

The Libyan Operation and Europe's Role in Defence and Security

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Summary

In the medium-term, and as witnessed during the recent operation in Libya, there may not be any dramatic change regarding the impact and shape of the Common Security and Defence Policy. For now, the CSDP and NATO are still compatible because the CSDP's initial goals are still unfulfilled; but in the future, how its relationship with NATO will evolve is uncertain. If European countries were to strongly boost their military capabilities, to the point that they fulfil the initial goals of the Saint-Malo Declaration, one may see the beginning of a new era of increased European contribution to defence and security. At the same time, this would pose new issues for its relationship with NATO and the United States in terms of sharing the burden of such responsibilities. In any case, the transatlantic relationship will also depend on the quality of the relationship between the United States and its European allies. As of today, seen as a whole in the multiplicity of its policies and within a broader understanding of the concept of security, part of a larger foreign policy framework, the European Union seems to be responding to an evolving world and has more and more means to articulate a relevant position that will enable it to be the meaningful and effective global actor that it has aspired to become. Yes, Libya led Europeans a little further, but much remains to be done to turn Europe into a single, effective and efficient actor in the field of defence.

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, met with National Transitional Council (NTC) Chairman Abdel Jalil in Libya on November 12, 2011, marking the end of the successful NATO operation. However, this success was not that of the Common Security and Defence Policy [CSDP, formerly called the ESDP and the defence branch of the European Union's (EU) Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)] - rather it was a success of a European initiative pushed within the NATO framework. These developments therefore provide an occasion to reflect on the European Union's role in defence and security affairs in the short and medium-terms.

Within the Union, Member States have on several occasions shown differentiated, if not divided, responses to international events. In this context, the Franco-British partnership has provided an engine for European military action, although irregularly and outside the frame of the CFSP.

This absence of internal cohesion and the lack of European military capabilities have spurred criticism from the United States, which has pressed Europe to shoulder its fair share of the security burden. At the same time, Americans have been concerned about the development of the ESDP insofar as the consolidation of an autonomous European defence and security force would be a potential challenger to the pre-eminence of NATO.¹ Yet, today, in view of the continuing lack of autonomy of ESDP/CSDP vis-à-vis NATO, this apprehension seems less relevant. Despite several noteworthy achievements, a number of constraints exist and they lead one to believe that a strong role for a united Europe in matters of defence and security may not develop significantly in the coming years.

The Lessons of the Libya Mission: Europe Divided

As mentioned earlier, the prominent European role in the Libyan operation was not the collective victory of European defence policy. Even though European countries today share a common line on Libya, one witnessed the same scenario of initial dissension that occurred in 2003: back then, France and Germany had opposed the war in Iraq, while countries such as the United Kingdom and Poland had actively supported the US position. This time, similarly, Member States disagreed over the suggestion of a no-fly zone over Libya, which *de facto* made the use of CSDP out of question.² Germany abstained on the UN vote for a resolution on Libya. In doing so, it found itself in the company of China

¹ The abbreviations ESDP and CSDP are used interchangeably. Earlier, policies were devised for the ESDP, which, since the Lisbon Treaty (2009), has been re-coined as CSDP.

² Toby Vogel, "EU divided over Libya", <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2011/march/eu-divided-over-libya/70525.aspx>.

and Russia, though for different reasons, and stood firmly by her post World War II preference for civilian solutions.³

On the other hand, the Libyan operation has shown the will of a strong Franco-British core, which had also crucially pushed for a European defence initiative through the Saint-Malo Declaration (1998). The Joint Anglo-French communiqué, adopted on November 10, illustrates a renewed commitment to a strong relationship: “the successful outcome of Operation Unified Protector in Libya bolstered our partnership... The parties examined the lessons to be learned at NATO and bilaterally from this UK- and French-led effort.”⁴ Indeed, while the American administration tried to circumscribe its engagement in Libya, France and the United Kingdom proactively favoured intervention.⁵ They strongly promoted the enforcement of a no-fly zone eventually adopted by a United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 in March 2011.⁶ They were also among the first countries to act militarily. Thus, these European countries demonstrated their will and capacity to significantly engage during the recent NATO-led operation in Libya.

In view of the milder involvement of France and the United Kingdom in the ongoing Syrian turmoil, the operation in Libya may suggest that the Franco-British dynamic in defence works particularly well when recognizable national interests are at stake. This was apparent in French foreign minister Alain Juppé’s comments to RTL Radio, when he said:

“What I know is the NTC [National Transitional Council] said very officially that concerning the reconstruction of Libya it would turn in preference to those who helped it. That seems fair and logical to me.”⁷

Allegations of a secret deal between France and Libya exposed by the French newspaper *Libération* last April assuring France of a third of Libya’s oil in exchange for French

³ The idea of a ‘civilian power’ Germany has been debated in academic circles. See S. Harnisch and H. Maull, *Germany as a civilian power?: The foreign policy of the Berlin Republic* (Manchester University Press, 2001).

⁴ *Presidence de la Republique Francaise, Joint Anglo-French Communique*, <http://appablog.wordpress.com/2011/11/10/joint-anglo-french-communique/>.

⁵ As stressed by newspapers, the US “signed on to the ‘time-limited’ mission, with the caveat that European and Arab governments would take the lead.” See, Kim Willsher, “As France takes the reins on, Sarkozy triumphs”, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/mar/20/world/la-fg-libya-sarkozy-20110320>.

⁶ NATO and Libya – Operation Unified Protector, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-B53C80A5-92FA1785/natolive/topics_71652.htm.

⁷ Adam Taylor, “France leads the charge for Libyan oil”, http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-09-01/europe/30128588_1_interim-government-oil-rights-total-crude-oil#ixzz1ecwWAWfP.

support to the NTC, point in the same direction.⁸ Besides oil, domestic reasons, such as the upcoming presidential elections in 2012 in France and the consequent desire of the French president to gain popularity, would have played a role in the decision to engage actively in the operation.⁹

On the British side, the revelation by the Guardian last September that British Petroleum was already in 'private' talks with the NTC¹⁰ and that part of the oil industry had been working with the UK government to change the regime in Libya, also underlines the British interest in Libya's oil.¹¹

That said, this argument has its limits as other countries have expressed the desire to have their share of the pie. Thus, Italy's former Foreign Minister Franco Frattini stressed in August on Italian television that the Italian company ENI '(would) have a No.1 role in the future' in Libya.¹²

In view of this situation, the role of the CSDP as an effective tool for providing defence and security remains doubtful.

Europeans and Americans, NATO and CSDP: Not that Simple an Equation

What about transatlantic relations? To recall, the US government earlier promoted the idea of a European Defence Community. But later the Americans seemed to have feared that a developing ESDP may clash with NATO.

However, in the post Cold War and post-Bosnian war context, it had been increasingly acknowledged that Europeans had to be able to manage the causes of instability in their neighbourhood. The Bosnian war had revealed the substantial capability gap that crippled European action and the change of strategic context had revealed the necessity to rethink the concept of security in Europe.¹³

⁸ Vittorio de Fillipis, "Petrole : l'accord secret entre le CNT et la France", <http://www.liberation.fr/monde/01012357324-petrole-l-accord-secret-entre-le-cnt-et-la-france> (September 2011).

⁹ Angelique Chrisafis, "Sarkozy hopes Libya can boost France's reputation - as well as his own", <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/01/sarkozy-libya-france-reputation-reelection>.

¹⁰ Julian Borger and Terry Macalister, "The race is on for Libya's oil, with Britain and France both staking the claim", http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/01/libya-oil?CMP=twtd_fd.

¹¹ Terry Macalister, "The next war in Libya is the one for oil", <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/02/next-war-libya-one-for-oil>.

¹² Clifford Krauss, "The scramble for access to the Libyan oil wealth begins", <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/23/business/global/the-scramble-for-access-to-libyas-oil-wealth-begins.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹³ A.J.K. Shepherd, "Irrelevant or Indispensable? ESDP, the 'War on Terror' and the Fallout from Iraq", *International Politics* 43 (2006), pp. 71-92.

Spurred by this realisation, France and the United Kingdom stated in the milestone 1998 Franco-British Saint-Malo Declaration that “the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.” The parallel development of the ESDP that resulted from this intention had famously led former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to warn about the necessity to avoid the ‘3D’: discrimination against non-EU NATO members (such as Turkey), decoupling of European/NATO decision-making and duplication of defence resources.¹⁴

Thus, although the Saint-Malo Declaration had made clear that Europeans would act “in conformity with (their) respective obligations in NATO”, “(contribute) to the vitality of a modernised Atlantic Alliance” and “take decisions and approve military action where the Alliance as a whole (was) not engaged”, the US found the ESDP ambiguous, if not problematic. There was a risk of possible competition, whether geographically or sectorally; the same European assets would be needed for NATO and ESDP.

One potential bone of contention with NATO was the agreement between European governments on a European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF), reached nearly a decade ago. Indeed, while ESDP has been changing, NATO has also been undergoing reforms, partly to counter the pervasive critiques of its post-Cold War irrelevance. As mentioned by Robert Gates, one major change was “the transition from a static, defensive force to an expeditionary force – from a defensive alliance to a security alliance,”¹⁵ that is, a broadening of the scope of NATO operations that bring them closer to ESDP operations. This attempt to re-orient itself led to the launch of the NATO Response Force (NRF) in 2002. The coexistence of the ERRF and NRF have raised questions such as: Will there be a possible division of labour? What will be the resource base of the NRF and ERRF, given that, in view of the limited resources of European countries, it would probably be the same? Who will have the command and the right of first refusal? Ultimately, the creation of a more modest force, the EU Battle Group, following the new 2010 Headline Goal, made these questions less relevant.

To a large extent, ESDP missions are still very dependent on NATO assets and planning capabilities, which they use thanks to the 2002 Berlin Plus arrangements. This lack of autonomy, that is the ability to carry out missions independently, appeared again, though in another form; Mission Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, can be considered as autonomous insofar as it did not rely on NATO assets, but the fact

¹⁴ Madeleine K. Albright, “The Right Balance Will Secure NATO’s Future”, *Financial Times*, December 7, 1998.

¹⁵ Robert M. Gates, “Speech on the NATO strategic concept”, February 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/nato/gates-speech-nato-strategic-concept-february-2010/p21518>.

remains that one Member State, namely France, coordinated the operations as the framework nation.¹⁶ This was crucial for its success.¹⁷

Another crucial factor of the Europe-NATO relationship and thereby of the fate of the CSDP is the political will and orientation of key Member States. On the one hand, tensions have been nurtured by divisions between Member States, and consequently between transatlantic allies. One may remember the famous remark made by former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in January 2003, qualifying France and Germany as 'old Europe', as opposed to what would be the pro-US Eastern 'new Europe'. On the other hand, the relationship of Europe with NATO and the United States has been kept ambiguous by the coexistence of two strategic cultures, the British and the French ones, which have envisioned this relationship differently. Traditionally, France has understood the ESDP as a way to build a strong pole of independent European defence, while the UK has seen it as a way to share the burden with NATO, in order to keep the American ally interested in Europe.¹⁸ The 'constructive misunderstanding' that was witnessed by many at the time of the adoption of the European Defence and Security Policy at Saint-Malo, has not disappeared.¹⁹

Despite the recent reintegration of France into the military command of NATO, questions on this issue remain. Moreover, new ESDP structures, such as the creation of a EU planning cell and a liaison team in the EU military staff, have not helped to define a clearer European understanding of 'autonomy' towards NATO.²⁰ As a result of subtle negotiations, they provided ESDP with new tools, but did not impact the current balance between ESDP and NATO.

As noted by commentators, the ESDP has undergone important transformations over the past 10 years.²¹ By 2009, it had already been involved in 23 missions, as diverse as

¹⁶ The EU definition of a framework nation was derived from NATO and WEU concepts and is stated as "a Member State or a group of Member States that has volunteered to, and that the Council has agreed, should have specific responsibilities in an operation over which the EU exercises political control", http://www.assembly-weu.org/en/documents/sessions_ordinaires/rpt/2008/2009.php#P129_11763.

¹⁷ Robert Gates (2010), Note 15.

¹⁸ See J. Howorth, "The EU as Global Actor: Grand Strategy for a Global Grand Bargain?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (3) (2010), pp. 455-474; and J. Howorth and A. Menon, "Still Not Pushing Back: Why the European Union Is Not Balancing the United States", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53 (2009), pp. 727-744.

¹⁹ C. J. Bickerton, B. Irondelle and A. Menon, "Security Co-operation beyond the Nation-State: The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49 (1) (2010), pp.1-21, p. 3.

²⁰ Shepherd (2006), Note 13.

²¹ European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), *European Security and Defence Policy – The First Ten Years*, 2009.

police, observation, peacekeeping, reforms of the judicial system and police training, on several continents. They intervened for instance in Chad, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, missions have showcased the increasing autonomy of EU actions: in March 2003, Operation Concordia replaced NATO troops in Macedonia and was followed by the police mission, Operation Proxima. In June 2003, the EU responded to a request from the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Interestingly, the ESDP developed a strong and integrated civilian dimension through the Petersberg Tasks, which include humanitarian and rescue work, conflict-prevention and peace-keeping as well as post-conflict stabilisation tasks.²² According to some scholars, it has been going towards more long-term civilian stabilization operations and counter-terrorism, instead of only military crisis management operations.²³

In order to enhance its capabilities and effectiveness, and respond to an evolving strategic environment, the European Council approved new targets for the CSDP. These were enumerated notably in the Helsinki Headline Goal (1999), the European Capabilities Action Plan (2002) and the Headline Goal 2010 (2004). The latter states that Member States commit themselves “to be able by 2010 to respond with rapid and decisive action applying a fully coherent approach to the whole spectrum of crisis management operations covered by the Treaty on the European Union.” Last in line, the Lisbon Treaty (2009) showed a renewed European ambition for the ESDP/CSDP and strengthened it with several innovations, among which are the creation of the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European Action Service, a mutual defence clause and a protocol of ‘permanent structured cooperation’.

That said, the most pertinent reproach by the US is about the weakness of Europe’s military power, which also impacts on NATO’s effectiveness. European countries have been engaged in NATO operations, for instance in Afghanistan. 24 EU Member States provided around half the International Security Assistance Force and took part in Provincial Reconstruction Teams.²⁴ But the US feels that this assistance does not meet the requirements and has urged many countries like Germany to expand their military commitments. As the commitment of European countries to the Afghan operations waned, so did the American desire to shoulder the burden alone.

The final speech given by US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates on June 2011 in Brussels,

²² See the Europa glossary at http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/petersberg_tasks_en.htm.

²³ Bickerton et al. (2010), Note 19, p. 4.

²⁴ At the same time, note that the EU as such engaged through a Europol police mission, launched in the Spring 2007 and involving 160 police, law enforcement and justice experts. It also contributed \$ 1.1 billion in aid to Afghanistan through the EC budget from 2002 to 2006.

reflected this sentiment clearly.²⁵ Gates clearly stated that the shortcomings revealed in Libya (as in Afghanistan), “incapability and will”, could put at risk NATO’s “ability to conduct an integrated, effective and sustained air-sea campaign.” Noting that the operation has “shown the potential of NATO, with an operation where Europeans are taking the lead with American support”, he stated “while every alliance member voted for Libya mission, less than half have participated at all, and fewer than a third have been willing to participate in the strike mission. (...) many of those allies sitting on the sidelines do so not because they do not want to participate, but simply because they can’t.” At issue notably was the lack of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets and the shortage of munitions that several allies faced only 11 weeks after the beginning of the operation. This makes the future prospects of the alliance uncertain. He stressed that future American leaders “may not consider the return on America’s investment in NATO worth the cost”, if European defence capabilities keep declining, and the Congress, even more so in a time of budget cuts, may be less willing to expend funds for Europe. The US may turn towards Asia. The remark on “the many areas where U.S. defense engagement and investment in Asia was slated to grow further in coming years” was significant as it alluded to the growing importance of Asia as an American strategic priority.

Bleak Prospects of a Significant European Role

Beyond considerations about NATO-CSDP compatibility, and despite a certain consolidation over the years, numerous challenges remain for the European Common Security and Defence Policy.

Lack of military capabilities in European countries and the related issue of under-financing and investment is today one of the main obstacles to the development of a significant European role. The Capabilities Improvement Conference in 2001 identified several shortfalls, many of which persist despite initiatives such as the creation of the European Defence Agency.

Troops and resources are still lacking. According to the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), although the cumulative defence expenditures of the Member States have increased in absolute terms from 160 billion Euros in 1999 to 210 billion Euros in 2008, they have relatively decreased as a percentage of GDP.²⁶ Robert Gates recently estimated that European defence spending declined ‘by nearly 15 percent in the decade following 9/11’. As a result, and despite the agreed NATO benchmark, only the

²⁵ Robert Gates, “Reflections on the status and future of the transatlantic alliance”, <http://www.securitydefenceagenda.org/Contentnavigation/Activities/Activitiesoverview/tabid/1292/EventType/EventView/EventId/1070/EventDateID/1087/PageID/5141/Reflectionsonthestatusandfutureofthetransatlanticalliance.aspx>.

²⁶ EUISS (2009), Note 21, p. 77.

UK, France, Greece, along with the US and Albania, spend more than two per cent of their GDP on defence.²⁷ The current debt crisis in Europe makes a substantial evolution in the short run highly unlikely.

As Robert Gates underlined, the question would be how to best allocate resources. Pooling resources and specialization are the other alternatives that have demonstrated a positive impact. For instance, during the operation in Libya, they allowed smaller countries such as Norway and Denmark to very effectively contribute; they struck almost one third of the targets, while providing only 12 per cent of strike aircraft.²⁸

Belgium and Canada also made noticeable contributions, as Gates explained, '*with their constrained resources, found ways to do the training, buy the equipment, and field the platforms necessary to make a credible military contribution.*' The Danes have specialized by discarding their submarine fleet and doubling their expeditionary force.²⁹ The 2010 UK-France Defence Cooperation Treaty, which envisions pooling of resources through the development of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, capabilities sharing and closer cooperation (notably on technology), is along the same lines. However, one may wonder what to expect on a larger scale. Defence remains a sensitive sector, which makes pooling of sovereignty an uneasy choice for countries.

The second important issue for CSDP is a lack of flexibility in decision-making, as decisions require unanimity in the Council of the European Union. As a result, and even more so with 27 Member States, decisions are hard to make.

A final problem is a lasting lack of coherence and clarity in European strategy. The 2003 European Security Strategy differs in several points from the 2002 American Security Strategy and seems thus to have helped to shape a European vision, that is, for instance, supportive of multilateralism.³⁰ Even though the Lisbon Treaty has presented renewed European ambitions for the ESDP/CSDP and thus strengthened its profile with several innovations mentioned above, there is the potential to enhance policy coherence, effectiveness and visibility.³¹

²⁷ Robert Gates (2011), Note 25.

²⁸ Example given by Robert Gates in his above-mentioned speech.

²⁹ Robert Gates (2010), Note 15.

³⁰ An important difference, as often argued, is the different approach that the EU takes on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

³¹ European Parliament, "The impact of the Lisbon Treaty on ESDP", Briefing Paper, January 2008, https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:TYw4v-pnE6AJ:www.statewatch.org/news/2008/feb/ep-esdp-lisbon.pdf+%E2%80%98The+impact+of+the+Lisbon+Treaty+on+ESDP%E2%80%99,+Briefing+Paper,+Directorate+General+External+Policies+of+the+Union,+January+2008&hl=en&gl=in&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShEtvkDH3MUWMGwURW5Dnv0R0lmvU-WQ9IYIsvwum9zU5VZ8vGvNV88U2tYfHAKapiTj1MJYeif5SEiFjXielW4yo52T4seHf6U_88d_h2Riy1unXuzZn7YDqwb5uxH9knvmdo&sig=AHIEtbSGAZ9UlxygssuGFECJYxVn4vUgtg&pli=1, p. 3.

On the whole, as proved with the operation in Libya, the very legitimacy and coherence of a European strategy and action seem undermined by parallel, and sometimes contradictory, national foreign policies of Member States. This is partly why Europe has been compared to a ping-pong player, as opposed to the US, along with China and India, which would be regarded as chess players.³²

Conclusion

Thus, today, one may argue that the prospects of a strong role for Europe (i.e. the EU Member States) in matters of defence and security is limited. The future of the CSDP and its role in global politics remains uncertain. In this way, it mirrors the state of the European Union as a whole, which still seems to be looking for its place in a changing context.

In an emerging multipolar world, some scholars envisage a potential success of EU foreign policy and its global contribution more through '*forging multilateral bargains which can drive history forward in co-operative and consensual ways*',³³ as well as through military resources being integrated into the '*broader European integration project*'.³⁴

Within a broader foreign policy that furthers defence aims through non-military means, for instance through support against WMDs and support for multilateralism, the European Union seems to be better equipped. The Lisbon Treaty has given it new means to protect its interests (such as physical security, economic prosperity and value projection) through many policies. From that point of view, the CSDP is only a part of what was sometimes called the European '*grand strategy*'.³⁵

In the medium-term, and as witnessed during the recent operation in Libya, there may not be any dramatic change regarding the impact and shape of the Common Security and Defence Policy. For now, the CSDP and NATO are still compatible because the CSDP's initial goals are still unfulfilled; but in the future, how its relationship with NATO will evolve is uncertain.

Paradoxically, if European countries were to strongly boost their military capabilities, to the point that they fulfil the initial goals of the Saint-Malo Declaration, one may see the beginning of a new era of increased European contribution to defence and security. At the same time, this would pose new issues for its relationship with NATO and the

³² Howorth (2010), Note 18, p. 10.

³³ Ibid, p. 3.

³⁴ M. E. Smith, "A liberal grand strategy in a realist world? Power, purpose and the EU's changing global role", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 18(2) (2011), pp. 144-163.

³⁵ Ibid.

United States in terms of sharing the burden of such responsibilities. In any case, the transatlantic relationship will also depend on the quality of the relationship between the United States and its European allies. As of today, seen as a whole in the multiplicity of its policies and within a broader understanding of the concept of security, part of a larger foreign policy framework, the European Union seems to be responding to an evolving world and has more and more means to articulate a relevant position that will enable it to be the meaningful and effective global actor that it has aspired to become. The CSDP has evolved and matured.

But we are still waiting with Madeleine Albright's plea: 'we want a Europe that can act.'³⁶ Yes, Libya led Europeans a little further, but much remains to be done to turn Europe into a single, effective and efficient actor in the field of defence.

³⁶ Albright, Note 14.