
Military Aspects of the European Security and Defense Policy

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During the Cold War, both politicians and the public understood that security and defense were mainly concerned with national survival. Today, however, the public believes that military forces are primarily maintained in order to shield or promote democracy, and to defend minority groups against genocide, rape, murder, or famine caused by civil wars. For politicians who play on these popular feelings, the military exists to demonstrate or gain power, and to exercise or gain influence on the international scene.

In December 2000, the European Union (EU) decided to fortify the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) with a military component in its effort toward developing a true crisis management capability. Such a move would complement the existing political and economic tools already at the disposal of the EU. This came as a natural consequence of the lessons learned during the various crises in the Balkans. European attempts to exercise crisis management there failed, partly because such initiatives could not be supported with credible military might.

THE MILITARY DIMENSION OF ESDP

As a result, the EU decided to set up a quick reaction force for use in crisis situations. This force could be used in concert with other means available to the European community. It was agreed that by 2003, the EU countries should be able to deploy and maintain a force of 60,000 personnel for at least one year. Additionally, air and naval elements could be added if necessary. A careful analysis of all EU countries shows that they should indeed be able to muster a force of

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this size within the allotted time frame. However, there are many issues one must keep in mind when discussing or evaluating the effectiveness of such a force. The following paragraphs highlight some of these important areas of consideration.

First, almost all troops that are or could be allocated to such an EU force are already earmarked for NATO. The EU nations are not creating new forces for the EU. They are simply giving existing forces a “double hatting.” This means that if NATO is engaged or is about to be engaged at the same time that the EU wants to enter the scene, politicians will have to prioritize.

Second, the EU force may be ineffective for a number of reasons. Only NATO and the U.S. own air force headquarters that can plan, direct, and control major air operations. This includes providing close air support to a multinational, corps-size army formation.

Moreover, logistics for a force composed of 14 nations would be a nightmare. All EU nations have their own weapons, vehicles, radios, spare parts, and rations. While this is also the case for NATO, the critical difference is that in NATO national formations are hardly ever smaller than brigades—for serious operations division. In a mixed EU corps, only the bigger European nations would be capable of sending brigades while the rest of them could only dispatch battalions or less. Clearly, this would result in limited operational flexibility due to logistics.

In addition, intelligence is a top priority when planning and conducting an operation in an unknown country, but the collection and dissemination of intelligence will be very difficult for the EU unless they can gain access to NATO intelligence. The EU countries lack both the strategic and tactical mobility needed for fast deployment both to a theatre and within a theatre. Heavy transport aircraft and helicopters are on the procurement agenda for many European countries, but costs will be high.

Furthermore, most European countries are now entering a transition phase from mainly conscript forces to all-volunteer forces. These transitions are taking place against a background of huge reductions in overall strength and spectacular acquisition programs. It would be a fair guess that most countries have over-estimated their abilities for recruitment and retention, and under-estimated the cost of the entire exercise. The result will be somewhat smaller all-volunteer forces than planned, and slower equipment replacement programs than forecasted in countries’ White Papers and other reports.

Finally, the language problem must be mentioned. In NATO, there are two official languages: English and French. For military operations, only English is used. In the EUROCORPS,¹ all member countries’ languages are accepted, but French and German are recognized as the two prime languages enjoying equal standing. Interestingly enough, when EUROCORPS headquarters took over in Kosovo last year, they accepted the use of English as long as it was under NATO command. Given that a main reason for “inventing” ESDP was a French wish to

diminish the Anglo-American—and particularly the American—influence, it will be interesting to see how the EU force will tackle the language problem. If efficiency is the target, some nations will have to swallow their national pride.

It follows from the above that the EU should be able to assemble a multinational force of some 60,000 people for a one-year deployment on the condition that NATO is not engaged in any serious way at the same time. From a military point of view, the force will be able to undertake peacekeeping tasks that are not too demanding. Quick deployment of the whole force will be impossible if air transport is necessary unless the U.S. steps in, or aircraft in sufficient numbers can be rented from Russia or the Ukraine. More demanding military tasks can be undertaken by a smaller, more homogeneous force composed solely of the bigger nations, particularly if some of the small European carriers from near-by waters can support them. For many years to come, the full force will not be suited for militarily demanding tasks like peace enforcement unless heavily supported by NATO and the U.S.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Several issues should be considered before the EU decides to deploy a sizeable force. First, it must once more be emphasized that deployment of a large EU-led force can only take place if NATO is not engaged at the same time. There are simply not enough forces available for simultaneous deployment.

Second, if the operation at hand is in any way serious, NATO or U.S. support will be needed, thus rendering U.S. acceptance mandatory. In many cases, one would guess that the U.S. would be quite happy to let Europe carry part of the burden in an international crisis, particularly if the Europeans can shoulder the commitment of ground troops while the U.S. provides intelligence, strategic transport, and other forms of air support only. However, if there is a risk of a later deployment of American ground forces, the U.S. could veto its own or NATO's support of the operation, thereby making it impossible to carry out.

Third, a well-defined mandate, task, and terms of reference for the commander are imperative for any operation of consequence. Clear and robust rules of engagement for the troops are also of the utmost importance. These terms have to be drafted and agreed to by the troop-providing nations. For these nations to agree on such terms, they first need to concur on the political aim of the operation. Unfortunately, one has to note that the European nations have not been very good at agreeing on how to handle international crises or incidents. Turgid declarations and threats of economic sanctions have been the standard response, irrespective of whether the crisis takes place in Africa, the Middle East, or the Balkans. National interests in most of the world's probable trouble spots are such that a single European opinion is unlikely. The track record is so disappointing

that it is fair to assume that without the leadership of the U.S., and guidance from an appointed, independent, and experienced commander, it is very unlikely that a decision to act militarily in a difficult political situation will ever be taken. If a decision is taken, then the chances of an ill-defined mandate are great.

Last, is a one-year only deployment of a force of 60,000 a likely situation at all? When politicians contemplate an international engagement, they must consider and define the aim of the operation, or its desired end-state. They must also consider what to do if the desired end-state has not been reached by the time the mandate expires. Can one imagine a situation where there is a need to deploy 60,000 troops that will plan on packing up and going home after 12 months? Such a scenario is unfathomable, but that is what the EU is planning for at the moment.

CONCLUSION

The political difficulties in deciding upon the deployment of a 60,000-strong EU force are many, and most of the problems will be within the EU itself. As mentioned earlier, security and defense is about influence and national interests. On this point, there is a long way to go before Europe speaks with one voice—with or without Javier Solana, the High Representative for Common, Foreign, and Security Policy for the EU, and former Secretary-General of NATO.

If and when the Europeans agree to react with military forces in response to a crisis, the EU will most likely be able to undertake some peacekeeping tasks similar to those we have seen under the U.N. flag. The bigger European nations could also handle more serious peacekeeping operations, provided they are limited in time and scope. A good example would be the evacuation of EU citizens from a conflict zone. But major operations calling for the deployment of a corps-size formation supported by a capable air force is definitely impossible unless heavily supported by either NATO or the U.S., which in both cases demands the latter's acceptance.

Europe is in no way going to be a military match to the U.S. Consider the 60,000 troops from as many as 14 countries with hopeless logistical arrangements, with ad hoc command arrangements and a multitude of languages, with insufficient air headquarters, with a substantial lack of strategic and tactical mobility, and with a problematic political leadership (to put it mildly). Then—without mentioning the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force—compare it to the U.S. Marine Corps with approximately 171,000 Marines, supplied with one type of equipment, a smooth logistical set-up, one language, one doctrine, one chain of command, its own air force, and integrated, versatile transport.

The U.S. should welcome a future European ability to put troops in some numbers on the ground. But it would be a mistake on the part of the Americans and

the Europeans if all the fine talk of European statesmen about ESDP and a European capability to deploy military forces of up to 60,000 should result in an increased influence on world affairs for which there is no real military justification. ■

NOTES

1 EUROCORPS is a multinational formation (5-6 European nations) created for political reasons by former Chancellor of Germany Kohl and French president Mitterand in May 1992. It was established as an EU formation, although it can be assigned to NATO.

