

BALANCE OF COMPETENCE FOREIGN POLICY REPORT: RECORD OF DEFENCE & SECURITY ROUNDTABLE, 19 FEBRUARY 2013

1. The FCO, in partnership with MoD, hosted an evidence gathering seminar for the Balance of Competences Foreign Policy Report on 19 February 2013. It was attended by representatives of think tanks, academics, former diplomats and London-based Defence attachés (list of attendees attached). This record, in agreement with participants, is under the Chatham House Rule, i.e. remarks are not attributed by name to those present.

2. The seminar was chaired by Professor Anand Menon, King's College, London. The seminar addressed the question: **Is the balance of competences between the UK and the EU broadly right with regards to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)?** It was divided into two plenary sessions, with a short introduction by officials followed by open discussion. The first session looked at CSDP missions, while the second examined the role of the EU in generating Defence capabilities, via the European Defence Agency (EDA), EU Battlegroups, and pooling and sharing capabilities.

Session 1: CSDP missions

3. The FCO set out how we can see the debate on EU defence through the same prism as NATO. Namely, by focussing on what it should and could be doing, as well as looking into how to deliver action through EU structures.

4. The FCO participant highlighted:

- That CSDP is unusual in predominantly requiring unanimity
- The debate surrounding institutions has now given way to a more operational dynamic, with four new CSDP missions since 2008
- Berlin+ has only been used for Op. ALTHEA
- EUTM Mali has been launched and the three CSDP missions in Somalia are continuing into 2013.

The following points/questions were raised:

Added value of working through the EU

- Some countries are more willing to co-ordinate and co-operate with the EU on CSDP missions than with NATO. In the case of the EU's ATALANTA mission in the Horn of Africa, co-operation with Russia, China and India has been part of its success. This means that CSDP will remain part of the broader defence and security picture.
- EU resources and leverage allow particularly smaller Member States to act through CSDP in areas where they would lack the capabilities or will to do so unilaterally.
- The UK has the opportunity to both have a major impact on EU policy in areas where it has significant interests (such as EU Burma

sanctions), while also being able to exercise decision-making power on certain other areas of EU's foreign policy activity, such as CSDP.

- The UK has achieved good value for money from the EU in foreign policy, through its ability to project its own policies, to access resources, and the advantages provided by the EU label.

EU effectiveness

- A key lesson of Somalia, Burma and Kosovo is that when/if you can get all the EU's moving parts working together you can have real impact.
- While other factors (private security, ship defences, regional actors) may have contributed, EU action in the Horn of Africa has successfully reduced piracy. In doing so, it has redirected investment activity in Somalia away from pirate activities. However we should be wary of prematurely declaring ATALANTA a success and therefore a model to be slavishly copied elsewhere. The challenge will now be to ensure that maritime security is maintained and used to support statebuilding.
- CSDP missions, as with other interventions, carry the risk of either leaving too soon or remaining too long. This risk is enhanced when missions are seen narrowly and in isolation from other activity.
- EU-NATO co-operation in ALTHEA works well and is a reminder of the potential of the Berlin+ arrangements that are currently subject to blockage.
- The EU can't take the decision to intervene as the French did in Mali. Legal constraints prevent such a decision from being taken sufficiently quickly.
- Planning for CSDP missions is hampered by slowness in the institutional system, particularly by issues in the relationship between the EEAS and the Commission. The launch of the EUTM Mali is a consequence of two years of planning.
- A new security strategy would have to clearly set out the route to achieving defined objectives. Without a roadmap to addressing current deficiencies in mobilisation, resourcing and institutional coherence any new strategy will not go beyond simply being a strategic document.
- The December European Council and the EEAS Review represent opportunities to address EU effectiveness in security and defence spheres.

EU v Member State Competence

- Consensus slows decision making, but effective action can still be taken. This was demonstrated when Member States (some of whom were extremely reluctant) were persuaded to allow the EU's ATALANTA mission to carry out tactical strikes against pirate logistic dumps on the shore of Somalia. This was made possible through the concerted efforts and leadership of the operation's commander.
- If Member States are willing to exercise leadership, much can be achieved. Actions happen because Member States want them to, not

because of the Commission's wishes. The secret is to reconcile states with differing interests. Thus, a rule of thumb is that if Britain, France and Sweden want the same thing, broad agreement can usually be secured.

- The range of CSDP missions is a consequence of consensus and varied leadership amongst all Member States, rather than the institutions of the EU.
- The demand for consensus makes national interests particularly pertinent in the CSDP decision-making process.

Session 2: The role of the EU in generating Defence capabilities

5. MOD set out the EU's instruments for generating Defence capabilities, including EU Battlegroups, a rapid reaction capability stood up in 2007 but never deployed, and the EDA, a practical embodiment of CSDP designed to support Member States in improving their military capabilities.

6. The following points / questions were raised:

- There is vast potential to achieve economies of scale through better cooperation between Member States, with for example, seven different kinds of armoured personnel carrier. However the difficulties should not be underestimated; it is difficult enough to achieve economies of scale unilaterally (e.g. combining logistics for the British Army and Royal Navy), let alone multilaterally.
- Most Member States spend their Defence budgets less effectively than they should. Efforts at burden sharing have so far failed. In part this is due to the lack of an existential threat, historically needed to force states to take difficult decisions about how to achieve maximum capability return from investment. There is a need to generate wartime thinking in a peacetime environment. One attendee questioned this, noting that even under the existential threat posed by the Cold War, NATO had not done any better than the EU in improving capabilities.
- The capability gaps are known, and have been for some time. In reality, Member States are unlikely to overcome national (primarily industrial) interests in order to pool and share capabilities most effectively.
- Working with 27 Member States is always going to make cooperation more complicated; indeed this is one reason why the UK and France choose to cooperate bilaterally. It was suggested that UK-France cooperation could be a catalyst for wider capability development amongst other EU nations.
- The EDA has many shortcomings. Not least is its lack of access to data on member state forces. The EDA, for instance, does not even have reliable data on the numbers of EU personnel deployed on CSDP missions.

- The EDA could be more assertive by ‘naming and shaming’ Member States about how they allocate Defence budget, pointing out where this is duplicative and unnecessary. This would help cajole Member States into more effective defence spending.
- A ‘defence industrial strategy’ for the EU was discussed, which could map existing capabilities and set out the priorities for future investment. However it was felt that this would be almost impossible to enact, due to the intensely political and difficult nature of some of the decisions it would necessitate, such as which capabilities (for example ship yards) to rationalise.
- Member States need to share information about where they are reducing their defence budgets, and which capabilities are being cut. Without this basic information sharing, it is difficult to avoid duplication of activities.
- There has been no increase in Defence spending as a result of CSDP. In fact it has declined. However, it is difficult to say whether the rate of decline might have been faster had CSDP not been in existence.
- From the UK perspective, participants thought that CSDP had made marginal (if any) difference in improving UK capability. However, that had never been the UK’s intention, which had primarily been to build the capacity of other Member States, and to encourage burden sharing.
- In terms of increased capability, CSDP has had a positive impact by encouraging Member States to improve their capabilities. A good example is Sweden, which has used CSDP to transform its defence policy, and through participation in the EU Battlegroup concept, has significantly improved its capability.
- Another example is Belgian and Dutch naval cooperation. The Belgians and the Dutch do not have their own navy, to all intents and purposes, because their navies are so closely intertwined, so it would be virtually impossible to deploy a Belgian navy unless the Dutch were going along with it too.
- Other examples of improvements to capability as a result of CSDP include helicopters, where NATO provided the equipment and the EU the training, resulting in helicopters being deployed to ISAF. In other areas, capability may not have actually increased, but has been used more. Examples include the Polish deployment in Mali, and Romanian fighter jets in Afghanistan.
- There have also been (small) improvements in civilian security capability, such as the Finns with regards to making their police personnel more deployable.

- CSDP missions have undoubtedly done some good, but there was some discussion about whether this was of direct benefit to the UK national interest. Some felt that CSDP missions contributed to burden sharing and back-filling, freeing up UK forces for more hard edged war-fighting such as Afghanistan. In some cases, without CSDP the UK might not necessarily have undertaken similar activities unilaterally, but this doesn't mean they weren't worth doing.
- There are many examples of the EU providing significantly more diplomatic clout than the UK could have achieved unilaterally. One example is the Iran nuclear dossier, where the EU was perceived as a more neutral broker than individual member states, and where, given the UK's imperial baggage, it would have been impossible to achieve a similar effect working nationally.
- Attendees discussed whether Britain could do more to develop capabilities cooperatively. It was felt that much of this effort would be focused on nations outside Europe. For example, future frigates are likely to be developed with Australia, and a lot of bilateral defence cooperation is already underway with the United States.

Wrap Up

- There are positive examples of Europeans working together operationally. However, a key challenge is to find a way of making an intrinsically non-strategic actor act in a more strategic way.
- While it is impossible to tell if defence spending would have declined faster but for CSDP, it is possible to look at how Defence spending is distributed. This has remained unchanged since the end of the Cold War, suggesting that, despite small positive examples such as helicopter training, CSDP has had minimal impact in this area. Perhaps, 15 years since the inception of CSDP, it is simply too soon to tell.
- Others argued that there are many problems with Defence spending statistics, making it hard to reach such a black and white judgement. Different – often asymmetric – threats are emerging, such as cyber. These cannot be met using conventional Defence capability, so perhaps looking at aggregate Defence spending does not tell the whole story.
- Aggregate defence spending, while declining, is still significant. Effectiveness is not measured by how much is expended, but how it is spent, and looking at hard edged military capability does not give a complete picture. Some CSDP missions, such as NESTOR (looking at maritime capacity building) are more civilian in nature and would not have happened but for the EU.
- The EU is not a sovereign state, but a useful way of pooling and sharing political authority. Broadly its activity in the sphere of foreign policy has

been successful, and vastly better than any single Member State could have achieved unilaterally.