



★ ★ ★
★ Senior
★ European
Experts

The EU's Common Security & Defence Policy

The EU's Common Security & Defence Policy

Introduction

The aim of the Common Security & Defence Policy (CSDP) is to give the EU a politico-military capability for European-led operations where the US and/or NATO do not want to be involved, for example for peacekeeping and other military and security tasks, without undermining the importance of NATO as the provider of territorial defence for most Member States.

This paper, which explains the background to recent developments in the CSDP, is complementary to the Senior European Experts paper on the Common Foreign & Security Policy (CFSP) and to a number of short papers on EU military operations.

Background

The Maastricht Treaty (1992) brought defence policy into the EU for the first time but the arrangements for giving it effect (through the Western European Union) came rapidly to be seen as ineffectual. Recognising this, and chastened by the weak European military showing in the Balkans in the 1990s, the United Kingdom and France went a stage further at a bilateral summit at St. Malo in 1998. Their joint initiative was adopted by the European Council in Cologne in 1999 (at the same time as the appointment of Javier Solana as High Representative for the Common Foreign & Security Policy) as the new European Security and Defence Policy (since renamed). As the Cologne communiqué put it:

the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and the readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO.

Details of the new approach were fleshed out at the Helsinki European Council in December 1999 and have been developed since. They included ambitious force goals (a corps level – up to 60,000 troops – deployment capability by 2003, later postponed to 2010) and new command, control and politico-military structures (Military Committee, Military Staff, political control by the Political and Security Committee). They also included ambitious capabilities on the civilian (civ-mil) side to promote preventive action to forestall war as well as to win the peace. As with NATO, there is no standing army, only national units voluntarily assigned on each occasion for joint operations.

It was agreed that the EU in CSDP could act “where NATO as a whole is not engaged” and could either draw on NATO assets, including for operational planning, or act autonomously for small scale operations. Tasks could range from humanitarian relief operations through

peace-keeping to peace-making (the so-called Petersberg tasks developed in the 1990s by the WEU and incorporated into the EU Treaty in 2000).

The EU's European Security Strategy provides the agreed framework for policy in this area. The details of the strategy, originally adopted in 2003 and revised in the light of changing security circumstances in 2008, are summarised in a separate SEE paper 'The EU's Security Strategy'. The importance of the strategy was that it set out the potential threats to EU Member States and what the EU could do, by means of co-operation amongst its members, in response. The five threats identified by the strategy are:

- terrorism;
- the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD);
- regional conflicts;
- state failure; and
- organised crime.

Territorial defence remains a matter for NATO for the majority of Member States – 22 of the 28 belong to NATO – and the Treaty explicitly states that the EU's defence policy shall "respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation".¹

More recently the European Defence Agency was set up in 2004 (see below) and a concept of (mostly multi-national) battle groups developed, each 1500 strong. Two out of the eighteen earmarked battle groups must be deployable at any one time in a six-monthly rotation, at very short notice, for urgent and short operations. The British provided one of these battle groups in 2008 and 2013 and a joint Anglo-Dutch battle group was on standby in 2010. Battle groups have yet to see military action, a fact that has raised doubts about the concept's effectiveness. The 2013 review of EU defence and security policy (see below) suggested further adaptations to the battle groups were needed to make them easier to utilise and to deploy.

The Lisbon Treaty made no fundamental changes to ESDP except to create an obligation on Member States to come to one another's defence in the unlikely event of armed aggression against one of them – but this is an obligation on Member States and not on the EU. The Treaty also renamed the ESDP the Common Security & Defence Policy (CSDP).

Initial American doubts were not at first easy to overcome, with some Washington critics seeing CSDP as either a threat to their and NATO interests or too feeble to be effective (although it is hard to see how it could be both). It is now better understood in Washington and was supported by the Bush and now the Obama administrations. The US recognises that the EU is able to make a contribution when NATO and the US do not wish to do so, or (in the case of civilian measures), cannot make one so well.

¹ NATO members: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom

Structure & Decision-making

The rules and procedure for the EU's defence policy are set out in the Treaty on European Union. Article 42 says that the common security and defence policy shall be "an integral part" of the CFSP. It shall, it continues, "provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets" which the EU can use "on missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter". The forces needed for this purpose would come from Member States; the EU, like NATO, has no standing "European Army", nor the power to create one.

Article 42(2) refers to the possibility of the EU framing a common defence policy, to be agreed unanimously by the European Council, but this is an aspiration and requires the approval of Member States "in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements". Given that four Member States (Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden) are neutral or non-aligned and two others (Cyprus and Malta) are also non-members of NATO, a common defence policy is likely to remain no more than an aspiration.

EU decisions on defence require unanimity in the Council of Ministers or the European Council, reflecting the highly sensitive nature of the subject. Proposals for action in this area can be proposed by the High Representative or by a Member State. A key feature of the Treaty provisions is the explicit statement that the Council can decide to entrust responsibility for implementing a defence decision to a group of Member States.

The management of EU defence policy day-to-day lies with the Political and Security Committee, a meeting of representatives of the Member States working under the direction of their governments at ambassadorial level and which takes its decisions by consensus. The EU Military Committee, whose role is advisory, is composed of the Chiefs of Defence Staff of Member States or their permanent representatives. A small EU Military Staff, made up of personnel seconded by Member States, works as part of the secretariat of the Council to support the Military Committee.

The EU has an agreement with NATO, referred to as the "Berlin Plus" arrangements, which enables it to call on NATO assets for its operations. This reflects the very limited capacity within the EU's institutions to plan, implement and manage an operation because the EU does not have a military planning and command structure like that of NATO.

The EU's External Action Service, created by the Lisbon Treaty to bring together services previously divided between the Commission and the Council Secretariat, now has an improved crisis management capability in both the military and civilian fields, designed to increase efficiency and effectiveness by bringing together relevant resources, experts and advisers quickly.

A further recent development has been the agreement at EU-level of regional strategies for parts of the world where the EU has particular interests. Current strategies, for example, cover the Sahel region of Africa and the Horn of Africa. Regional strategies are designed to bring together different aspects of external policy, such as trade and development, with security, including capacity-building in partner countries. The Council of Ministers agreed in November

2013 that further regional strategies need to be adopted and that there could be a greater security role for the EU in one particular region of critical importance, the Western Balkans.²

A key issue for the EU is inadequate co-ordination between the armed forces of its Member States in fields such as weapons procurement. The European Defence Agency (EDA) was established to improve the capability of Member States in defence. Its role is to act as a catalyst, promoting ideas that improve military capability and capacity in the EU but it is up to the Member States to implement them.

An important success for the EDA was the agreement between a number of Member States in 2009 to establish a European Air Transport Fleet. The Fleet pools assets and capabilities in order to improve the inadequate fixed wing military transport capacity of individual EU Member States. The initial 12 countries have subsequently been joined by a further 7 members, including Norway, the only non-EU country involved. Several Member States have gone further and developed the European Air Transport Command (EATC), a joint military operation based at Eindhoven in the Netherlands which involves the pooling of parts of the air transport and air-to-air refuelling assets of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxemburg and the Netherlands under a single command; Italy will be joining in 2014. EATC has organised air transport, including to support the French military operation in Mali in 2013, to evacuate foreign nationals from South Sudan and to provide emergency aid to the Philippines. The UK has not joined the EATC but worked in co-operation with it when providing its own aircraft to support the deployment of French forces to Mali in 2013.

Military Operations

A number of military or civilian-military operations have been carried out under CSDP, notably in Africa (Darfur), the Balkans (Macedonia and Bosnia), the Middle East (Rafah border crossing between Gaza/Egypt) and even South East Asia (Aceh). The largest operation to date has been the establishment of the EUFOR mission in Bosnia (some 7000 military personnel when it was first established but now down to 600), which took over from the NATO peacekeeping force there in 2005.

The largest operation currently under way is Operation Atalanta, the EU mission to deal with piracy off the Horn of Africa. This operation is described in greater detail in the Senior Experts paper, 'EU Peacekeeping and Somalia'. It involves over 1,200 largely naval and some military personnel and has been running since 2008. The total number of attacks in the area covered has fallen from a peak of 176 in 2011 to 7 in 2013; this is a major success for the EU operation, together with its partners from other nations.³

One of the key strengths of the EU is its ability to combine military and civilian elements in order to assist a country where there is or has been conflict to re-establish civil society. Current civilian missions under the auspices of the CSDP include police training in Afghanistan, the provision of unarmed civilian monitors on the tense borders within Georgia since the ceasefire that ended the brief conflict in 2008 between Georgia and Russia and a mission in Libya since May 2013 to help that country improve the security of its borders.

² European Council, *Council conclusions on Common Security and Defence Policy*, 25 November 2013

³ European Union External Action Service, 'Key Facts and Figures', 20 January 2013

Following the outbreak of violence in northern Mali in 2012, the French Government sent forces to support the Malian Government. The EU provided, from January 2013, a 500 personnel military training mission as part of wider EU policies to stabilise Mali. In January 2014 the EU agreed to supply a small military force in support of those the African Union and of France in the Central African Republic, where internal strife has led to appalling violence between communities and the collapse of effective government.

Future Developments & the 2013 Review

While the CSDP is still work in progress, the EU through CSDP has been making a low-key, but increasing and real contribution to international peace and security. There have been a number of operations which show that the CSDP is a working policy and not mere declarations of intent. After a decade since the adoption of its security strategy in 2003, however, the EU decided that a review of its defence policy was necessary.

The desire for a review in 2013 reflected the fact that issues of political leadership and of effectiveness remain. Divisions over military action to protect Libyan civilians in 2011 demonstrated that Europeans, whether in NATO or the EU, do not find it easy to reach agreement on actions involving the use of force. In that instance the British and French stepped into the gap left by the US desire that Europe should lead what became a NATO air operation with the EU providing other forms of support where there was agreement, such as for humanitarian aid and for sanctions against the Gaddafi regime. Similar disagreements between Member States arose over suggestions of the use of force in Syria in 2013, although it was not suggested that the EU itself should be involved.

The question of the effectiveness of Europe's military forces remains a major issue. The defence cuts as a result of austerity measures since the global financial crisis are making the need for greater European co-operation more urgent. The total defence budgets of the 28 Member States of the EU is about a third of the US defence budget, yet the EU Member States have half a million more personnel in uniform. They spend a smaller share of their budgets than the US on defence research and can only deploy overseas a fraction of what the US is able to deploy in expeditionary forces. Furthermore, the EU 27 spend one-third per soldier of what the US spends on equipment and training.⁴ This situation partly reflects the absence of economies of scale because there are 28 national military command structures and 28 defence budgets. Nonetheless, groups of EU Member States could work together to increase capabilities and to make more use of those they have. The Anglo-Dutch joint battle-group, the larger plans for Anglo-French co-operation and the European Air Transport Command are successful examples of this approach.

Influenced by the events of recent years, the 2013 review, which was completed by the European Council in December 2013, identified a number of ways in which the CSDP needs to be improved:

strengthening effectiveness, visibility and impact

- measures under this heading include improving the military and civilian rapid response capability and speeding up the deployment of civilian missions; the

⁴ Cited in Thomas Valasek, *Surviving austerity: the case for a new approach to EU military collaboration*, Centre for European Reform, 13 April 2011, p. 1

European Council highlighted the need for the EU to develop capacity in cyber defence, improve maritime security and to strengthen border management;

enhancement of capability

- under this heading, the European Council emphasised the need for more co-operation between Member States in the development of military capabilities, particularly through the projects run by the European Defence Agency (in which the UK participates) relating to cyber defence, remotely piloted air systems (drones) and air-to-air refuelling;

strengthening Europe's defence industry

- the European Council called for a more innovative, integrated and competitive European defence industry with mutual recognition of military standards and more collaboration between civil and military research.

The 2013 review did not lead to a step-change in the development of EU defence policy; the European Council opted for a nudge on the tiller. They reiterated the importance of NATO for the defence of the majority of Member States while continuing to push the EU to develop its limited military capacity in new ways. This indicates that EU defence policy will continue to proceed, as the Treaties require, on a voluntary, co-operative basis and missions will only be deployed where there is unanimous agreement that they should be.

May 2012; revised February 2014



Senior European Experts

The Senior European Experts Group is an independent body consisting of former high-ranking British diplomats and civil servants, including several former UK ambassadors to the EU, and former officials of the institutions of the EU.

The group provides high-quality, fact based briefing materials on EU issues.



senioreuropeanexperts.org



info@senioreuropeanexperts.org



[@SEE_Group](https://twitter.com/SEE_Group)