

EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE: COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE UK AND EU

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INTRODUCTION

Security and defence at the European level continues to be dominated by member states. Arguably, national governments and national parliaments will consider the decision to expend blood and treasure as a matter predominantly for national decision making. However, the European Union (EU) has been an exercise in a new form of sovereignty and decision making at the supranational level. Even within, security and defence, member states have come to align their policies and modes of behaviour.

It is clear that even in security and defence there has been some movement towards political union. Jean Monnet –one of the founding architects of the constitution of the EU– argued that small steps in one field (albeit unrelated) create a habit of rapprochement, consultation and cooperation that eventually spreads to the political fields¹. The Schuman Declaration (drafted by Monnet) that brought the European Steel and Community into effect posited that “Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity”².

The United Kingdom (UK) remains the obdurate exception. Ironically, the UK, as one of the EU’s largest military powers, has also been one

of the member states that has played a significant role in the formation of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP): a role that has been both positive and negative. While the UK has promoted strong functioning militaries amongst member states, it has also categorically denied the EU the right to build its own autonomous structures. These dichotomies have led some commentators to view the UK as a straightforwardly anti European power. It has been argued that the most powerful European military power continues to be focused on its own unilateral foreign policy objectives and obsessed with its relationship with the United States (US).

The reality is that there is a far more complex policy behind the megaphone public diplomacy. The UK does have a vision for an inter –governmental European foreign policy– a sort of hybrid actor. This sounds like a contradiction in terms but arguably the form of CSDP we have today is exactly this hybrid actor which combines both national and communitarian functions. For example, within the newest treaty (Lisbon) there are steps taken towards framing a common defence policy but at the same time, the European Parliament has only the minimal right to be consulted on the “main aspects and basic choices of the commons foreign and security policy”³.

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¹ Monnet Jean, *Memoirs*, 1978.

² The Schuman Declaration, 9 May 1950.

<http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/treaties_ecsc_en.htm>.

³ Treaty of the European Union, Article 36.

This article will explore first the British conception of foreign policy. Next, the article will consider in details the construction of CSDP. It is clear that the UK has played an influential role in the construction of CSDP. Within this historical study will also be an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the British approach and the consequences for CSDP today. What becomes clear is that the EU and UK have a symbiotic relationship to play in CSDP. Without, the EU, the UK is unable to play the role that it emulates on the global stage and as French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin noted “there will be no Europe without a European defence. There will be no European defence without the United Kingdom”⁴.

There will also be a detailed case study of Operation Atalanta - an example of the current form of CSDP in action where the UK played a major role. Finally, the essay will consider the consequences for CSDP and the UK in the new Lisbon Treaty.

1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

There are three major principles which guide UK actions in European foreign affairs. First, the UK believes that the European Union (EU), especially in foreign and security policy, must act as a coalition of willing sovereign states rather than through an institutional and communitarian format. As such, sovereign states have other allies and other interests and therefore, Europe is not the sole foci of foreign policy. It is perfectly legitimate for the UK to pursue other strategic interests and cultivate other allies outside the EU. Second, in matters of national security, the EU is absolutely the wrong forum to take decisions that impact directly on national blood and treasure. Third, the most important ally for the UK is the United States (US). Therefore, it follows that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is *the* forum for European security issues to be discussed and enacted.

These principles have remained the core of UK foreign policy for over 50 years. While they

have their own internal coherence as a set of principles to guide national foreign policy, their bisection with the hybrid and supranational realities of the EU, has resulted in some rather glaring inconsistencies and forced the UK into rather awkward permutations. A notable example is that the UK wants a strong European military power but has remained adamantly opposed to any form of Command and Control (C2) capabilities. As a result the EU is unable to plan, launch or sustain its own autonomous military missions without NATO capacities. Nor has the UK participated in the fledgling Eurocorps. Moreover, any discussion of a shared procurement policy in defence has been vigorously opposed by consequent British Secretaries of State for Defence.

The UK has worked hard, and successfully, to ensure that the EU is closely tied to NATO and the US. This in turn has had the adverse and unplanned result of weakening the transatlantic alliance. With the US and NATO remaining the pre-eminent security umbrella for the EU, it has removed the initiative for other European states to develop their own security and defence capacities. EU member states, safe under the shelter of the overwhelming might of the US, have consistently and continuously under-spent and under-developed their own defence capacities. Simultaneously, these weak military powers have been criticized by the US for not carrying their share of the military burden.

The UK has a political, military and practical investment in the building of a European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); new and complex threats; increased demand upon armed forces and dramatically declining defence budgets have made burden sharing and cooperation not only attractive but also essential⁵. UK political leaders are well aware of these factors and have been pursuing an inter-governmental foreign policy at the EU level. This takes the form of sovereign states cooperating closely on aligning their foreign policy positions issue by issue and deciding amongst themselves what action should be taken. The weakness is that this form of foreign policy requires member states to align their interests and

⁴ De Villepin, Dominique, “A new era for Europe” *Les Echos*, 7 November 2003.

⁵ CSDP is the new acronym for European security and defence policy: Article 42 of the Lisbon Treaty replaces Article 17 of the Nice Treaty which refers to “Provisions on the common security and defence policy” (CSDP), previously the European security and defence policy (ESDP).”

to have a shared desire for action. In fact, this is far from the case. Other European states lack the UK's appetite for an interventionist foreign policy.

As a consequence, the UK has followed increasingly a policy of encouraging vanguard and willing nations to pursue increased cooperation and integration. This is the underlying motivation for the development of Franco-British cooperation in the fields of security and defence and for Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC) to be formalised into the Lisbon Treaty. There is indeed a value in this approach and it has reaped many advantages for CSDP. However, member states acting together has proven insufficient to build a truly effective European military power.

These guiding principles above can be traced in the UK's engagement with CSDP and their influence can be seen in the form of CSDP that exists today.

2. BRITAIN AND EUROPE

British national identity has been shaped by some cherished and enduring myths. There is pride in British constitutional traditions, tolerance, liberty and loyalty to various regional identities. The Anglo-European identity is only one of many other identities to which the British align. As Timothy Garton-Ash has noted,

“Britain's European identity can only ever be a partial identity, for Britain has always been and will remain –so long as there is a Britain– a country of overlapping identities”⁶.

While this is also true of other European nations, there is a subtle difference between the UK and many other EU member states. The crucial difference is that British elites and the general public lack an emotional identification with Europe. An essential part of national identity in Britain has been created in opposition to Europe. The myth of the “sceptred isle” standing alone as a fortress against invaders and tyrants (often of European origin) has powerful connotations in Britain. This

representation of exceptionalism and glorious isolation from the European continent, albeit not factually accurate, has been an influential factor shaping the British conception of foreign policy⁷.

The result is that while Europe is one of the most important allies and arenas for foreign policy, it is not privileged as the sole foci in which the UK acts. At the most suspicious spectrum of British political thinking, the EU is also the recipient of foreign policy actions. As Margaret Thatcher noted:

“Our destiny is in Europe, as part of the Community. That is not to say that our future lies only in Europe, but nor does that of France or Spain or, indeed, of any other member state”⁸.

As a result, British political elites have often advocated a cautious approach to Europe as befits a sovereign state engaging with another sovereign state. In 1946, a study by the Royal Institute for International Affairs suggested that the attitude towards Europe should be *watchful rather than active and continuous participation*⁹. Nearly fifty years later, in 1995, the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind reassured Parliament that shared interests among member states did

“[N]ot mean that the European Union has, or should aspire, to a single foreign policy, for the simple reason that a single identity of interests does not exist among the member states on every issue facing us”¹⁰.

The clear implication is that Britain, as a sovereign nation, has other interests and other allies and, therefore, a legitimate right to pursue these alongside its role as an EU power. The approach towards the EU is selective rather than *de facto*. Almost all EU member states do pursue their own bilateral foreign policy but perhaps few member states see their most important strategic priorities and partners as being outside the EU.

Britain wishes to be able to use EU foreign policy instruments when it should so desire but also, wishes to have the flexibility to act alone when it deems necessary. To ensure this flexibility, British

⁶ Garton Ash, Timothy “Is Britain European,” *International Affairs*, 77, 1, (2001), 13.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Thatcher, Margaret “Speech to the College of Bruges”, 20 September 1988, <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>>.

⁹ Larsen, Henrik, *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe*, London, Routledge, 1997, 51.

¹⁰ *Documents on British Foreign Policy: volume I, 1995 -1997*, Royal United Service for Defence Studies, London, 351.

elites want a foreign policy which is not communitarian but rather one where sovereign states come together to decide on foreign policy missions and goals. The ideal format is willing cooperation between sovereign states. As Margaret Thatcher stressed,

“[W]illing and active cooperation between independent sovereign states is the best way to build a successful European Community. To try to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardise the objectives we seek to achieve. Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions and identity. It would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality”¹¹.

This approach can have some positive aspects: Britain has been the most active force behind promoting strong nation states with their own independent force projection. The UK has consistently urged that other European powers should fortify their military capacity with the requisite capabilities and supported by adequate Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spend. This approach worked well in the early years (1970s and 1980s) of the European Political Community (EPC) but in time it becomes increasingly clear that there is little appetite for a militarily strong EU power amongst other member states. As a result, the UK begins to focus on bilateral relations with vanguard nations who share their strategic goals - especially France.

The motif that matters touching security and defence must remain resolutely national is a motif shared by elites across the British political spectrum. Even Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the EU did not veer from this line:

“I want to make clear in this negotiation (referendum on the planned EU constitution) that Britain will co-operate fully in helping Europe

work better; but work better as a Europe of sovereign nation states. There are certain areas of policy where maintenance of control of our affairs is essential. In those areas like taxation, foreign policy, defence, social security, how the essentials of our common law, criminal justice system work, treaty change, we believe the national veto must remain..... Defence is to remain unanimous and the prerogative of the nation state”¹².

In 2011, Britain blocked plans for a permanent operational headquarters (OHQ) for EU security operations. While the plans were probably opposed by many other nations but it was only Britain that was actively prepared to use its veto to block the OHQ. The Foreign Minister William Hague made the point that

“The United Kingdom will not agree to such a permanent Operational HQ. We will not agree to it now. We will not agree to it in the future. That is a red line for us...“We are opposed to this idea because we think that it duplicates NATO structures and permanently disassociates EU planning from NATO planning, whereas that planning can best be done in SHAPE”¹³.

The UK has also resolutely disagreed with any hint of “Europeanization” of the structures of spending or human resources. In 2004, the formation of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2004 was a step forward in the direction of rationalising defence spending, research and procurement at the EU level but so far, the UK has shown little willingness to work through the EDA. In 2009, on the question of defence procurement at the EU level, Secretary of State for Defense, Liam Fox, was clear that,

“we can’t have is procurement being done through the European Union. Defense is a sovereign, not a supranational, area, so we have no problems cooperating with other European nations, but we will not surrender any territory on procurement to the EU”¹⁴.

¹¹ Thatcher Margaret, “Speech to the College of Bruges”, 20 September 1988, <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>>. There maybe some criticism of using Thatcher as an example of foreign policy thinking but actually Thatcher was not the exceptional eurosceptic but rather the Thatcher years are part of a pattern of continuity of intergovernmentalism in foreign policy.

¹² Blair, Tony, “Statement to the House of Commons announcing a referendum on the planned constitution”, 20 April 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3642713.stm>.

¹³ Hague, William, speaking at Press Conference after the Foreign Affairs Council, *Agence France*, 18th July 2011.

¹⁴ Fox, Liam, Interview, *Defense News*, 13 September 2009, <<http://www.defensenews.com>>.

Finally, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a discourse within the UK that has prioritised the US as the most important player in European defence. Generations of foreign policy elites have bent all their efforts to ensure that the US remains invested in Europe. British foreign policy has been driven by the belief that the UK's geopolitical and strategic interests align with those of the US and that the UK's most important role was as a strong ally to the US¹⁵. Since Winston Churchill's speech advocating the "special relationship" and as William Hague's comments (above) show, political elites have continued to prioritise the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as the cornerstone of UK security.

3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF CSDP 1970s - 1990s: EU AND UK

The hybrid form of CSDP that we have today reflects the tensions, ambitions and aims of the EU member states. The European Political Community (EPC) during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s was characterised by enthusiastic British support and participation. A grouping of nation states coming together to make decisions on foreign policy issues and cabinet style decision making with the UK playing a central role was exactly the vision advocated by the British. The informal obligations of the EPC as set out by the Luxembourg Report of 1970 (foreign ministers should meet at least every six months and Political Directors every four months) and the scarcity of systematic coordination mechanisms suited the UK very well. In 1975, Anthony Crosland, the Foreign Secretary enthused that EPC had been "underestimated as a gauge of what has been, and can be, achieved in the field of European unity"¹⁶. While in 1981, another Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd was equally positive that EPC "is one of the areas where Europe makes the most sense"¹⁷.

Britain was invested in the EPC; took steps to act within EPC and even to reform it when neces-

sary. The UK took the lead in engineering common responses within the EPC to Afghanistan in 1979 and in building consensus for European condemnation of Poland's imposition of martial law in 1981. The Carrington/London Report of 1981 addressed the fiasco of the EPC's hesitant and tardy response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Lord Carrington proposed that any three countries should be able to call an emergency meeting at 48 hours notice; a permanent small secretariat should be attached to the diplomatic missions and greater and more overt political commitment should be made by member states.

While prior consultation, common positions and joint actions were planned as part of the mechanisms of EPC, they did not in any way impose any legal impositions on the members. Without any legal codification of the rules and obligations, EPC retained the primacy of the sovereign state. Christopher Hill, writing in 1983, argued that the UK was unlikely to go much further than the current arrangements and would not relinquish any further national freedoms or room for manoeuvre in international relations. "As it stands, EPC is too good for British foreign policy for Britain to seek a genuinely European substitute"¹⁸.

Even at a period, when the UK was happy with the style and format of European foreign policy making, there were clear red lines. Certain affairs touching national sovereignty and defence were considered completely taboo at European level. As Lord Carrington stated in 1981, defence "would be absolutely the wrong thing to be discussed with Political Cooperation"¹⁹. The Falklands War, in 1981, shows the limits of British cooperation: while Lord Carrington did work to bring about consensus in EPC, the decision to invade was taken unilaterally²⁰.

It was this "red line" which directed the UK's regressive influence on the Western European Union (WEU) - the military arm of the EPC. In 1954, at the inception of the WEU, the Brussels

¹⁵ Hill, Christopher, "Britain: A Convenient Schizophrenia" in Christopher Hill (ed.), *National Foreign Policies and European Political Cooperation*, London, Routledge, 1983.

¹⁶ Hill, Christopher, *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Larsen, *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁸ Hill, Christopher, *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁹ Hill, Christopher, *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁰ Freedman, Lawrence, "The Special Relationship: then and now", *Foreign Affairs*, 8, 5, (2006).

Treaty preamble stated that the WEU aimed to promote unity and to encourage the progressive integration of Europe. However, in 1973, after Britain's accession, the WEU faded into oblivion: there were no more meetings held until 1984²¹. By 1984, the UK worked hard to upload its preferences that defence should be a matter for NATO. The WEU's 1984 Rome Declaration preamble states that "better utilization of WEU could not only contribute to the security of Western Europe but also to an improvement in the common defence of all countries in the Atlantic Alliance." Moreover, it was the UK's clear displeasure that resulted in the Jobert Plan (WEU was promoted as an alternative to NATO) being shelved²².

The late 1980s and 1990s witnessed the decline of Britain as one of the undisputed leaders in foreign policy. German economic power made it a (albeit reluctant) leader in foreign policy. The Franco-German dialogue and Thatcher's position on the Common Agricultural Policy and the budget rebate resulted in an increasingly isolated UK. The Single European Act (SEA) of 1986 heralded this new period of Franco-German coordination which drove EU foreign policy cooperation in a direction that the British were entirely opposed to. Soft, informal laws were hardened into legally binding obligations. Title I, article 1 of the SEA explicitly linked the EC and EPC together in a common objective to make progress towards European unity. Title III codified the structure of the troika and created a small but centralized secretariat.

The UK had a very acute dilemma in the 1990s: it was torn between wanting to lead Europe, wanting to act unilaterally, wanting to accept European responsibilities and wanting to follow US action. It was also becoming very clear to the UK, that few other European nations shared their ambitions for a militarily active EU. Instead, EU member states were making drastic cutbacks in defence expenditure and pursuing policies of retrenchment. The crises in Yugoslavia made the military weakness and political fractiousness of European states all too clear. Europe was unable

intervene in a clear humanitarian disaster and incapable of projecting power even into its near neighbourhood. The UK drew the inference that bilateral relations with vanguard and like-minded states was the future of defence policy.

4. CONSTRUCTION OF CSDP 1990s - 2000s: FRANCE AND UK

The Saint Malo Declaration (1998) was initiated in the aftermath of the Balkans crisis. France and Britain, in the Saint Malo Declaration, recognised that the EU "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"²³.

The significance of the Saint Malo Declaration was threefold. First, both France and Britain agreed that a military credible European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) –as it was known at the time– was necessary; second, both countries recognised that bilateral cooperation was the key to make it possible and third, both countries were able to summon the internal political will to make it a reality²⁴. A bilateral relationship with France has been the favoured *modus operandi* of the UK since 1998. It is driven by the recognition that in terms of shared strategic ambitions for the form of CSDP, France and the UK are more similar than any other member states.

Since 1998, there have been further developments in ESDP. From 1998-2001, progress was made in developing military and police capabilities. In 1999, the Helsinki Headline Goal was adopted for a rapid reaction force by 2003 (the deadline was eventually postponed to 2010). In 2001, at the Laeken Conference, the EU declared its military capacity "operational". In June 2002, at the European Council meeting in Seville, declarations were made on adapting ESDP to fight terrorism and further announcements followed of enhanced cooperation with NATO, Russia and Ukraine²⁵. Bilateral relations between the two

²¹ Duke, Simon, "The second death (or the second coming) of WEU", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 34, 2, (1996).

²² Duke, *Ibid*.

²³ Joint declaration on European Defence, Franco-British Summit, Saint-Malo, 4 December 1998.

²⁴ Howorth, Jolyon "Britain, France and the European Defence Initiative" *Survival* 42, 2, (2000).

²⁵ Howorth, Jolyon, "France, Britain and the Euro-Atlantic Crisis," *Survival* 45, 4, (2003-4).

countries have indeed yielded very positive benefits for ESDP as a whole.

However, there have also been obstacles. The two allies have disagreed over the scope and responsibilities of ESDP. The most significant difference has been on the question of NATO. UK and France disagreed over whether ESDP should fight terrorism with the UK arguing that it was covered by NATO's remit. In the debates about the formation of the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the UK envisaged a consultation body whereas France wanted a PSC able to influence and drive policy.

For France, ESDP was a European project to build an autonomous EU capacity but for the UK, it was the best means to maintain the Atlantic Alliance by strengthening the members - a key demand of the US. Contrast the differing Action Plans put forward by the UK and France. France set out areas where Europe lags behind the US and set out proposals to close the gap, while the UK suggested an *intelligent use of NATO instruments*²⁶. In 2001, Tony Blair confirmed that the Rapid Reaction Force would only act when NATO chose not to and NATO had the *first right of refusal* - thereby giving it a veto over the ESDP missions.

In 2003, the UK and the US intervened in the Second Gulf War despite deep divisions within the EU. Relations between the UK and many of its continental allies fractured. The progress of ESDP stalled. The divisions over intervention in the Gulf were another demonstration to the EU that the UK prioritised loyalty to the US above any common European policy. From the viewpoint of London, once again its European allies had demonstrated a lack of stomach for the fight.

In 2010, we have witnessed another spurt of bilateral cooperation between the UK and France. This time, economics was the catalyst. The 2008 financial crisis and the consequential enforced austerity on national budgets have made both UK and France acutely aware of the advantages of burden sharing, shared research and development and

also, non-duplication of capabilities. As Secretary of State for Defence Liam Fox noted at a Franco-British Summit:

“[I]t makes little sense for the two most powerful militaries in Europe to spend more than necessary on duplicate capabilities, which could be delivered in a more cost-effective manner. The aim of the summit, therefore, is to strengthen the relationship at all levels: joint training, bilateral co-operation on the acquisition of equipment and technology, improved interoperability, and greater information-sharing”²⁷.

The same wave of urgency was shared amongst the EU. At the Foreign Affairs and Defence Council Meeting of Brussels (9th December 2010):

“The Council stressed the need to turn the financial crisis and its impact on national defence budgets into an opportunity, to give a new impetus to European military capability development in order to meet its level of ambition, to address remaining shortfalls and to safeguard the defence capabilities required to support the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as well as to achieve national capability targets, while avoiding unnecessary duplication between Member States”²⁸.

The resulting Franco-British Defence Treaty of 2010 is far-reaching and innovative in its scope. There will be cooperation in sharing of facilities for testing nuclear warheads; creation of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF); an integrated carrier strike group from 2020 onwards; shared training for A4000M transport aircraft and coordination of wide variety of equipment amongst other areas²⁹. In 2011, there have already been regular discussions at the highest levels and bilateral exercises are planned aimed at increasing the levels of interoperability between the two armed forces³⁰.

Security and defence is not like any other EU competence. There will always be a role for nation states. The form of CSDP today encompasses both communitarian and national elements. Moreover,

²⁶ Howorth, Jolyon, *ibid* “Britain, France and the European Defence Initiative”.

²⁷ Fox, Liam, *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 October 2010.

²⁸ Council Conclusions on the Development of Military Capability Developments of the 3055th Foreign Affairs (Defence) Council Meeting, 9 December 2010 <www.consilium.europa.eu>.

²⁹ Taylor, Claire, House of Commons Briefing, *Franco-British Defence Cooperation*, House of Commons Library, London, 2010 <<http://www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snua-05750.pdf>>.

³⁰ Fox, Liam responding to a parliamentary question, 10 February 2011, *Hansard*, <www.parliament.uk>.

Franco-British cooperation demonstrates that the initiatives and actions of nation states can have a constructive impact for EU policy. The Franco-British Treaty will make both countries more militarily relevant, more capable allies and thereby indirectly strengthen the EU. As Javier Solana claims,

“Implemented correctly, these treaties could become a hopeful precedent for the entire European Union. By transcending strictly national limits, these treaties chart the future path of European defence and will help determine the course of Europe’s relations with the United States and NATO”³¹.

5. BUILDING CSDP: UK AND US

A guiding motif of UK defence is that the US is the primary security provider for Europe. This focus has had an entirely unplanned and unwelcome result. By ensuring that the US continues to provide an iron-clad security umbrella, the UK has also neutered the EU by removing the incentive for the EU to develop its own security and defence capacities. This collective weakness on the part of the EU has not only weakened NATO considerably but has also been the most serious thorn in the transatlantic alliance. In 2011, Robert Gates, US Secretary of State for Defence, criticised European weakness:

“Turning to the NATO operation over Libya, it has become painfully clear that similar shortcomings –in capability and will– have the potential to jeopardize the alliance’s ability to conduct an integrated, effective and sustained air-sea campaign... In particular, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets are lacking that would allow more allies to be involved and make an impact. We have the spectacle of an air operations center designed to handle more than 300 sorties a day struggling to launch about 150. Furthermore, the mightiest military alliance in history is only 11 weeks into an operation against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country – yet many allies are beginning to run short of munitions, requiring the U.S., once more, to make up the difference.

The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling

appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress –and in the American body politic writ large– to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense”³².

It is valuable to consider his criticisms in some detail. The lack of reconnaissance and command and control capacities has indeed been a goal pursued by the UK. In September 2011, five of the biggest EU member states (bar the UK) wrote a letter to the HR/VP Catherine Ashton asking for more integration in the field of defence. The Leader of the Liberals in the European Parliament, and former Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt welcomed this call. He also placed the blame for the lack of a HQ squarely on the UK:

“It is absurd that the UK blocks the use of these operational headquarters when closer coordination between EU Member States on defence planning could have been of considerable benefit, particularly in instances where NATO formally is divided or the Americans do not wish to participate. The EU is the loser with lack of visibility, capability and coherence in its external action”³³.

The other weakness noted by Robert Gates is the comprehensive and continued under-investment in the field of defence and security. Only France, Germany and the UK spend 2% of GDP on defence as agreed by NATO. In February 2011, at the Munich Security Conference, current NATO head, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, noted that in the last two years alone, European defence spending had shrunk by \$45 billion — the equivalent of Germany’s entire military budget. Rasmussen warned

“If Europe becomes unable to make an appropriate contribution to global security, then the United States might look elsewhere for reliable defense (sic) partners”.

The UK’s position here is rather contradictory. While Britain has continuously espoused higher GDP spend by member states, it has also removed a key motivation for them to do so. By

³¹ Solana, Javier, “Window of Opportunity for European Defence”, *New Europe*, 3 January 2011, <<http://www.new-europe.eu/articles/104028.php>>.

³² Gates, Roberts, speech citation, 10 June 2011, <<http://www.wsj.com>>.

³³ Verhofstadt Guy, Press Release, 9 September 2011, <<http://www.alde.eu>>.

ensuring the US and NATO offer Europe a cast iron security guarantee, the UK has encouraged a cultural and historic trend whereby European nations become increasingly pacifist. These two steps have played a significant role in retarding the growth of EU security and defence capacity.

6. OPERATION ATALANTA: CSDP IN ACTION

In the last 20 years, the EU has conducted 24 global missions. Operation Atalanta, a recent anti-piracy mission, serves as a model for both the strength and weaknesses of EU military missions and highlights the role that the UK plays.

In 2008, in order to combat the increasing threat of piracy off the east coast of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, the EU established its first-ever naval CSDP operation. This was also the first military CSDP operation in which the UK had taken a leading role. This Operation, named EUNAVFOR Somalia—Operation Atalanta, has been in operation since December 2008 with its mandate extended in December 2009.

Operation Atalanta operates in a zone comprising the south of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Somali basin and part of the Indian Ocean. More than twenty vessels and aircraft take part in Atalanta. In 2010, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, Luxembourg and Portugal were all making a permanent contribution to the mission³⁴. The mission of Operation Atalanta is to escort World Food Programme (WFP) ships, protect the African Mission in Somalia and fishing vessels as well.

The UK has been an enthusiastic collaborator in this project. The Operation Commander is Rear Admiral Peter Hudson of the UK Navy and the Operational Headquarters (OHQ) is based at Northwood in the UK. The UK Government's House of Lords Report commissioned to assess the mission noted that Operation Atalanta was 100% successful in protecting WFP ships from pirate attacks. It stated that

“The EU acted rapidly and decisively in response to this threat by launching Ope-

ration Atalanta. This is a good example of the EU successfully conducting foreign and security policy. We welcome the lead role which the UK is playing in the Operation”³⁵.

The value of Operation Atalanta for the UK was that it was a strictly limited mission with a clear goal. In fact, while Operation Atalanta is undoubtedly a success, it also represents a form of the lowest common denominator of military operations. Acting the Gulf of Aden in pursuit of a humanitarian mission is uncontroversial. No attempt was made to pursue an aggressive policy against piracy. Building consensus at the EU level to send troops ashore or to secure the posts or to cut off pirates from their logistical lines would have been very difficult. Such an approach would not have appealed to other less interventionist powers. Instead, the operation has a strictly limited mandate of defence and protection with no offensive counter measures.

Operation Atalanta highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of CSDP. While Operation Atalanta is undoubtedly a success in its humanitarian mission, it is also limited by a lack of daring and political will. Operation Atalanta highlights one of key difficulties in CSDP which is that launching any mission requires unanimity at the level of the European Council. This is extremely difficult to achieve amongst 27 member states with different strategic priorities, different capacities and different risk appetites. One of the aims of the Lisbon Treaty was to address just such institutional challenges.

7. THE LISBON TREATY

The Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (both commonly known under the acronym of the Lisbon Treaty of 2009) do retain sovereign state primacy in foreign policy but at the same time there are institutional developments that have had a positive impact in building the coherence, visibility and effectiveness of EU foreign policy.

The Lisbon Treaty has arrangements that may make it possible to obtain more foreign policy decisions by qualified majority voting (QMV). There is

³⁴ Figures taken from Council website (www.consilium.europa.eu).

³⁵ Combating Somali Piracy: the EU's Naval Operation Atalanta: Report with Evidence Ordered. House of Lords Report, London, House of Lords, 14 April 2010.

a new treaty basis for Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC) which allows those countries with the political will and capacity to promote further cooperation. *Article 42.6* of the Lisbon Treaty offers precise details about how member states whose military capabilities fulfil higher capabilities can establish a more permanent cooperation. The most radical innovation is that QMV will be used for the adoption of PSC but unanimity will still be required for launching a mission. Lisbon also provides a legal and political basis for a politics of scale and providing the military capacities to allow the EU to play a role commensurate to its stated ambitions.

The real crux of Lisbon how these innovations are implemented. It is revealing consider the dual tensions of community versus members states in one of the most important innovations of Lisbon - the newly created role of High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP). The dual-hatted HR/VP chairs the Foreign affairs Council and is also one of the Vice-Presidents (VP) of the Commission. The dual position allows her to reach across the pillars and to the member states and formulate a coherent foreign policy. She also has the capacity to propose the use of both national resources and union instruments. It is indeed impressive on paper but the reality is much less effective.

The choice of Catherine Ashton for the role was a deliberate choice and a clear sign of the lack of ambition for this role by member states. Without any foreign policy experience and lacking an experienced Cabinet, Baroness Ashton has been a disappointing HR/VP. Her lacklustre performance has been repeatedly criticised in the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) of the European Parliament - a very pro integration body. In May 2011, Ashton came to address AFET. She was subject to scathing criticism from MEPs across the spectrum for her performance in the ongoing crisis in Syria. Green MEP Brantner warned Ashton not to “count on the member states to save you. The member states are not a guarantee to keep you in your job”³⁶. Véronique de Keyser of the Liberal Group also called on Ashton to be more daring and more independent from the member states³⁷. Elmar Brok from the Centre Right urged Ashton

to “take control of EU foreign policy, exercise political leadership and convince reticent member states”³⁸. Except that Ashton is not the figure with the credibility, prestige or experience to stand alone or tell Foreign Ministers of member states what to do. There is no doubt that Ashton was a clear and deliberate choice for exactly these reasons.

More impressive is the creation of a European External Action Service (EEAS) consisting of personnel from the Council General Secretariat, the Commission, and seconded staff from national diplomatic services. The EEAS will enhance expertise by bringing together experts from EU capitals into the Crisis Management Planning Directorate (CMPD). Furthermore, national ambassadors will take on new roles as EU Special Representatives (EUSR). This is a promising innovation and it is possible that it will give member states a sense of ownership over EU foreign policy. In fact, the UK has embraced the opportunity with British diplomats such as Nicholas Westcott and Rosemary Marsden taking high level positions within the EEAS. This is a very promising development. Diplomats like Nicholas Westcott bring experience and expertise to the EEAS but at the same time, within the UK, they are reassuringly part of the establishment.

CONCLUSION

It is in the UK’s strategic best interests that there is a strong and credible European security player in the global arena. 21st century threats are global and multi-dimensional in scale. Today’s armies need to be fast, mobile possessing both hard kinetic power, able to manage counter-insurgency in foreign terrains and being able to deal with new threats such as cyber-security. Security is not only more expensive but it is also very specialised. Single nation states cannot meet these expertise and costs alone.

In the UK’s case, the recent years of austerity have made cooperation at the EU level a necessary next step. The 2010 Strategic Defence Review has had a material impact on the UK military capacity. HMS Ark Royal and 63 Harrier jets were decommissioned immediately. Furthermore, 9 TriStar and

³⁶ *Agence Europe*, 13 May 2011.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

13 VC-10 aircraft and 137 Tornado GR4 aircraft will all be withdrawn from service within the next decade. The Review also announced nine Nimrod MRA4 military aircrafts would not be brought into service³⁹. The same pattern of enforced austerity and retrenchment is happening to most EU member states.

The UK has played a significant role in building CSDP. It has provided CSDP with much needed political will and supported its political will with military capacities. The UK is essential for a serious EU foreign power. It is one of the few EU member states with the capacity to reach out of theatre and sustain the fight. However, it is also

one of the most suspicious member states. It has tried to upload its preferences for CSDP. As this article has tried to show, the resulting CSDP is a hybrid of sovereign and communitarian elements. The consequence is a CSDP that lacks both clear direction and capacity. It can act –as we have seen with Operation Atalanta– but missions are often the lowest common denominator forms. The fundamental flaw that no amount of UK cajoling and US complaining can change is that few EU member states see the need for a powerful military force and will not spend for that ambition. Until the EU supports its foreign policy with adequate spend, it will always be a weak and unimpressive actor.

³⁹ Nick Harvey, UK Minister of Defence responding to a parliamentary question. *Hansard*, 9 February 2011, <www.parliament.uk>.