

THE EU'S CSDP IS A MISGUIDED IRRELEVANCE AND SHOULD BE SCRAPPED

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You cannot get closer to the bone of national sovereignty than defence, and the European Union has regarded fulfilment of its ambitions in this field as a major political objective. As part of an increasingly federal union where the EU acquires more and more of the attributes of an integrated state called 'Europe', then of course it would want it to have its own currency, fiscal policy, diplomatic service and, ultimately, military capability.

The aspiration for the creation of a 'European army' is rarely expressed in such blunt form. Yet if this is not the goal, why does the EU want an operational planning HQ and a commitment to "deploy 60,000 men in 60 days"? Why is it so keen to stick the EU badge on a succession of military operations? What justification is there for the panoply of EU structures to control these operations? Why is there a European Defence Agency and such an effort to create an EU defence industry and an EU defence procurement market? And why do we have a virtual European Defence College to promote an EU defence culture?

Institutionally there have been a plethora of initiatives over the years that have gradually built up the EU's desired military identity. The UK brake on EU involvement in defence was removed by Mr Blair at St Malo in 1998 when it was formally agreed with France that the EU should develop an autonomous military capability. Since then, while contributing no additional military capabilities or adding any practical value, the EU has placed its institutional footprint on an increasing range of defence-related activities, and wastefully duplicated staff and decision-making structures that are all already very well established at NATO.

Clearly, the ability to recruit, train and deploy personnel is the most critical of requirements of an autonomous military force, and with this in mind the 1999 European Council in Helsinki gave birth to the idea of a 15-brigade EU force of 60,000 troops, sustainable in the field for a year. Of course, these were not additional troops, but the same ones that nations had for national, NATO, UN or other operations. This ridiculous idea didn't get far at the time - but, as in other sensitive areas of policy, the EU proceeds by small steps, and decided instead to create so-called "EU battlegroups" that have never been deployed on operations and are really just a retitling of already existing units

In the years that followed, the Nice Treaty saw the creation of an EU Military Committee (replicating the similar body long-established at NATO) that would be served by an EU Military Staff, and the intention of having an operational headquarters (OHQ) with all the associated command and communications capabilities (again duplicating structures at NATO in its SHAPE HQ). The idea of a permanent EU OHQ was the 'logical' next step for Eurocrats, but when it was finally presented to the Foreign Affairs Council in July 2011, the UK Government took a tough line, insisting the EU focuses on more

constructive areas of work - and effectively vetoed the proposal. It has since re-emerged in different clothing.

EU efforts have been both institutional and conceptual. Adept at identifying fresh justifications for its ambitions, the EU now claims some unique amalgam of civil and military capabilities through its 'comprehensive approach'. This is what generations of soldiers have known as CIMIC or 'hearts and minds'. Unfortunately, while NATO's budget is being pared, the EU seems to have largesse to throw around. The reality is that the EU is incapable of getting both parts of the civil-military equation right. Apart from the fact that most of those that inhabit the EU civil sphere, including NGOs, have little understanding of, or taste for, the military, the EU has difficulty coordinating its own activities. At one stage, for example, its civil delegation in Kampala had nothing to do with its Uganda-based military training mission for Somali recruits. In Afghanistan EU personnel sat in offices in different parts of Kabul, rarely communicated with one another and had little coordination with the main effort which was being run by NATO.

In European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso's so-called 'State of the Union Address' in September 2010, he declared "[The EU] *will not have the weight we need in the world without a common defence policy. I believe now is the moment to address this challenge.*" His words confirmed the real purpose of CSDP - not to do anything militarily useful but to enhance EU ambitions.

In Britain, the Coalition Government's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review reluctantly set out the biggest defence cuts since the Cold War. Budget sacrifices included an 8% cut in defence spending by 2014. This bleak picture has been replicated across Europe: most European nations have inflicted major cuts in their defence budgets since 2008. Some naively imagine that the EU will provide a more comprehensive solution - this misses the point about the essential purpose of a nation's armed forces. It would also entrust the same people that created the Euro with responsibility for our defence.

The fact is, the EU brings no additional military capabilities to the table and takes on no additional European share of the transatlantic defence burden. Instead, European defence ambitions are yet another call on the same diminishing pool of national armed forces, and are a very serious distraction from NATO - the long-established institution which should be the clear and natural focus of international military commitment for Western democracies. The defence and security challenges that confront us today - Afghanistan, international terrorism, piracy - and as yet unknown for the future, are too serious to be playthings for the EU's political ambitions. CSDP has not added one more bullet, one more gun or aircraft to our military capabilities, nor will it. The whole logic of CSDP - essentially French driven - was removed when France rejoined the integrated military structure of NATO. Libya proved its irrelevance. The military efforts of the European nations should be concentrated on reinvigorating NATO.

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