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International Security Programme Workshop Summary

European Security and Defence: Capabilities and Cooperation

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INTRODUCTION

For the third workshop of the European Security and Defence Forum, scholars, policy-makers, experts and members of the private sector gathered in London to contribute to the debates about the future of European security and defence and address some fundamental questions: In an age of severe fiscal restraint, what should European security and defence be for? Can decision-makers actually form unified and coherent decisions about their strategic future? With increasingly diverse risks on the security agenda, which challenges take top priority? How are these challenges best managed, and what lessons can we learn from our approaches to managing them? How does an uncertain strategic environment affect the relationship between government and defence industry? Does it promote greater cooperation or competition within Europe?

From the day's proceedings, it is clear that members of government, academia, and the private sector all share the same primary concern: that of the need to maintain both national and European defence postures in an 'age of austerity.' Strategic objectives – often driven by events – have, since the crash of Lehman Brothers, been underscored by a financial imperative. Though signs of economic recovery are now evident, the knock-on effects of government overspending and military overstretch are taking their toll on countries like Britain and France. Consequently, European countries across the board are being forced to ask difficult questions about how they understand the character of the strategic environment in which they operate, and how they plan to maximise their existing capabilities, as well how to adapt those capabilities in order to afford the greatest flexibility of response.

Session 1 addressed the wider question of the role of collaborative defence and security and Europe, with different viewpoints from America and Europe. In Session 2, practitioners and experts discussed two case studies of European cooperation between NATO and the European Union in the Gulf of Aden and Afghanistan. In Session 3, members of the private and public sectors debated the 'civ-mil' aspects of European security; specifically, how the integrated civil-military approach to conflict is applied to complex situations such as natural or man-made disasters. The final session of the day addressed the way in which differing European approaches to security are manifested in the defence industry. In sum, while some participants remained sanguine about the future of EU-NATO cooperation *on the ground* (or *at sea*, as is the case with the Gulf of Aden), many of the age-old suspicions about Europe from the American viewpoint, or NATO from the EU viewpoint – or indeed the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

from the NATO lens – remain intact. One thing was clear: Europe is in the midst of a ‘crisis of confidence’ in the way it understands and projects itself – and this is a crisis which must be resolved if Europeans are to manage risks effectively within and without its borders.

WHAT ROLE FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE AND SECURITY? A VIEW FROM WASHINGTON AND BRUSSELS

When questioning the coherence – or lack thereof – in the current European security environment, it seems that strategic policy is influenced by two key factors: culture and geopolitics. Firstly, European countries often create policy in accordance with their culture, which includes their foreign policymaking tradition, their values, and their historical narrative. Often, differing cultural interpretations result in contrasting policies. Furthermore, security and defence policy is also defined in terms of shifting geopolitical realities. For instance, some countries place a much higher priority than others on energy security, and this will in turn influence their foreign policy. The potential for these differences is perhaps one reason why one Zbigniew Brzezinski points to the lack of a common voice in Europe: that the EU itself lacks a common perception of its role in the world – to which one could add that even NATO lacks a coherent understanding of itself. According to one participant, Brzezinski's viewpoint is largely shared by the Washington policy establishment - to American decision-makers, Europe often appears as a squabbling entity which can seldom present a unified image of itself to the world, and thus can seldom be relied upon as a cohesive actor. As the speaker noted, America judges Europe on its *contribution*, while Europe wishes to be judged according to its *potential*. Despite Europe's contribution of approximately 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, commentators often wax lyrical of President Obama's near dismissal of Europe, as his administration's attention is most often turned toward the Asia-Pacific region or even Russia. As participants indicated, the lack of consultation by Washington with its European allies over the dismissal of General McChrystal from the top post in Afghanistan in June 2010 is a clear example of this policy turn away from Europe.

From the European viewpoint, many observers question just how different Obama's strategic objectives are to those of George W. Bush. Is the global war on terror still America's defining strategic priority? If so, is it just the 'GWOT' (Global War on Terror) by another name? As one participant noted, Norway gave President Obama the Nobel Peace Prize, so Europeans clearly viewed him as drastically different to his predecessor. In such a way, Obama appeals to those who prefer the 'civ' aspects of military conflict: as several participants remarked, his policy in Afghanistan is a decided shift away from America's 'hunt the terrorist' operations to a broader counter-insurgency policy. Indeed, with regard to Afghanistan, many countries under the EU banner emphasise the importance of the 'comprehensive approach' (CA) – a policy which was coined by the British and adopted by NATO, but as one

speaker noted, has been 'high-jacked' by the EU, which considers itself as 'more appropriate' than other actors to handle the 'civ' aspects of conflict. Thus, although the CA is interpreted differently from culture to culture, it broadly means the same thing within the European Union in that it is viewed as a civilian approach to armed conflict, rather than as a development/stabilisation aspect of an essentially military policy.

Accordingly, as one participant elucidated, Europe and European states have different objectives for NATO and different objectives for the European Union. Though they draw on the same troops for these institutions, they may prefer one to the other in order to carry out a specific action. However, when blamed by observers like Brzezinski for a lack of cohesion, the staunch supporters of the EU often point a finger at NATO, and the NATO champions in turn blame their EU counterparts for disrupting a coherent vision. In short, the EU side questions the continued relevance of NATO, and the NATO side questions the efficacy of the EU. However, as several participants questioned, it might actually be the bureaucratic hindrances and administrative capacities themselves which prevent the formulation and expression of a European strategic vision. Therefore, viewed through its institutions, European security and defence can rarely – if ever – appear to be of one common strategic vision. Consequently, several speakers vociferously argued that Europe is the midst of a 'crisis of confidence' and a 'crisis of leadership', and that it must learn to sell itself better by articulating its success in places like the Balkans. In so doing, one participant claimed, Europe must seriously re-engage in Afghanistan, and work closely with the US on issues like Iran. It is problematic that Europeans often think you can 'dip in and out' of certain obligations and operations, and must instead remain seriously committed to the tasks at hand.

CASE STUDIES OF EU-NATO COOPERATION IN THE GULF OF ADEN AND AFGHANISTAN

The second session of the day examined two such tasks in which both the EU and NATO have actively cooperated: the EU Atalanta operation in the Gulf of Aden, and the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. In many ways, the operation off the coast of Somalia is a success story for EU-NATO cooperation. As one expert claimed, both institutions are working together rather well, and NATO has passed on the torch for the EU to handle certain newer issues. Several participants expressed the hope that this solid cooperation on the ground can have a 'trickle up' effect at the bureaucratic level in Brussels. The Gulf of Aden remains a region in which EU member states and NATO allies have vital interests to protect, and thus hopefully will continue to work together effectively.

As is the case with most debates about the future of European security and defence, Afghanistan dominated the discussion as the central case study. Yet in a rather pointed departure from past debates, one speaker claimed that we are at present facing an 'existential moment' in south Asia, according to which political and military leaders are constantly asking the questions: what do we need to do in order to get out of Afghanistan? How much do we need to leave in place before we can leave? Problematically, unlike the Gulf of Aden, the enduring operation in Afghanistan does not reflect a clear interest on behalf of European ISAF partners. Though preventing stability in south Asia is a 'home issue' for Britain (with a large Pakistani population), why does France – whose most recent terrorist threats emanate from the Maghreb – consider it within its national interest to have a presence until 2015, like the UK? In other words, although NATO and EU operations in the Gulf of Aden represent a clear interest, what is NATO's collective interest in Afghanistan? Is the need to prevent (further) instability in a nuclear region enough to sustain an expensive war?

What kind of a regime will we leave behind in Afghanistan? Will success continued to be measured by the 'body bag' count, or are there other tangible success stories of security sector reform or stabilisation operations, such as in Helmand province? Is counter-insurgency even the most suitable policy to pursue, or does it make presumptions about the local population and political setting which really aren't there? What is the most desirable end-state for Afghanistan given the resources at hand? One participant claimed that it might eventually resemble a 'stable patrimonial regime', like the UAE without (much) oil, which would have some human rights abuses and corruption, but without a drug-based economy. Does this accord with the varying interests of

ISAF members? Certainly, as one participant emphasised, we have very little understanding of the *local* elements in Afghanistan, and continue to lack political understanding of many of the contrasting elements in the region as a whole. Problematically, we view military troops as a 'palliative' in combating the Taliban, but have very few viable and effective political options to put in its place.

‘CIV-MIL’ COOPERATION IN EUROPEAN SECURITY – NATURAL AND MAN-MADE HAZARDS

Many of the items which can be found on the security agendas of European countries are those which require ‘disaster relief’, whether in the form of natural hazards such as floods, influenza outbreaks, or man-made hazards such as malicious infrastructure damage. These challenges – which have become ‘securitised’ in the 21st century – often require an integrated, joined-up, or *holistic* approach which involves both civil and military instruments. Issues such as disaster relief, border security, and transnational organised crime often blur the distinctions between the foreign and the domestic, and require a wide array of tools to effectively manage them. How flexible are our institutions at dealing with these complex issues? According to one speaker, while the military is very good at strategic planning and implementation, the civilian side has a lot to learn. And, while European militaries have been adept at involving civilian elements in their planning, the civilian side often regards the military with what can be at best termed suspicion. The act of policing is one process which sits between the two, and is often involved in both military and civilian responses. As one speaker noted, countries such as France and Italy with a *gendarmerie* or *carabinieri* may be better suited to deal with such complex challenges as opposed to countries with a tradition of strict divisions between forces.

As an illustration, one participant cited the possibility that one such major incident – such as an act of terrorism – could transpire in the City of London. In such an event, who would be in charge? One speaker highlighted the need for the police to remain in charge and in command, rather than the military. In the City, the Territorial Army would be present, but the police would take priority. In this case, interoperability is the key, and we should strive for *full* interoperability, beyond that of communications. Moreover, within this context, there is a crucial nexus between the public and the private sector – just as many of the challenges faced by Western countries represent the ‘dark side’ of the fruits of globalisation, so might private corporations be helpful in providing an integrated approach toward managing them.

EUROPEAN DEFENCE INDUSTRY – COOPERATION OR COMPETITION?

In the final session of the day, experts, policy-makers, and members of the private sector discussed the possible futures and dynamics of the European defence industry. Again, participants described an ‘existential crisis’ within the European community, particularly due to the impact of the financial crisis on defence spending. In an age of austerity, as one speaker elucidated, we will have to make our forces more adaptable than ever before. Though the US chides countries like Britain and France for not spending enough on defence, they are actually ‘outliers’ within the European setting, and together amount to 45% of the total European military budget. Indeed, one participant argued that especially because America is irritated at what it perceives to be an etiolated European defence sector, there will be a need for greater industrial cooperation amongst European countries.

Several participants emphatically argued for governments to take particular care in choosing how to spend their defence budgets, and to pay particular attention to future costs – not only in terms of future equipment orders, but also in terms of maintenance costs. In other words, what will it cost to maintain this helicopter, to keep it in theatre, and to train troops how to use it in hot climates and high altitudes? – certainly much more than the cost of the initial procurement of the helicopter. In such a way, governments benefit from having a ‘proper arrangement’ for upgrades over a long period of time, as certain industrial companies share with the UK MoD, for example. As many participants amusingly pointed out, ‘defence cash isn’t for Christmas – it’s for life!’ In terms of domestic vs. foreign equipment purchases, one speaker pointed to the need for many countries to prove that they have an indigenous engineering capacity – so skilled that it can develop and maintain its own military capacity. This domestic capability is ideally balanced with a healthy dose of transnational competition. Finally, (and this was emphasised most clearly by those party to the SDSR process in Britain), decision-makers must constantly debate our need of ‘heavy metal’ capabilities – such as aircraft carriers – with equipment perhaps better suited for future conflict, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones. Perhaps one solution – and one adopted by the UK and France – is to team up on heavy metal capabilities to achieve the maximum effect of existing resources.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, participants of the third workshop of the European Security and Defence Forum gathered together to break through national, institutional, and methodological boundaries in debating the future of European 'civ-mil' capabilities. In keeping with one of the core aims of the Forum, members of academia, the policy world, and the public sector brought their own areas of expertise to the table. Participants were in whole-hearted agreement that the complex challenges faced by decision-makers today cannot be met by exclusively military means: on the contrary, an integrated and *holistic* approach must be adopted as they seek to manage security risks. However, such a 'comprehensive approach' varies from culture to culture: while it means one thing for the Americans, it means a different thing for the Dutch, or for the British, or indeed for the EU and for NATO. While these cultural differences exist *within* Europe, we often take little effort to have cultural intelligence in the theatres in which we operate. As one participant emphasised, we often destroy 'organic markets' and existing power structures, thus demonstrating our immense failure to understand the 'local.'

Nowhere is this more evident than in Afghanistan, where the very concept of 'winning' is elusive. In a conflict in which success is defined in negative terms – that is, winning becomes 'not losing' – it is immensely difficult to find a unified interest on behalf of ISAF's coalition partners as to why they stay the course. Is Atlanticism sustained by the operation in Afghanistan? In such a way, when the war has ended, will that mean that NATO doesn't have a future? This is perhaps a rash conclusion to make; notwithstanding, European policy-makers are starting to speak and think in terms of NATO 'after Afghanistan', which brings us to two further questions. Firstly, concerning the Obama team's lack of attention toward Europe, what about the world post-Obama? It is clear that his policy advisors focus more on Asia and on Russia – but is this a feature of his administration, or a deeper trend in Washington? Accordingly, policy-makers may not need to think in the present terms of America with no love for Brussels. Secondly, what happens in the event of a financial recovery? For European countries (hopefully) will not always be in the midst of a financial crisis. Has Europe slid far enough toward a post-modern Kantian peaceful federation with ever-dwindling defence budgets? Or might economic resuscitation mean less restrained budgets? Finally, though much of the day's proceedings were dominated by a discussion of Europe in terms of Britain, France, the EU, and NATO, this excludes an significant and enduring division within Europe: that of east and west, or 'old' and 'new'. Is there a definite clash of interests and strategic

priorities, or do the recent members of the EU and NATO potentially inject new lifeblood into 20th century alliances? These questions will be debated in Workshop 4 of the European Security and Defence Forum.