

WHERE DOES CSDP FIT IN EU FOREIGN POLICY?

Nick Witney | Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)



SUMMARY

The Lisbon Treaty describes CSDP as ‘integral’ to Europe’s foreign policy. Yet European leaders’ actions belie any such belief. The EU has gone ‘missing in action’ in North Africa: ‘pooling and sharing’ is discussed but not practised. Governments aborted the EADS/BAES merger, for narrow national reasons.

This lack of seriousness about defence stems from intervention fatigue, and the absence of any direct military threat. But the hegemony of the West is finished; the US is pivoting to Asia; and Europe is being rapidly marginalised. It needs to exploit all its assets, including its armed forces, to continue to count in the world.

The missing understanding is how the military can be used as a tool of statecraft. Europe’s ability to offer assistance and training, intelligence and arms, should be a key conduit of influence – for example, with the new democracies of North Africa.

Europeans need to re-think the global strategic environment, and how their armed forces can support foreign policy. The European Council should commission a European Defence Review, to produce both a strategic re-assessment and proposals for major integrative projects.

This Policy Paper is part of a series entitled “[How can Europeans be taken seriously with lower hard security capacities?](#)” which also includes contributions by Jean-Pierre Darnis (IAI, Rome), Ronja Kempin (SWP, Berlin), Daniel Keohane (Fride, Brussels) and Jan Techau (Carnegie Europe, Brussels).

It is a contribution to the project “[Think Global – Act European \(TGAE\). Thinking strategically about the EU’s external action](#)” directed by *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute* and involving 16 European think tanks:

Carnegie Europe, CCEIA, CER, CEPS, demosEUROPA, ECFR, EGMONT, EPC, Real Instituto Elcano, Eliamep, Europeum, FRIDE, IAI, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, SIEPS, SWP.

Four other series of Policy Papers deal with key challenges on EU neighbourhood, strategic resources, migrations and economic policy. The final report presenting the key recommendations of the think tanks will be published in March 2013, under the direction of Elvire Fabry (*Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, Paris*).

Introduction

“The common security and defence policy”, declares Article 42 of the Lisbon Treaty, “shall be an integral part of the common foreign and security policy.” CSDP is to provide “an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets”, which the Union can then use for crisis-management missions – and “shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy.”

The most obvious meaning of “integral” in this context is “subordinate”. CSDP is intended to serve the wider aims of the EU’s foreign and security policy. This reflects how the relationship between defence and foreign policy is now conceived in all advanced democracies: the generals do their business at the behest of the politicians and diplomats.

But “integral” should also be understood to have a second implication – the close interconnection between defence and diplomatic activity. Some years of debate about the ‘comprehensive approach’ have left all Europeans vigorously agreeing with each other that few crisis management missions will succeed without a combination of civil and military means. ‘No security without development, no development without security’ is the new orthodoxy. Some would push the point further and argue that foreign policy without the ultimate backing of military power is simply deficient. As Frederick the Great expressed it, “diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments”.

So advocates of a more effective EU foreign policy can only despair as, like Alice’s Cheshire Cat, the CSDP fades into a disembodied grin.

1. CSDP: All Grin, No Cat

It was not meant to be like this. On the contrary, the Lisbon Treaty should have given the CSDP a shot in the arm. Better institutional arrangements for defining the Union’s strategic interests and conducting its foreign policy should have provided the context in which that ‘integral’ CSDP could be more effectively deployed. In practice, the Lisbon Treaty stopped CSDP in its tracks. Between 2003 and 2008, over 20 European crisis management operations were initiated. After the launch of the Atalanta anti-piracy operation in 2008, however, a three-year hiatus ensued during which only one new CSDP mission (training Somali forces in neighbouring Uganda) was authorised.

2012 has seen some tentative resumption of EU operational activity. Three new missions were launched (in Somalia, South Sudan and Niger). The EEAS website¹ concludes that “the EU’s role as a security provider is rapidly expanding”. Yet it also reveals that the three new missions (all civilian) only involve some sixty personnel between them. Meanwhile, the prospect of an operation to help post-revolutionary Libya with controlling its borders has evidently run into the sand; and when Mali blew up in early 2013 the EU kept its head down, continued with its interminable planning for a mission to train the Malian army, and left the risky intervention to France. In sum, Europe’s performance as a contributor to global security and crisis management might be summed up with the ‘3 Ts’: timid, tardy, and tokenistic.

Similar dismal results characterise that other domain of the CSDP’s supposed activity, the provision of capabilities appropriate for crisis management missions. Even the more Atlanticist Member States have consistently supported this capability development ambition; there has been a broad consensus that, given the feebleness of the capabilities that Europeans could summon whether within the alliance or on their own account, then efforts could and should be made under the EU banner, as well as that of NATO, to improve the level of

1. EEAS website, accessed 30 November 2012.

useful output achieved from European defence spending. The only Atlanticist provision was the need to ensure deconfliction with any relevant NATO activity.

In practice, the problem has not been one of conflict but of lack of progress under either banner. Under CSDP, the Helsinki Headline Goal for improved military capabilities was succeeded by Headline Goal 2010, whilst comparable targets for improving civilian crisis management capabilities were set out in 2008 and 2010. All these goals came and went; all were missed. From the European Capabilities Action Plan of the late 1990s to the Ghent Initiative of 2010, European defence ministers have repeatedly launched new plans of action to improve the situation, to little or no effect. The European Defence Agency was set up in 2004 to provide a focal point for the effort; it has managed to establish its role, and has done some useful work. But its results have been in no way commensurate with the job that needs to be done if the European defence enterprise is to start to realise its potential - or, indeed, if European taxpayers are to be given any sort of reasonable return on their defence euros.

With an entrenched economic crisis across Europe, and almost universally falling defence budgets, 'pooling and sharing' is now on everyone's lips - echoed by NATO's 'Smart Defence' initiative. Yet, away from the ministerial declaration and the conference hall, virtually nothing changes. As General Hakan Syren, chair of the European Union Military Committee, recently spelled it out: "The military capabilities of the EU Member States are on a steady downward slope... Looking a few years into the future, it is simple mathematics to predict that many Member States will be unable to sustain essential parts of their national forces, air forces being the prime example".²

2. Why this Failure?

The theory of the CSDP is simply not being practised. Three questions arise: Why? Does it matter? And, if so, what can be done about it? Just as CSDP has two components - operations and capability development - two sorts of reasons account for the policy's failure to perform. On operations, the 'early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention' called for in the 2003 European Security Strategy has simply fallen out of fashion. Europeans have had experience of comparable exercises under American leadership in Iraq and Afghanistan and have found them both to be immensely costly failures. One might, and should, argue that Europe has always aimed for more astute and politically-legitimate operations - but the damage has been done. It is clear that both elites and publics in Europe are, understandably, suffering from intervention fatigue.

“ INDIVIDUAL NATIONAL CUTBACKS IMPACT THE EFFICIENCY OF THE WHOLE ”

There is much less excuse for Europe's failure to make progress on the capability development front. Whilst talking the talk of pooling as the logical means to overcome their defence budget crises, national governments have in fact responded in an almost uniformly solipsistic fashion - cutting back on their national defence programmes without co-ordination or consultation, with no serious consideration of how greater collaboration with partners might limit the damage, and without regard to how the sum of individual national cutbacks would impact on the efficiency of the whole. It is hard to escape the conclusion that most European governments - indeed, to some extent all European governments - just do not take defence seriously.

This is not quite as irresponsible as it sounds. Despite the regular attempts of US administrations to galvanise Europeans with talk of 'new threats', whether global Jihadism, cyber attack or even energy cut-offs, Europeans have not missed the fact that they are, in the early years of the 21st century, safer than at any time in recorded history. This may change; it would be foolish to cancel the insurance policy. The Russia of Vladimir Putin needs

2. Adrian Croft, "Some EU states may no longer afford air forces-general", *Reuters report*, 19 September 2012.

watching; efforts to bring the Western Balkans out of the Middle Ages are still not sure of success; and, despite the generally hopeful context of the Arab Spring, revolutions and wars continue to boil around the southern edges of Europe. Yet the chances of European countries finding themselves subject to direct armed attack, or European citizens finding themselves conscripted by governments preparing for war, have quite literally never been lower.

In such circumstances, to cut defence spending even further would not be an irrational response (though as I argue below, it would be the wrong one). But vested interest – of the defence industries and of the military itself – acts as a strong brake on budget reductions. So it is unsurprising that governments should pay even more attention than usual to what else they can get out of their defence budgets apart from effective armed forces and, in other words, increasingly view defence spending as a means to support employment, or regional, or industrial policy, with the generation of actual defence capability relegated to a lower priority.

This basic lack of seriousness about defence is evident from the parlous fashion in which defence is managed in so many European countries. Any business in which investment lead times are so long obviously requires a systematic planning process, to match foreseen expenditures against foreseen resources a number of years ahead. Yet such processes in European defence ministries are the exception rather than the rule. Similarly, any government serious about maintaining public support for its armed forces – their existence, and periodically, their use – would take the trouble to think through and set out just what it sees as the point and purpose of those armed forces. What missions are envisaged for them? How do those missions relate to the nation's wider foreign policy – to the government's understanding of the global environment and its own country's role and position in the world? How do these conceptions translate into plans for forces of a particular size and shape?

Few European governments trouble to ask themselves such questions. A recent survey of the strategic and defence publications of the 27 Member States uncovered a haphazard set of documentation, some of it as much as fifteen years out-of-date, which generally fails to cast light either on the fundamental strategic issues or on more prosaic matters such as budgeting, planning and management. It is hard not to conclude that the majority of European governments either simply do not have a clear picture of what their armed forces are for, or prefer to have their hands left free to spend their defence budgets year by year on whatever short-term (and often non-defence) objectives they see fit; or both.

A similarly myopic concern with jobs and narrow national interests evidently led to the scuppering of the most exciting initiative of the decade in European defence, the proposed EADS/BAES merger.

3. Does it Matter?

But – my second question – does any of this really matter? If Europeans are today unprecedentedly safe, perhaps it does not. Yet, even if Europeans are at little risk of direct conventional attack, they face a deeper strategic challenge which, though less immediate, is nonetheless existential. Simply put, the challenge is to continue to count in the world – to retain the ability to promote European values and interests, and to shape an international system which will give future generations of Europeans the chance of continued security and prosperity.

In the second half the 20th century, when the West effectively ran the non-Communist world, Europeans were able to achieve these happy conditions on Uncle Sam's coat-tails. Too few European governments have realised how profoundly that situation has now changed. The end of Western hegemony and the rapid transfer of wealth to the south and east have re-worked the network of global power. The US has responded with its 'pivot to Asia' – revealing the extent to which US strategic interests are now diverging from those of Europeans. In the multi-polar world, the European and North American poles are likely to be each other's closest allies for as far ahead as anyone can see. But that has not prevented a US president who is almost revered in Europe from working

to reduce European representation on international bodies, or from cutting deals with China behind European backs to frustrate meaningful action against climate change.

In such a new world, Europe must use all the assets at its disposal to preserve what it can of its international power and influence – including effective armed forces. Though it prefers to talk about values, the European Union is not above acting self-interestedly. In matters of agricultural trade, for example, it behaves with a hard-headedness which verges on the unscrupulous. Yet this readiness to assert itself through economic means does not carry over into the domains of more traditional defence and foreign policies. Here, the EU likes to think of itself as a more herbivorous sort of power, preferring a narrative of CSDP, like the CFSP, which emphasises values over interests, and which is most comfortable portraying European military missions as a sort of armed charity work.

“ THE EU LIKES TO THINK OF ITSELF AS A HERBIVORIOUS SORT OF POWER ”

This is not only hypocritical; it is also hugely wasteful. For you do not have to go all the way with Frederick the Great to nonetheless accept that armed forces should be seen as instruments not just of a passive ‘defence’ but also of active statecraft – as tools of power and influence. In a recent paper³ I tried to set out how this can work in practice – not as some form of outdated ‘gunboat diplomacy’, but as a means of effective engagement with foreign leaders and governments who, outside Europe, tend to have military and security matters very much on their minds. If Europeans wish to induce the rest of the world to act in conformity with their preferences – that is, if they wish to exercise international power and influence – then they must be able to engage with the rest of the world on the issues that really matter to them, and to offer them things they really want. Arms, training, intelligence, and military advice are only some of the more obvious forms of defence assistance which Europeans should deploy, carefully but also actively, to promote both their values and their interests.

The Arab Spring provides a good example. Europeans want to support the new democratic governments – but find themselves, in their own economic crisis, able to do little on the economic side. Yet security is as much a concern to the new north African leaders as are jobs and growth; indeed, a new and welcome regional cooperation is burgeoning on the back of shared anxieties over border control, and the growing lawlessness and extremism in the Sahel. If ever there were the ideal opportunity to make vigorous use of CSDP, this is it. Partly because instability south of the Sahara impacts on EU interests, but mainly because this is a perfect way to honour the EU’s promise to ‘support the democratic transitions’ – especially if military-to-military relationships can be developed to a point where the EU is invited to help with the crucial internal processes of security sector reform that all the new democracies must undertake.

So the EU’s failure to act in the Mali crisis of early 2013 was all the more shameful – especially when the situation was tailor-made for the deployment of one of its famous ‘battlegroups’. Yet such an idea does not even seem to have occurred to Brussels. Thus does the idea that CSDP could have anything to do with ‘hard power’ become progressively less plausible.

4. What Can Be Done?

The answers to this final question are, I hope, implied by what has gone before. The evidence is now overwhelming: nothing of consequence happens on CSDP unless ordered ‘top-down’. The standard operational model, whereby defence ministers ‘invite the staff’ to explore the possibilities of making some progress here or there, produces nothing but litanies of objection, and choruses of argument for proceeding, if at all, by baby steps. If anything significant is to change, Heads of State and Government must themselves engage,

3. Nick Witney, “How to Stop the Demilitarisation of Europe”, *Policy Brief 40*, ECFR, November 2011.

addressing first the fundamental questions of what European armed forces are now for, and how the full potential of CSDP can be realised. And then, taking some of the key decisions needed to achieve a step change in the degree of defence integration in Europe.

Such an attempt to combine renewed strategic vision with key managerial decisions sounds remarkably like what, in a national context, is termed a Defence Review – and what is now needed is a European Defence Review. A blue-ribbon commission should be charged by the European Council (which has already decided to put defence on its agenda in December 2013) to undertake the effort on its behalf – and come back to it with an analysis of how Europe’s armed forces can best support the Union’s external policies in today’s transformed strategic environment. Beyond that, the commission should be tasked to lay out a handful of proposals for major integrative projects – whether for coordinated forward planning of national defence budgets (on the lines of the new ‘European semester’ in the Eurozone), or for shared policing of European airspace, or...

There is no shortage of ideas for major steps which would transform European defence capabilities without a euro more being spent. All that is required is for Member State leaders, in the European Council and prompted by their Review Commission, to tell the bureaucracy not ‘we would like to do more together to remedy the deficiencies revealed in the Libya air campaign: what are the options?’, but rather ‘we want a European Strike Force: come back in twelve months with a costed plan for creating one’. As ever, it comes down in the end to political will – or, one might say, to seriousness about defence.

On the same theme...

Contributions to the TGAE series: “How can Europeans be taken seriously with lower hard security capacities?”

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR EU DEFENCE POLICY

Daniel Keohane (Fride), *Policy Paper No. 63, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013

WHERE DOES CSDP FIT IN EU FOREIGN POLICY?

Nick Witney (ECFR), *Policy Paper No. 64, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013

WILL EUROPEANS EVER AGREE ON THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE?

Jan Techau (Carnegie Europe), *Policy Paper No. 65, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013

HOW TO MAINTAIN HARD CAPABILITIES IN TIMES OF BUDGET CUTS?

Ronja Kempin (SWP), *Policy Paper No. 66, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013

THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE INDUSTRY’S FUTURE: HOW EUROPEAN?

Jean-Pierre Darnis (IAI), *Policy Paper No. 67, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013

Managing Editor: Yves Bertoncini • The document may be reproduced in part or in full on the dual condition that its meaning is not distorted and that the source is mentioned • The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher • *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute* cannot be held responsible for the use which any third party may make of the document • Original version • © *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*