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Permanent Planning and Command Structures for Autonomous EU Operations

A Capacity Deficit to Be Addressed

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All EU military operations conducted up to now have required the setting up of ad hoc chains of command case by case since the European Union is lacking a permanent operational planning and command structure (OHQ). Strong professional military reasons require the creation of a permanent planning and command structure in the framework of the EU. Denying the EU a permanent planning and command structure creates an unnecessary handicap for the Union and its ESDP amounting to an act of self-mutilation of Europe in the military field. There is a growing awareness within the EU to address the issue.

The broad support expressed by EU defence ministers for the idea of establishing a permanent capability for planning of military operations within the EUMS at their informal meeting in March 2007 in Wiesbaden can be considered as an important starting point to address the problems the EU is facing in planning and conducting EU operations. But the result of negotiations among EU states was so far very modest.

Against this background it will first be looked at the available structures. Second, several comments and recommendations will be offered.

1. Available Planning and Command Structure for EU Operations

At present the EU has three options to plan and run crisis management operations: using NATO structures, one of the five HQ of EU framework nations or the newly created Operations Centre. Having no permanent operational planning and command capability at strategic level the EU must discuss and negotiate the establishment of an ad hoc operational chain of command with NATO and EU-Framework nations on a case by case basis. This is of course long and time consuming. In looking at structures available for EU operations the following points need to be considered:

- NATO structures have been built up and organised to plan and command NATO military operations in the area of defence and now also of crisis management. If NATO is requested by the EU to provide an OHQ it would not be sufficient just to put an EU label on existing NATO structures, but within the existing NATO chains of command, an ad hoc command chain needs to be negotiated and organised. In the case of operation Althea in BiH, EU-NATO negotiations took over 8 months. In case of a necessary rapid response, e.g. rapid deployment of a EU Battle Group, it is obvious that Berlin⁺ would never fly. Furthermore, NATO does not have civil instruments in house. NATO is therefore not equipped to run EU-type comprehensive

civil/military operations. The NATO approach is CIMIC, which means organising military cooperation with available civil actors in the theatre. Using NATO means could also in certain situations be politically difficult. Finally, NATO means might not be available or their use blocked by a member state.

- As regards the use of EU framework nation HQs, standards for equipment, manning and procedures for EU-OHQ have been defined by the EU and are implemented by framework nations. But also national OHQ need to be activated, augmented and multinationalised within a time frame of 20 days in order to be fully operational. The key nucleus of the OHQ provided by the frameworks nations varies from 42 to 46 personnel. The permanent nucleus available for EU staff work exclusively are 15 persons in Potsdam, 9 in Cento Celle, substantial less (2-4) at Mont Valerien and Northwood. The majority of the key nucleus is double hatted staff immediately transferable to the activated OHQ. CIS facilities are prepared and the staffs of the key nucleus and augmentees are earmarked. Nevertheless official work of the OHQ can only start when the decision designating the OHQ is taken. This also means time. National HQs do not have civil-military competences either. National parent headquarters continue to have other national, alliance and coalition roles to fulfil and will only bear the bleeding involved in running an EU operation for operations of clearly limited duration. There is also the issue of burden sharing.
- The new Operations Centre at the EUMS enables the EU to build and equip an operational chain of command for autonomous operations at short notice in Brussels, particularly in cases where a joint civil/military response is required and no multinationalised national headquarter has been identified to conduct the operation. However, the EU Operations Centre is not a permanent structure. It can be activated within 5 days achieving full operational capability within 20 days for operations up to 2000 soldiers. Infrastructure is prepared and personnel from the EU Military Staff, Council General Secretariat and member states have been earmarked to work at the Operations Centre. But the present construction of activating the Operations Centre would bring about the temporary destruction of the EUMS, which is a matter of concern. There would not be sufficient staff available for other important staff-work such a military strategic contingency planning, crisis response strategic planning etc.

2. The need to create a Permanent Planning and Conduct Capability in Brussels

The experience of EU operations demonstrates clearly that the lack of a permanent planning and command capability for EU operations has become a capability-shortfall affecting and limiting the effectiveness and the credibility of EU operations. For these reasons, the EU must consider moving further toward equipping itself with a more readily available permanent planning and command capability for autonomous EU operations.

Several arguments speak in favour of creating a Permanent Planning and Command Structure on a strategic level for autonomous EU Operations:

1.) Duplication does not exist

The argument to avoid unnecessary duplication is neither convincing nor valid. Given the civil/military focus of the EU, a permanent EU planning and command capability would not duplicate anything that exists elsewhere. Such a capability does neither exist in NATO nor in available national HQs.

2.) Structuring the operational strategic level

Having no permanent structure at the operational military strategic level reduces the competence of the EU to plan and conduct military operations at that level, which affects EU's effectiveness and credibility. When launching an operation, the credibility of the action relies first on the credibility of the chain of command, i.e. the capability for the upper layer to assess and control at any time what the subordinate layers are doing. Therefore a clear military need for a permanent structure at the operational strategic level exists. Such a capability would allow a better implementation of the concept of Effects-Based Operations Planning. Such a capability needs also to be located in Brussels with the political leadership to be effectively able to translate and communicate military implications of political options and decisions to political leaders.

3.) Improving arrangements for preparation, planning and conduct of operations

Lessons learned from EUFOR RD Congo demonstrate that arrangements for preparation, planning and conduct of EU military operation need to be improved. The translation of directives, from the political to the military level, was made difficult by an existing gap in the

military planning process. The need for an OHQ in the phase immediately preceding the decision to deploy, was felt strongly by the Council Secretariat and EUMS because a number of questions related to the OHQ were raised by political decision-makers and there was no OHQ yet designated.

Also the force generation process was faced with difficulties due to the lack of sufficiently precise military data, itself due to a lack of expertise in the strategic planning process. One example was the two-week search across the EU for two military surgeons for EUFOR DR Congo. There were also problems related to timely information of all EU member states about essential military characteristics of the operation under preparation. Some member states insisted on running their own reconnaissance missions to the Congo, resulting in a series of European delegations asking the same questions and sowing confusion.

4.) Conceptual inconsistency

The 2010 Headline Goal's declared responsiveness target for battle group deployment in the theatre is ten days. Such target days are incompatible with the time to negotiate the choice of an OHQ, its multinationalisation and the time necessary for planning. It is inconsistent to develop a Battle group concept to be able to deploy force rapidly far away and rely on a case by case basis for providing an operational chain of command.

5.) Supporting a comprehensive approach

The comprehensive EU-approach to crisis management trying to join up the various civilian and military instruments into coherent policies and actions is a strong case to plan and conduct also the military part of an operation from Brussels, keeping in mind that the EU has substantial non-military instruments at its disposal which are becoming more and more important for successful crisis-management. Most of these tools are managed by Brussels institutions. The establishment of a permanent operational military planning and command structure would be an important contribution to enhance the EU comprehensive approach and would allow the EU to respond faster and better to the increasing demand for comprehensive civil-military action in the area of crisis-management. It would also be an important contribution to make EU international action more visible.

6.) Overseeing and coordinating EU operations

No connection is so far established between different operations allowing centralised management from Brussels. There is an increasing need for a capacity to watch, command and control the various concurrent EU operations from central HQ in Brussels, because the present situation running a greater number in an unconnected way is not sustainable and should be overcome.

7.) Including smaller member states

The present system of using five framework-nation HQs as EU-OHQs present for smaller EU countries a major difficulty, whose staffing constraints are considerable. It is indeed difficult for most of the smaller countries to send permanent liaison officers to five HQs, which would ensure their full involvement in EU crisis-management and give them full and timely information about essential military characteristics of the operation which is prepared and in which they should be able to take part. With the same number of officers, smaller states would be able to contribute substantially to a permanent multinational OHQ. The creation of a permanent planning and command capability in Brussels would make it easier for smaller member states to be represented and play a role in ESDP military operations.

8.) Strengthening institutional memory

The current system, whereby the responsibility for planning and conduct of an operation is passed from one framework-nation to another, means that the experience gathered during the previous operations is not retained in the EU for operational learning as it should be. EU's lack of a permanent operational planning and command structure means that the institutional memory and lessons learned at the military operational level will likely be lost every time a new OHQ is designated. This is a strong argument in favour of setting up a permanent staff of planning officers, particularly given that greater experience means also shorter lead times.

9.) Using synergies

Permanent planning and command structures would create synergies for the development of a EU strategic culture as advocated in the ESS. This would also allow the development of a more coherent European military and operational culture and strengthen understanding, trust and solidarity among European military. However, there is no need to reinvent anything

within the EU in terms of standards and concepts, which already exist in NATO, but it would be important that NATO makes them available to the Union and its members.

10.) *Cost effectiveness*

A permanent planning and command capability would allow a better pooling of resources and fairer burden sharing of costs among EU members as the present system. The cost argument against creating EU operational planning and command structures is not valid. In designing a permanent EU planning and command structure, the EU would not need a structure commensurate with NATO's due to its lower level of ambition. CIS equipment exists already to a large extent. The placing of about 50-60 people in an operations centre in or near Brussels should be easily affordable for the EU.

11.) *EU Mission HQ*

A permanent military planning and conduct structure in form of an EU-OHQ, which could also be called a EU Mission HQ, would not only increase the visibility of any EU operation on international level but also increase the visibility of EU operations with the European citizens, which support ESDP development with a great majority.

12.) *Improving emergency response*

Permanent command structures of the EU could also be used to assist in implementing the 'solidarity clause' in cases such as multiple severe terrorist attacks or other major emergencies. Attempts to prepare an EU information network for emergencies have so far not found support. Emergencies as foreseen in the solidarity clause make an immediate response necessary. The military role is most important in the first 24 hours after the incident. Planning, preparedness and command structures would have to be designed accordingly, and there would be demanding requirements on access, mobility, information, communication, vehicles and force protection.