

# The Telegraph

## The tide begins to turn on the EU's military ambitions

By Geoffrey Van Orden MEP  
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*As we reject the idea of a state called Europe, it is right that we should discourage the construction of its military arm*

There is no more potent symbol of statehood than military power. It is not surprising therefore that Eurocrats regard defence policy as a key element in their drive for a state called Europe, playing a role on the global stage.

The forthcoming European Council (19/20 December), when heads of government meet, has long been trailed in Brussels as a "Defence Council" to take a great leap forward in the EU's Common Security & Defence Policy (CSDP). Actually, the modest defence-related decisions have largely been taken by Ministers in recent weeks and Prime Ministers will spend most of their time on economic issues.

On CSDP, maybe the tide has at last turned. Among the major European powers there is now no appetite for an ambitious EU military policy. The emphasis has focused more on civil activities in terms of crisis prevention, humanitarian assistance, and post-conflict reconstruction. Many of us have long campaigned for just such a shift so that the EU might actually do something useful in terms of complementing rather than trying to imitate, NATO's military muscle. It's been a long haul to get to this position.

The UK brake on EU involvement in defence was removed by Mr Blair at St Malo in 1998 when he agreed with France that the EU should develop an 'autonomous' military capability. Much flowed from that declaration. Mr Blair wanted to raise his game in Europe and defence was his strongest card. It also played to long-standing French desires to separate European security from United States influence through NATO.

While contributing little of practical value, the EU placed its institutional footprint on an increasing range of defence-related activities, wastefully duplicating staff and structures already very well established at NATO. These included 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 was also an impressive narrative of activity, including some 30 operational "CSDP missions". Most were self-generated. Few stand up to scrutiny. And, as it happens, they were mainly civilian.

As one American top General put it, "the EU installed the plumbing but there wasn't any water". It provided no additional military capabilities - not one additional warship, combat aircraft or soldier. Its lofty aim of 60,000 troops standing ready for dispatch on some imaginary EU-flagged military operation came to nothing. The successor concept of smaller and clearly misnamed 'EU battle groups', has yet to meet reality and identify a useful role.

Aware that naked pursuit of a European Army for political purposes might upset key powers such as Britain, the EU has busily sought alternative justifications for its ambitions. The latest is the 'comprehensive approach' which enables it to claim some 'unique' amalgam of civil and

military capabilities. But the EU is incapable of getting both parts of the civil-military equation right. Many of those that inhabit the EU civil sphere, including NGOs, have little understanding of, or taste for, the military, and the EU even 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, of course, being run by NATO.

While the EU has tried to press on regardless, we can now see that the high point of EU military ambition was reached with the 2009 Lisbon Treaty. This established a 'High Representative' as the putative EU Foreign and Defence Minister, gave formal blessing to a European Defence Agency, and enshrined a dangerous "mutual defence" clause, which the EU has no capacity to fulfill and which was just a pale imitation of NATO's robust Article 5.

But for the Eurocrats, military effectiveness was always secondary. The current High Representative, Baroness Ashton, let this slip when she stated that the "first (priority for CSDP) is political, and it concerns fulfilling Europe's ambitions on the world stage .... The EU needs to remain a credible security and defence player on the world stage." More attention is paid to EU military "visibility" than its relevance.

It has taken British Conservative Ministers to recognise the nature of CSDP. They have now seen that we cannot, in one breath, seek to distance ourselves from 'ever closer union' and call for repatriation of powers from Brussels, and in another acquiesce in a flagship EU policy designed to deepen political integration and extend EU competence.

The EU has no military requirements different to those of NATO. It may make sense for less capable countries to get together to improve capabilities, provided they have the will to use them, but there is absolutely no need for the EU to be involved in any of this. Nor does the EU need to be involved in multi-national defence industrial projects.

Britain's strategic priority is to ensure that the US remains fully engaged in NATO, and, elusively, to get European Allies to develop their military capability in a way that will contribute more effectively to the Alliance. Creating wasteful, duplicative EU structures has never been the solution to this.

As we reject the idea of a state called Europe, then it is right that we should discourage construction of its military arm.

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