



Security through knowledge.

Euro-View: Geoffrey Van Orden on an EU Army

"No" to the European Commission president's European Army



There is only one reason why the EU is involved in defence, why European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker should now repeat the mantra calling for an "EU Army". Just like the single currency, the creation of an EU military capability is seen as a key step in European political integration and

every European Council Summit aims to see movement in that direction. Next month's European Council, on 26 June, will focus on defence.

Many people are confused by this issue. They confuse the EU and our European nations as the same thing. The EU, of course, seeks to dissolve our nations and take over their sovereign responsibilities. That's the point.

The EU means the European Commission, the European Parliament (EP), and the Council with its External Action Service, all managed by large, inter-connected secretariats.

It also means the European Court of Justice. The aim is to constantly extend the competences of these EU institutions into more and more areas, both large and small, which are normally the domain of our national governments.

Similarly, many fail to differentiate between the EU and NATO. But these organisations couldn't be more different. NATO is an inter-governmental organisation that does not seek to take power from national governments.

Most importantly, it ensures that European allies sit at the same table as the United States when dealing with crises. This is what gives NATO credibility and real capability.

It is true that the United States wants Europe to contribute more to the defence of the democracies. This has been the American demand for the past 50 years. It is an illusion to imagine that this will be achieved by placing the

EU imprint on defence. At best this is just a lame excuse offered by some capitals; at worst it is a confidence trick.

While contributing little of practical value, the EU has merely placed its institutional footprint on an increasing range of defence-related activities, wastefully duplicating staff and structures already very well established at NATO.

These include an EU Military Committee, an EU Military Staff, an intelligence assessment staff, and a European Defence College to promote an "EU defence culture".

For the power-point presentations, there is also an impressive narrative of activity, including some 30 operational "Common Security and Defence Policy" (CSDP) missions.

Most of these, however, have been self-generated. Few stand up to scrutiny. And, as it happens, those that aren't mainly French operations are largely civilian. The EU adds nothing to defence capability – nor will it. All the evidence points to the reverse.

Aware that the naked pursuit of a European Army for political purposes might upset key powers such as Britain, the EU has long sought alternative justifications for its ambitions. These

range from mistaken notions of cost-effectiveness to the latest idea - the 'comprehensive approach'. This enables the EU to claim some 'unique' amalgam of civil and military capabilities.

Not only is this flawed in EU hands but there is nothing original or exclusive about it. After all, NATO's International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan oversaw just such a wide range of capabilities.

The central fact is that the EU regards its defence policy as a political instrument: to intensify European integration in the most nationally sensitive sector and to enable the EU to become a global actor, imagining that there is a common will among the people of our nations, a common allegiance, a European 'demos' that has superseded national loyalty and identity.

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As it happens, most EU countries are also NATO members and those that are not have all sat at the NATO table and participated at some stage in NATO planning and operations.

It is therefore nothing short of ridiculous that NATO and the EU have to try and create elaborate coordination mechanisms to enable the same countries to talk to one another in the same city, about the same crisis.

As a further affectation, the EU insists on 'strategic autonomy' and will not countenance the idea that NATO should have the right of first refusal in dealing with a crisis.

To take just one of the many dangerous threats that has re-emerged in recent years, Russia would like nothing better than to separate Europe from its transatlantic allies.

What is clear is that each of the European nations must seriously improve their military capabilities, and be willing to make them available for robust and sustained operations. And NATO needs to be revitalised without the distractions of the niggling, misplaced EU ambition, which misleads friend and foe alike.

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