challenge of the this trias, http://ecfr.eu/page/-/documents/FINAL%20VERSION%20ECFR25_SECURITY_UPDATE_AW_SINGLE.pdf