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Recalibrating CSDP-NATO Relations: The Real Pivot

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In an age of major power shifts, which we know from history always to be particularly dangerous, different scenarios are possible; the only promising one is that of more and well-structured international cooperation. Yet, critical voices point at a drifting apart of longstanding allies. Recalibrating CSDP-NATO relations has become more important than ever.

Are long-standing allies drifting apart? In the US, struggling with budget deficits, questions such as “Is current US security strategy not stimulating free-riding by allies and friends?”, or “NATO: what is in it for us?“, and even “Should the US not withdraw from NATO’s military command structure?”¹, are more than ever coming to the fore. In Europe on the other hand, even if some worry about the effects of the “the US pivot to Asia”, many are still looking to the US to take ultimate responsibility for crisis management operations. The effect of the post-Iraq/post-Afghanistan context in the US and the real meaning of

“leadership from behind” are not that well understood in Europe. The message that at times it will be up to Europeans to take responsibility has not come across. Consequently, so far Europeans have not achieved more coherence in defence capabilities, let alone more integration – barely some limited cooperation and minimal savings. Persistent shortfalls in military capabilities are not being met, quite the contrary.

All of this signals the absence of transatlantic dialogue. And as to the institutional dialogue between NATO and the EU/CSDP, it is difficult to label that constructive or successful. Yet, there is one common concern: austerity. Its impact on defence on both sides of the Atlantic can hardly be overestimated. Quoting Churchill – “Gentlemen, we have run out of money. Now we must think” – may inspire us to give serious thought to a renewed transatlantic relationship, in particular to an appropriate CSDP-NATO link.

Until recently, the common view was that putting this issue on the political agenda would be counterproductive – and rightly so. Many well-intended efforts in that sense have fallen victim to lethal *collateral* damage due to the asymmetric membership. The Turkey-Cyprus issue is of the utmost importance – and must therefore be dealt with at the highest political level and not be reduced to a secondary issue dealt with in the slipstream of revisiting arrangements between NATO and CSDP. Confusing those two debates effectively is counterproductive. Today, after more than a decade of hesitation, it is time to develop the CSDP-NATO relationship on a new basis. The objective of this paper is to present some practical recommendations to that end, to be part and parcel of a strong transatlantic dialogue. To arrive at these recommendations, we will examine the new posture of the US and the EU, major changes in NATO and CSDP, and the way crisis management operations are conducted.

THE US: REMARKABLE CONTINUITY ENTAILING TREMENDOUS CHANGE

After having been drawn into two World Wars and with the Cold War looming, the US was naturally propelled into the role of “leading nation”, in particular within the transatlantic community. It took the lead for about half a century, by stationing troops abroad, providing for reinforcements and strategic transport whenever required, ensuring overall strategic balance and, indeed, by determining the security strategy for the whole of the Alliance and its friends. Since the end of the Cold War the political environment has changed drastically. And so has the US.

However, a closer look at the American position in the present geopolitical context reveals that its grand strategy remains reasonably intact: defending its position in the world, politically, economically and militarily. But there is a shift towards a new area of concern, the Asian and Pacific region: the so-

called “pivot”. Consequently, there is a shift in the location and numbers of US soldiers stationed abroad, but that shift remains remarkably small.

Furthermore, for the first time since the early 1990s, the US defence budget will decrease substantially over the next decade. But then again, since World War II there have been several ups and downs in the DOD budget. This time however the impact on allies and friends may be quite different. Even if the US maintains its leadership in NATO, it expects from the Europeans a more balanced burden-sharing. Free-riding has now, more than ever, become an issue. Many experts agree that in the past the US was seen as the overall guarantor of security, allowing partners to steadily lower their defence expenditure without having to fear direct or even indirect consequences. Now, it is clear that the US no longer sees Europe as a security consumer but as a security provider. In the context of crisis management operations, this boils down to: “dear allies and friends, sometimes you will be on your own!” To conclude, even if the current US security strategy is more a rebalancing of its efforts than a full pivot to Asia, Europeans are under gentle pressure from Washington to recalibrate their defence effort. So, the ball is in the European camp, with Washington being one of the strongest supporters to develop an effective and efficient CSDP.

THE EU: NO OPTION BUT BECOMING THE ACTOR OF ITS FUTURE

For the Europeans and the EU as such, the general picture looks quite different. During the atypical period of the Cold War, from a European perspective, the security paradigm appeared remarkably self-evident.

At present, that certainty has all but evaporated. The crisis in former Yugoslavia was a wake-up call, demonstrating for all to see the absence of a European security strategy

and of any structures to steer a crisis management operation of limited magnitude in Europe's own backyard. Saint-Malo signalled to European countries that any ambition to alter this situation leaves them no other option than to rebuild their respective sovereignties at the level of the EU, as they already did for so many other vital "national" policies. Four decades after the rejection of a European Defence Community, the taboo that rested on "defence" as part of the European construction was lifted. Saint-Malo thus symbolises a first and most remarkable paradigm shift.

However, in practice Saint-Malo was only about gathering some military capabilities for potential "peacekeeping operations", while "agreeing to disagree" on strategy. For some it was about becoming a more significant contributor during such military operations with the purpose of gaining influence on decision-making in Washington; for others it was about the ability to launch autonomous EU operations. This ambiguity led many countries to believe that listing some of their existing capabilities in an EU catalogue would do the job and that when push would come to shove, any shortfalls would in any case be filled by NATO – read by the US. That implicit paradigm is on its way out.

Experience has shown that – if there is sufficient political will – European countries are able to deploy and sustain quite impressive numbers of troops. On the other hand, the operation in Libya once again highlighted that the already identified strategic capability shortfalls (strategic air transport, air-to-air refuelling, ISR, and SEAD) constitute *the* limiting factor for Europeans. Moreover, at present there is little appetite among Europeans to launch operations that could be long-lasting, with many boots on the ground, with potentially many casualties, or considerable collateral damage. The "declared ambition" remains to conduct the whole spectrum of

Petersberg Tasks, up to peace enforcement, but with a strong preference for "quick in, quick out" operations. For Europeans traditionally focussed almost exclusively on maintaining tactical military capabilities, their defence planning is now confronted with a new paradigm. The question now is whether they are still in favour of conducting the high-end Petersberg operations, up to peace enforcement, or not. In short, Europeans need to reach agreement on the role and usefulness of the military instrument within the overall toolbox of external action.

One of the EU's mantras is its strong ambition to act preventively. "We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and when necessary, robust intervention. [...] Preventive engagement can avoid more serious problems in the future", states the 2003 European Security Strategy. However, operations in Libya and Mali have made clear that setting up preventive crisis management operations, let alone urgent interventions, remains among the structural weaknesses of the Union. Ad hoc solutions have shown their limits and can no longer hide the need for a more structured approach, for the ability to call on permanent capabilities for planning and conduct of crisis management operations, and for stand-by assets to implement them. That very sensitive paradigm shift is in the making.

Finally, the paradigm that CFSP and CSDP are to be built exclusively through a bottom-up approach with no need for any top-down steering is running out of steam. With the Lisbon Treaty the European External Action Service was created to bridge "the supranational" and "the intergovernmental" in security matters. It has started to develop sub-strategies, each focused on a specific region, such as the Sahel or the Horn of Africa. However, recent events prove that such sub-strategies, valuable though they are, must be anchored in a much broader strategy, which

moreover needs to be well known and supported by the Heads of State and Government. On defence matters, the Lisbon Treaty produced all the instruments to provide effective top down direction. The respective white books or defence plans of the Member States, all established in more or less splendid isolation, have produced so far an impressive list of redundant military capabilities at the EU level, which far outnumber the list of shortfalls. All these are good reasons for the December European Council on Defence to tackle crisis management and the corresponding military capability requirements, and to provide effective top-down steering. If not a new paradigm, this is at least a major change in policy.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT: SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT THESE DAYS

In crisis management there is no such thing as soft or hard power. There are but instruments of soft and hard power. Recent experience has made it evident, once more, that real power lies in a holistic and tailored approach, and in the ability to mobilize all of the required means at the right moment. The weakest link is determining the final outcome. The military and civilian capabilities deployed are simply catalysts, and even then if and only if, on the ground, within local communities and in the region, some crucial political ingredients are present. For durable solutions to be possible, the economic dimension must be brought in as well. *Primus inter pares* is the political factor: a clear desired political end-state that fits into a longer-term strategy. Such a holistic and well-tailored approach is no longer simply a desirable objective in crisis management, but a necessity.

In this context the strategic headquarters for planning and conduct of operations acquires a totally different meaning. Such a strategic HQ is to integrate all factors. Its scope goes beyond the traditional 3D approach; in the light of the growing “economization” of security, economic policies are to be integrated as well into an overarching roadmap leading to the desired end-

state. All of these dimensions must be represented in the “civil-military strategic HQ, their respective competences and specificities acknowledged. The aim is to safeguard unity of direction or unity of command in each and every distinct area, while at the same time ensuring overall coherence. This calls for permanent structures, which is indeed common practice at the national level in countries experienced in crisis management, as well as in some international organisations. Only thus can a strategic HQ be structurally part of the overall holistic set-up.

At the military level, the US has set up six permanent regional unified combat commands. Among them US Europe Command (USEUCOM), which is in no way considered to be duplicating NATO’s strategic HQ, SHAPE, because in the US system, whenever operations are conducted, the principle of supporting and support HQ is applied to all of the permanent combat or force HQs. In the EU however, the strategic military HQ is still in the making. For well-known political reasons, progress has had to remain under the radar screen. The paradox is that the current organisation within the Union is rendering any preventive or urgent action impossible. Moreover, not only is an EU strategic HQ essential in a command and control structure, but it too has to be complemented by appropriate force or combat HQs.

The final observation on crisis management is that the specificities of a given crisis will determine the international organisation, the country, or the group of countries best placed to take the lead. All of this pleads in favour of recalibrating CSDP-NATO relations.

NATO IS TRANSFORMED

NATO remains *the* transatlantic forum to deal with collective defence and military interoperability, but also to conduct military crisis management operations when North

American and European countries decide to join forces.

NATO is an excellent forum to generate military capacity through its force generation conferences among Allies and partners. Moreover, it has access to some irreplaceable capabilities, in particular several highly specialised force HQs, co-financed by Allies. However, NATO lacks the various civilian components needed for a comprehensive approach. This constitutes a kind of mirror image to EU – and another good reason to redefine arrangements between the two.

To a large extent the “Berlin Plus” arrangement still defines the relationship between CSDP and NATO. But it has in effect never been applied in the circumstances for which it was designed, i.e. to provide support to the EU “when NATO as such is not involved”. Berlin Plus was used only for post-conflict management, transferring from a NATO to an EU operation, and never under time pressure. Supporting urgent or even preventive EU operations would be quite a challenge.

Berlin Plus has outlived itself. At the time it was about “no Discrimination, no Duplication, no Decoupling”, creating, in political terms, the notion of hierarchy between NATO and CSDP. But this did not stop unproductive competition between NATO and CSDP. Today, it is well-known that for political reasons Berlin Plus cannot be used. It is time to turn a dysfunctional CSDP-NATO relationship into a constructive and future-oriented one.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

THREE CS UNDERPINNING A NEW CSDP- NATO RELATIONSHIP

The new geopolitical environment creates valuable opportunities. The US is ending two wars in Central Asia. European countries are repatriating their military forces as well. The US is rebalancing its posture. In the EU we are embarked on a process of *Europeanising* all

policies constituting our international relations. Part of that endeavour is bringing ever closer the defence policies of the Member States, forging a Common Security and Defence Policy leading to a common European defence. Throughout the Atlantic all of our nations have national obligations and military tasks to ensure at home, but will be called upon ever more to operate in an international context. All of us are faced with tight budgets. Defence matters, defence budgets as well, but so does the justified expectation that the defence effort achieves maximum efficiency and effectiveness. This requires standing arrangements, allowing for prevention, rapid action, and being part of reconstruction whenever required. This implies all partners to assume responsibility and show solidarity. In that context, it is not advisable to suggest that the US leave the military structure of NATO. It is advisable for the EU to be more present in the Alliance. A sense of urgency is justified at this pivotal moment. Time has come to create a new era in the NATO-CSDP relationship. Recommendations to do so are offered in 3 distinct domains.

Co-operation

- Establish a new deal on security, a transatlantic Strategic Security Compact, codifying a broad concept of security, analyzing the challenges posed by a multipolar world, and aspiring to joint strategy and coordinated action to offer the right solutions. This compact should be part and parcel of the EU-US Strategic Partnership.
- Convene regular and structured bilateral EU and US meetings in the context of the transatlantic Strategic Security Compact to enhance effectiveness and better support today’s “multi-bilateral” scheme. Analyse the possibility of deepening permanent liaison arrangements, not only through embassies but also between relevant

policy-making and executive bodies, e.g. between the EEAS and the National Security Council.

- This bilateral EU-US partnership should inspire the debate at the level of CSDP and NATO.

“It is important to avoid doing ‘too little too late’”

Co-ownership

- Implement new structures for dialogue between NATO and CSDP based on full participation, on both sides, of all Nations and Members States. Joint meeting at all levels of both organisations should be allowed to deal at all times with issues related to all on-going or potential crisis management operations, in whatever international context.
- Whenever a military operation is launched by the EU or NATO, apply a supporting-supported approach in both directions allowing for the transfer or dual use of both NATO’s and the EU’s collective assets and capabilities: the HQs, centres of excellence, training facilities etc. In this context, establish command and control arrangements for such transfer, in particular of a specific HQ from one organisation into the chain of command of the other when it has the lead in a given operation.
- Synergies on military capabilities, and in particular on civil-military and even dual use capabilities, should be jointly explored.

Capabilities

- Develop for the EU member states an appropriate level of strategic autonomy, allowing in specific cases to prepare, plan and conduct operations without being

dependent on direct support from US military capabilities.

- Implement an effective decision-making process allowing emergency action by both NATO and the EU, underpinned by arrangements for immediate mutual support. Establish liaisons teams between the Strategic HQs of both NATO and the EU, the latter to be further strengthened and thus to become permanent.
- Coordinate the defence planning of countries, ensuring on the one hand that EU member states are able to set up operations for the whole spectrum of the Petersberg Tasks and on the other hand that missions commonly agreed upon in NATO are adequately supported as well. In this context the defence planning of European member states will focus on identifying and reducing existing redundancies at the EU level, solving the already identified shortfalls, maximising “pooling and sharing”, prioritising future requirements, and favouring multilateral solutions while ensuring corresponding national budgetary margins to do so.
- For EU member states, in the spirit of Permanent Structured Cooperation, develop a co-leadership of countries that have the will to become the engine of Europe in defence and security (capabilities, operations, budget).
- Preserve current procedures and practices to ensure interoperability between the forces of members and partners of NATO and the EU. The Connected Forces Initiative offers a promising way forward in this regard. Intensified multinational education and training is key to maintaining capable, knowledge-based militaries.

EPILOGUE

Must the dialogue between CSDP and NATO remain impossible, for “well-known reasons”? More and more, the relevance of NATO is becoming an issue of pressing importance for Americans and Europeans alike. Should they connect their respective forces, how, and at what cost? The relationship between the EU and Turkey is important as well, but of a different nature and magnitude, and will therefore not to be solved in the slipstream of any renewed CSDP-NATO relationship. Continuing to link these issues will at best lead to a standstill in the relationship, which is a luxury that we can no longer afford. Within our transatlantic community we have a longstanding tradition of confronting highly sensitive issues and subsequently solving them. The same is true within the process of European integration. Mutual respect for autonomy is another tradition to keep. Rearticulating and deepening CSDP-NATO relations is undoubtedly a good step to transcend the present blockage.

Events dear boy, events. The specificities of a given crisis always determine the international organization, the country or group of countries best placed to take the lead in crisis management operations. The more options available, the better. Some argue that NATO is no longer set to launch any military operation of some magnitude. Others argue that CSDP is finished. We believe that both these convictions about the future are reckless and wrong. Circumstances will dictate. Credibility and cohesion will be of the essence, for CSDP as for NATO, which calls for mutual support, not for competition.

Europe’s defence will be European or not. By nature a European defence policy has to be part of a comprehensive foreign policy and of a global European security strategy even, covering both the internal and external aspects of security. In this context CSDP and NATO are but subsets, although of the first importance. Not that long ago, European countries tried to forge European

defence outside the structures of the EU by turning to the Western European Union. An experiment not to be repeated. Setting up a kind of European pillar (or caucus for that matter) in NATO surely is a useful technical instrument for the purpose of internal coordination within the Alliance. But by no means can such a pillar substitute for a comprehensive security and defence policy of the Union and its Member States. Consistency and synchronisation of efforts will be of the essence.

Military Capabilities. Military capabilities are of the essence. It is an illusion to hope that optimizing the institutional relations between CSDP and NATO will generate additional capabilities. The added value lies in making better use of existing capabilities and expertise, creating a win-win situation through a “supporting and supported” approach during crisis management operations. Hence the proposed 3 Cs and in particular the suggestion to replace the concept of “assured access to NATO’s planning capacities” by “assured transfer of NATO’s assets and capabilities to the EU”, notably C2 structures to be inserted in a modular way into overarching C2 structures of the EU. Vice versa the UE is to support NATO operations by providing specific capabilities and instruments it has developed within the framework of CSDP and in other areas relevant to crisis management, including support and expertise that can be provided by the EU Commission.

Too daring proposals or too short-term? The recommendations put forward in this paper may at first glance look rather daring, but they are but a continuation and enhancement of both CSDP and NATO as autonomous but cooperative projects. The profound modifications which both CSDP and NATO will undergo in the years and decades to come may reveal these recommendations to be unsustainable in the long term, to be replaced

by more profound adjustments. In the meantime though it is important to avoid doing “too little too late”.

This calls for a strategic reflection, on all sides. A message to be taken on board at the upcoming European Council on defence in December 2013 and at the NATO summit in 2014.

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