

# Military Strategy and the Deployment of European Forces in 2006

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Paper prepared for the GARNET Conference ‘The European Union in International Affairs’, Brussels, 24-26 April 2008.<sup>1</sup>

*This paper discusses the progress made in the course of 2006 in terms of institutionalised cooperation among European states in security policy. With new or expanding operations in Afghanistan, Lebanon and the DRC, 2006 qualifies as a pivotal year in terms of operational engagements for the European armed forces. This expanding European military engagement in the world is complemented by major institutional and conceptual developments. What remains missing is a sound appreciation of strategy in its military sense, namely how to achieve political effects through the application of military force. The conceptual confusion about strategy manifests itself in the operations European forces undertook in terms of a malfunctioning or haphazard politico-military interface and corresponding schism between ends and means. Elements of military strategy can be identified, but a number of problems in conceptualization as well as implementation persist. The argument concludes that institutional progress and a rising engagement of troops deployed overseas risks to remain fruitless without strategic reflection on how to wield the military tool as an instrument of policy.*

## 1. Introduction

The institutionalised cooperation among European states in security and defence matters is receiving significant academic attention.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of the Cold War and the absence of major warfare for over six decades, the mere fact that European states maintain defence policies already triggers some reflection. In parallel to the early experiments with UN peacekeeping in the aftermath of the Cold War, NATO crisis management in the Balkans and the development of a foreign and security policy pillar in the EU, European armed forces came to see expeditionary crisis response operations as their main thrust of activity. Territorial defence as such dissolved into broader security policies. Shared historical experience, increasing recognition of interdependence and integration, shrinking defence budgets and advantages of scale all contributed to making European states cooperate in defence matters ever more intensively. Most of the European states, with the exception of the former colonial powers France and Britain, no longer have the ability to conduct meaningful operations on a national basis. As a result, there exists a complex puzzle of overlapping authorities and competences as far as defence policy-making in Europe is concerned. The brunt of activity – assessing the security environment as well as planning and conducting operations – takes place in a variety of institutional

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<sup>1</sup> Draft only - not to be quoted without the permission of the author.

<sup>2</sup> Recent examples are J. Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007) and S. Jones, *The Rise of European Security Cooperation* (Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 2007).

frameworks, NATO and the EU being the most prominent, yet the final decision-making lies in the national capitals.

The genesis of the current constellation of security policy mechanisms reads as long and discontinuous story marked by pivotal events and timeframes. The theoretical conception of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), for example, can be traced back to the Franco-British summit in Saint Malo in 1998. In practice, however, it could be argued the ESDP suddenly came of age in 2003. Surprisingly yet not coincidentally in the year characterized by an existential European debate about the use of military force and the state of transatlantic relations, the European Security Strategy (ESS) was written and the EU started conducting military operations.<sup>3</sup> This process started in ‘follow-on to NATO’ mode (Operation Concordia, Operation Althea) but soon acquired autonomy of its own. Operation Artemis – the first military ESDP operation executed without recourse to NATO assets – provided the basis for a “Joint Declaration on EU-UN co-operation in Crisis Management” in September 2003 as well as a blueprint for what would become the EU Battlegroups (cf. infra). As such, 2003 dramatically altered the outlook of the European security architecture. A turning point of this magnitude will not be equalled easily. However, it can be argued that 2006 constituted an honourable follow-up.

The year 2006, broadly defined, can be qualified as a pivotal year for the European armed forces in terms of operational engagements and, to a lesser extent, structural and conceptual developments.<sup>4</sup> First of all, it featured a new autonomous military ESDP operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – EUFOR RD Congo. Second, there was a display of rapid reaction and a rediscovery of UN peacekeeping in Lebanon (UNIFIL – *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon*) in the aftermath of the summer war between Israel and Hezbollah. Third, 2006 was the year in which the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan (ISAF – *International Security Assistance Force*) completed its territorial expansion throughout the country. When this operation – quantitatively speaking by far the most important deployment of European forces – came to include the unruly southern and eastern sectors of the country, it led to a somewhat unexpected confrontation with intense fighting on a scale European militaries had not seen for decades. This expanding operational engagement was complemented in terms of evolving institutional structures and concepts. Across the different institutional frameworks available to European states for deploying their forces – NATO, ESDP and UN – there have been major steps forward in rapid reaction capability, visions on the future and command-and-control (C2) arrangements. If 2003 can be characterized as the sudden emergence of ESDP, 2006 presents a more gradual but also more encompassing renovation of the European security architecture.

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<sup>3</sup> For in-depth discussion of the ESS, see S. Biscop, *The European Security Strategy: A Global Agenda for Positive Power* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005); A. Toje, ‘The European Union Security Strategy: A Critical Appraisal’ (2005) 10 EFA Rev., pp. 117-133; and S. Biscop and J.J. Andersson, *The EU and the European Security Strategy: Forging a global Europe* (Routledge, London, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> In what follows, the label 2006 should be understood as a rough temporal indicator rather than an exact period. The UN request for an EU operation in the Congo arrived on 27 December 2005, for example. Similarly, the EU Battlegroups and the Operations Centre (infra) became fully operational from 1 January 2007 onwards. What all events and developments have in common is that the main action took place in 2006.

This article will sketch an overview of the progress made in institutionalised security policy cooperation among European states in the course of 2006. It discusses the operational and structural trends identified above both from a positive and negative perspective: what progress has been made and where has progress been missing? As a result, this discussion falls down into four parts. Section two provides a brief overview of principal characteristics of the operations mentioned above. Section three engages in a similar exercise pertaining to the developments in institutional and conceptual structures. Section four advances the argument that the principal missing element is strategy in its traditional, military sense: an understanding of how to achieve political effects and outcomes through the application of military force or the threat thereof. Having discussed this issue on the conceptual level, section five investigates how this liability manifests itself in the operations. The concluding section balances the past developments against the identified shortfalls and argues that the grand strategic debate in Europe is in sore need of a counterpart on military strategy that details how the use of military force can be harnessed in practice for political purposes.

## **2. Operational Engagements in 2006**

The number of troops from European states deployed on operations has been steadily on the rise.<sup>5</sup> As recent figures from the European Defence Agency (EDA) indicate, the average number of troops deployed throughout the year by all 26 EDA Participating Member States (i.e. all EU states minus Denmark) was approaching 100,000 in 2006.<sup>6</sup> What is remarkable about the deployments in 2006 is the variety of institutional frameworks under whose banner forces were sent out. In a nutshell, European states can send troops overseas (i) on a national basis (e.g. the French Operation Licorne in the Ivory Coast), (ii) as part of an ad hoc coalition (e.g. the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan) or (iii) through an institutional framework, in which case three options are available: NATO, the UN and the EU. In 2006, each of these was put to practice under very different circumstances. We witnessed a new military ESDP operation in Africa (EUFOR RDC), an unexpected, European-led boost of the UN force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the planned expansion of the NATO-led ISAF. This section sketches a broad overview of these operations and discusses some of their more intriguing characteristics.

### **2.1. EUFOR RD Congo**

In December 2005 the UN requested the assistance of the EU for securing the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>7</sup> A highly capable EU force would be placed on standby to act at the request of the large but overstretched UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC) that was already present in the theatre.<sup>8</sup> From the start it was agreed the mission would last four months from the election date onwards

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. Giegerich and W. Wallace, 'Not Such a Soft Power: The External Deployment of European Forces' (2004) 46/2 *Survival*, pp. 163-182.

<sup>6</sup> EDA, 'Defence Facts: European Defence Expenditure in 2006' <[www.eda.europa.eu/genericitem.aspx?area=Facts&id=286](http://www.eda.europa.eu/genericitem.aspx?area=Facts&id=286)>, 19 November 2007.

<sup>7</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the operation and its relevance for ESDP, see A. Mattelaer, 'EUFOR RDC and the Development of the ESDP' (forthcoming) *Studia Diplomatica*.

<sup>8</sup> For the legal aspects of the operations, see UN Security Council Resolution 1671 and the Council Joint Action 2006/319/CFSP (OJ 2006, L116/98).

(30 July 2006) and only operate in the western provinces of the country, whereas the main bulk of UN forces was stationed in the troubled east. As Germany functioned as lead nation, albeit somewhat reluctantly, the mission was led from the multinationalized Operation Headquarters (OHQ) in Potsdam, with the Force Headquarters (FHQ) deployed to Kinshasa. Remarkably, the main intervention forces – roughly numbering 1,200 – were deployed to the French military base in Libreville, Gabon, as ‘over the horizon’ reserve. The 800 troops manning the FHQ included a Force Capable of Immediate Reaction, and a (French) EU Battlegroup on standby in Europe was earmarked as strategic reserve.

EUFOR RDC constituted the second autonomous military operation conducted by the EU. In contrast to Artemis, by and large a French operation, a wide variety of member states (21 in total!) provided forces for EUFOR RDC, with France, Germany and Spain being the main contributors. It also provided a test of the ‘standby model’ developed for EU-UN cooperation. In a policy paper building upon the EU-UN Joint Declaration of 2003<sup>9</sup>, two models of EU-UN cooperation in military crisis management had been developed. In 2003, Operation Artemis had illustrated the ‘bridging model’, where the EU steps in a crisis hot spot to buy the UN the time needed to mount a new mission or reinforce an existing one. The ‘standby model’, as illustrated by EUFOR RDC, is meant to provide an existing UN operation with an over the horizon reserve or extraction force.

## 2.2. *UNIFIL*

In the summer of 2006, the hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon only ended upon the agreement of significantly enhancing the long-standing UN peacekeeping mission in the region. UNIFIL peacekeepers had been present in varying numbers since 1978. Following the 2006 conflict, however, the UN Security Council authorized a significant expansion of the operation.<sup>10</sup> From its pre-conflict strength of 2,000, troop numbers rose sharply to nearly 11,000 four months later (30 November 2006).<sup>11</sup> In this deployment, the member states of the EU played a visible and crucial role: they were very active on the diplomatic scene (notably France in the UN Security Council) and made a rapid reaction logistically feasible. Roughly 80% of UNIFIL’s troop strength by the end of October 2006 consisted of troops from European states, most notably France and Italy, who subsequently took the lead of the operation. Rather unusual for UN deployments, it was a particularly robust peacekeeping force – culminating in the highly symbolic deployment of French *Leclerc* main battle tanks.<sup>12</sup>

It is striking how some innovative arrangements were explored for deploying and commanding the beefed-up force. First of all, in terms of force generation, the major troop commitments were made on the EU General Affairs and External Relations

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<sup>9</sup> ‘EU-UN co-operation in Military Crisis Management Operations: Elements of Implementation of the EU-UN Joint Declaration’, adopted by the European Council, 17-18 June 2004.

<sup>10</sup> See UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

<sup>11</sup> For UNIFIL facts and figures, see the Center on International Cooperation’s *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2007* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2007), pp. 82-87, 275-285. For a good overview of UNIFIL’s history, see R. Gowan, ‘UNIFIL: Old lessons for the new force’ [Summer 2007] *Signal*, pp. 45-50.

<sup>12</sup> International Herald Tribune, ‘French put tanks ashore for UN role in Lebanon’, 12 September 2006.

Council (GAERC) meeting of 25 August – a rather unusual forum for discussing a UN mission. Second, in order to facilitate rapid reaction in terms of logistics, national and ad hoc cooperation arrangements were preferred over the procedures of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). Third, UNIFIL was to be led from a newly created multinational Strategic Military Cell (SMC) in New York (cf. infra).

### **2.3. ISAF**

2006 was also the year in which NATO completed the expansion of its presence in Afghanistan. NATO took over command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in August 2003, with initial authority in and around Kabul, but was mandated by the UN to cover the whole of the country in October 2003.<sup>13</sup> This process was completed in four stages: Stage 1 – expansion to the North (completed in October 2004), Stage 2 – the West (completed in September 2005), and Stage 3 and 4 – the South and East (completed in August and October 2006, respectively). After taking over the command of troops previously under a variety of national commands, NATO found itself leading some 35,000 troops from 37 countries – a number that rose even further in 2007 and currently stands at 43,000 (February 2008).<sup>14</sup> As a NATO operation this is obviously no exclusively European enterprise, but with roughly half of the troops coming from 25 EU member states – i.e. all except Malta and Cyprus – it is clear there is more than substantial European involvement in the mission.

In terms of numerical strength and operational intensity, it was especially the expansion during 2006 that was particularly challenging. The number of troops under NATO command quadrupled and the mission effectively expanded from stabilisation and reconstruction tasks to counterinsurgency and war-fighting. Officially, counterinsurgency remains the remit of the parallel US-led Operation Enduring Freedom, in which special operations forces from European states participate as well, for that matter. In practice, however, the distinctions have increasingly blurred.<sup>15</sup> As a result, some European forces (most notably, but not exclusively, the British and the Dutch) are experiencing levels of violence they haven't seen for decades. Unsurprisingly this led to considerable public debate in several of the participating states. The former British commander LtGen David Richards described the fighting in southern Afghanistan to the BBC as “probably as intense as anything the British Army has seen since Korea”.<sup>16</sup>

## **3. Institutional Progress**

In recent years, the institutional frameworks for security policy have developed new instruments and structures. This is the most visible in the case of the ESDP, but it is by no means limited to the EU-context, and in many ways runs parallel to what goes on inside NATO. While institutions constantly change and adapt, and developments

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<sup>13</sup> See UN Security Council Resolution 1510.

<sup>14</sup> Information on troops contributions available from the ISAF Homepage <<http://www.nato.int/isaf/index.html>>, 29 January 2007 and 6 February 2008.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. S. Kay and S. Khan, ‘NATO and Counter-insurgency: Strategic Liability or Tactical Asset?’ (2007) 28/1 *Contemporary Security Policy*, pp. 163-181.

<sup>16</sup> Interview in the Panorama documentary ‘3 Commando: Hunting the Taleban’. Transcript available from: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/6211092.stm>>, 5 December 2006.

of varying degrees of importance are correspondingly numerous, 2006 featured some highly visible and arguably fundamental developments. These include the operationalization of rapid reaction forces, developing institutional visions on future security and innovative command and control structures.

### **3.1. *Rapid Reaction Forces***

The creation of force packages on high readiness for crisis response purposes is not altogether new. Already in Prague in 2002, NATO decided to create the NATO Response Force (NRF): “a joint force of land, sea and air elements that can be tailored to individual missions and deployed rapidly wherever the North Atlantic Council requires”.<sup>17</sup> At the Riga Summit in November 2006, the NRF was declared to have reached Full Operational Capability (FOC) – in total adding up to some 25,000 troops ready for deployment at five days notice. However, as early as 2007 the project seemed to be faltering. At the defence ministerial in Noordwijk in October 2007, it was decided to rely on a smaller force ‘core’ rather than keep the full force on standby, which proved to be very difficult to sustain.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, from December 2003 onwards the EU worked on its own scheme for rapid reaction forces, which have come to be known as the EU Battlegroups. Based on the model of Operation Artemis, the Battlegroups (BGs) were defined as “the minimum militarily effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of either stand-alone operations, or the initial phase of larger operations”.<sup>19</sup> In practice, a BG is based on a combined arms, battalion sized force with additional enablers varying along the mission at hand – combat support, combat service support, air and naval assets – with a corresponding strength between 1,500 and 3,000 troops. Initial Operational Capability (IOC – one BG on standby) was achieved from January 2005 onwards. Two years later, on 1 January 2007, FOC was declared: two BGs permanently on standby.

Both the NRF and the EU BGs have been heralded as major steps forward in terms of force transformation – and in the case of the BGs as a catalyst for ESDP itself.<sup>20</sup> The preparations for declaring FOC of both the NRF and the BGs made sure that rapid reaction forces were high on the political agenda in 2006. But one can also argue that the way in which possible operations are funded may very well inhibit their actual use.<sup>21</sup> The relevant funding mechanisms are largely based on the ‘costs lie where they fall principle’, meaning that every state pays for its own individual contribution. As states are unlikely to be willing to foot the bill of an operation in which they have no interest, deployment seems to be limited to the unlikely scenario where the interests of the states on standby in the rotation cycle coincide with the crisis scenario at hand.

### **3.2. *Peering into the Future***

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<sup>17</sup> NATO, *NATO Handbook* (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels, 2006), p. 177.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews and press conference by NATO Spokesman James Appathurai, <<http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s071025c.html>>, 25 October 2007.

<sup>19</sup> R. Hamelink, ‘The Battlegroups Concept: Giving the EU a concrete “military” face’, [Winter 2005] *EuroFuture*, pp. 8-11.

<sup>20</sup> See Y. Boyer, *The Battle Groups: Catalyst for a European Defence Policy* (European Parliament Subcommittee on Security and Defence Briefing Paper, Brussels, October 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Mattelaer, op. cit.

Security policy planning cannot do without a reflective process on how the future will look like. In 2006, two such exercises were taking place in an institutional context. On the NATO side, the project goes under the name of the *Future Security Environment* (FSE) study – forecasting the security environment in 2025.<sup>22</sup> In October 2006, on the other hand, the European Defence Agency (EDA) published *An Initial Long-Term Vision for European Defence Capability and Capacity Needs* (in short Long Term Vision or LTV).<sup>23</sup> Apart from their direct value of shaping expectations about the future context of international security, both of these documents have the function of providing a basis for outlining future capability needs. The LTV, for example, is explicitly linked to the Capability Development Plan which EU governments launched in the EDA in December 2006. Perhaps even more important is the role these documents can play as basis for developing future doctrines, an issue briefly touched upon in section four.

### 3.3. *Commanding Operations*

Questions pertaining to the command and control (C2) structure in crisis response operations are often the focal point of controversy. The C2 arrangements tend to reflect the public prestige, acknowledged know-how and self-professed ambition of the respective institutional frameworks. NATO's military command structure underwent a fundamental restructuring following the Prague Summit in 2002. It was build around two functionally defined commands: Allied Command Operations (ACO) and Allied Command Transformation.<sup>24</sup> The availability of a large multinational integrated command structure undoubtedly played a large role in the decision to hand over the command of ISAF to ACO. As such, ACO underwent its most formidable test with the 2006 expansion. However, it are the EU and the UN contexts where new developments in C2 arrangements were the most striking.

Whether the EU should have an autonomous military headquarters (HQ) has been the source of much diplomatic friction – both across the English Channel and across the Atlantic.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of the ill-famed chocolate summit in 2003, it was agreed the EU would have access to three options for commanding operations: (i) with access to NATO assets (i.e. making use of ACO's headquarters SHAPE, wherein an EU-cell was established), (ii) by multinationalizing a national headquarters (of which there are five available on paper but only three in practice) and (iii) by means of an Operations Centre (OpsCen) in the Civilian-Military Cell of the EU Military Staff. This EU OpsCen is not a fully-fledged headquarters but a combination of a small core (about eight officers and the necessary infrastructure) that can be rapidly activated and expanded when there is a need to conduct a small (Battlegroup-sized) operation. This

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<sup>22</sup> The FSE study, produced by NATO's Allied Command Transformation (ACT), is not a public document. It does, however, build upon earlier projects similar in nature, such as the *Strategic Vision: The Military Challenge* document produced in August 2004 by NATO's Strategic Commanders, and the *Future World Scenarios* paper prepared in April 2006 by ACT. Both documents are available from <<http://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE>>, February 2008.

<sup>23</sup> EDA, *An Initial Long-Term Vision for European Defence Capability and Capacity Needs* (European Defence Agency, Brussels, October 2006).

<sup>24</sup> For an introductory overview of the Alliance's C2 structure, see NATO, *NATO Briefing: A new command structure for a transformed Alliance* (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> For discussion, see S. Biscop, *NATO, ESDP and the Riga Summit: No Transformation Without Re-Equilibration* (Royal Institute for International Relations, Egmont Paper 11, Brussels, 2006).

integrated civil-military OpsCen has become operational as of 1 January 2007. In June 2007 it was activated for the first time in the context of MILEX 07, an EU military crisis management exercise focusing on the interaction between the EU OHQ (i.c. the OpsCen) and the Nordic Battlegroup's deployable FHQ. While the establishment of the OpsCen is in itself a very modest achievement, it represents a highly symbolical compromise with regard to the EU's military autonomy.

The most dramatic innovation in C2 arrangements in 2006 came with the establishment of the Strategic Military Cell for UNIFIL. At the time of the conflict, the UN DPKO was already severely overstretched, running eighteen different peacekeeping operations on four different continents. In order to be able to absorb the rapid expansion of UNIFIL, the SMC was intended to provide a temporary stopgap in C2 capabilities for the UN headquarters. The SMC, tasked with military planning and managing UNIFIL's strategic posture, reports directly to the UN Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping Jean Marie Guéhenno but remains separate from the DPKO bureaucracy. It is composed of some 30 officers (of which two thirds are European) from troop contributing nations and is directed by a French three star general.<sup>26</sup> Organised as a military structure along J-codes, it differs markedly from the civil-military DPKO, for example by engaging in contingency planning for worst-case scenarios. While the working relationship between the SMC and UNIFIL in the field is said to be excellent, the cooperation in with the DPKO is reportedly more difficult and mostly based on informal contacts. In terms of institutional structures, the creation of SMC provided for a more capable planning staff for UNIFIL. At the same time, however, it starkly highlighted the shortcomings of the DPKO's Military Division generated by permanent overstretch. Next to fuelling institutional competition, it occasionally provoked the accusation that European troop contributing countries are getting a preferential treatment, in contrast to the major contributors to other UN operations.

#### **4. The Missing Link: Military Strategy**

It has become popular to say that the major contemporary problem in military affairs is about *strategy*. In Michael Gordon's view, "American defence is in a state of strategic confusion."<sup>27</sup> A former NATO Ambassador stated at a recent conference "Strategy is our biggest problem: out of fear we will lack answers, the big questions are not even asked."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Thomas Waldman argues that British soldiers, acting as a junior partner in the Iraq coalition, find themselves operating in a 'strategic void'.<sup>29</sup> Richard Gowan already labelled the EU Battlegroups "a concept in search of a strategy".<sup>30</sup> This section sketches a generic overview of what this debate is actually about. With this conceptual prism in mind, the next section can then return to the operations European armed forces undertook in 2006.

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<sup>26</sup> Coincidentally, the Director of the SMC, LtGen Bruno Neveux, served earlier as Operation Commander for the EU's Operation Artemis in 2003.

<sup>27</sup> M.R. Gordon, 'Break Point? Iraq and America's Military Forces' (2006) 48/4 *Survival*, pp. 67-82.

<sup>28</sup> Conference held under Chatham House Rule.

<sup>29</sup> T. Waldman, 'British "Post-Conflict" Operation in Iraq: Into the Heart of Strategic Darkness' (2007) 9/1, pp. 61-84.

<sup>30</sup> R. Gowan, 'The Battlegroups: A Concept in Search of a Strategy' In: S. Biscop (ed.), *E Pluribus Unum? Military Integration in the European Union* (Royal Institute for International Relations, Egmont Paper 7, Brussels, 2005), pp. 13-19.

What is strategy? On the one hand, one can observe that government agencies and states as well as international organisations produce documents that go by this elusive name: the US *National Security Strategy*, the *European Security Strategy*, NATO's *Strategic Concept*. The mainstream interpretation is that these should function as a strategic paradigm, i.e. as perspectives on the security environment, the threats emanating from it and how to respond to them. In this sense, strategy is supposed to guide policy.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, strategy has a military-technical sense that refers to the link between military means and political objectives. This second sense is being lost. Hew Strachan, for example, presents a forceful argument that strategy has become conflated with policy.<sup>32</sup> While Carl von Clausewitz defined 'strategy' as "the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war"<sup>33</sup>, its meaning crept ever closer to policy through phrases like 'grand strategy' and 'national strategy'. The advent of the nuclear age and deterrence meant that strategy was no longer limited to the discussion how to wage war but came to describe how to use the threat of war during peacetime. The semantic gap between policy/strategy on the one hand and tactics on the other was filled by the concept of the operational level in war. In Strachan's view, this presents a dangerous evolution as the operational level occupies a politics-free zone. As a result, this leads to a malfunctioning politico-military interface.<sup>34</sup> For the purpose of the argument, this second, more technical sense of strategy will be labelled 'military strategy'.

The accusation of flawed strategy or simply the absence of strategy is best known with respect to the US engagement in Iraq.<sup>35</sup> As the next section will show, there is reason to believe that these problems are as real for European armed forces. On a conceptual level, however, it would be too rash to say that reflection on military strategy is altogether lost. Several doctrinal documents, for example, clearly reflect the enduring spirit of Clausewitz. The EDA's LTV directly paraphrases *On War* by stating "It is a familiar thought that war is the continuation of politics by other means."<sup>36</sup> On the NATO Summit in Riga in November 2006, Allied Heads of State adopted the *Comprehensive Political Guidance*.<sup>37</sup> This document, based on the *Strategic Vision* paper and intended to complement the 1999 *Strategic Concept*, puts emphasis on an 'Effects Based Approach' to Operations (EBAO), i.e. "the coherent and comprehensive application of the various instruments of the Alliance to create overall effects that will achieve the desired outcome", clearly linking military instruments to political effects. The 'future visions' referred to above hence also serve as a foundation for the development of strategic doctrine.

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<sup>31</sup> See e.g. S. Biscop, *The ABC of European Union Strategy: Ambition, Benchmark, Culture* (Egmont, Egmont Paper 16, Brussels, 2007). Here it is rightly pointed out that a broad conception of strategy along public management terms serves the purpose of functioning as a reference framework enumerating long-term objectives and the different policy instruments needed to achieve them.

<sup>32</sup> H. Strachan, 'The Lost Meaning of Strategy' (2005) 47/3 *Survival*, pp. 33-54.

<sup>33</sup> C. von Clausewitz, *On War* (Trans. M. Howard and P. Paret, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 133), cited by Strachan (op. cit., p. 34).

<sup>34</sup> This idea is further elaborated in H. Strachan, 'Making Strategy: Civil-Military Relations after Iraq' (2006) 48/3 *Survival*, pp. 59-82.

<sup>35</sup> With regard to Iraq, the accusation seems to be losing some of its salience as a result of the recent US 'surge' providing (so far) a significant improvement in the security situation.

<sup>36</sup> EDA, op. cit., §17.

<sup>37</sup> NATO, *Comprehensive Political Guidance – Endorsed by NATO Heads of State and Government on 29 November 2006* (NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels, 2006).

Making military strategy work, however, is difficult, and increasingly more so.<sup>38</sup> Even when military planners do their very best, steering political effects remains tricky business. If confusion about military strategy is already at play at the national level, the problem risks being aggravated in an international or institutional context. Last but not least, one should also take into account the fact that the majority of contemporary operations undertaken by European militaries – peacekeeping, stabilisation and reconstruction – do not lend themselves to easy accommodation in classical strategic thought. Theo Farrell explains how such operations tend to disregard the four main principles of war:<sup>39</sup> (i) defining clear and attainable objectives, (ii) achieving unity of effort and command, (iii) massing of force in space, time and effect, and (iv) surprising the adversary. How to apply military force in a useful way when the objective is not to destroy an opponent but to foster a political process or rebuild a nation remains a delicate question to which no answer is beyond debate.<sup>40</sup> With European militaries undertaking operations with very different characteristics, one cannot help but wonder how this plays out in practice.

## **5. Military Strategy in European Operations**

Since the end of the Cold War, the armed forces of European states have by and large concentrated on crisis response operations. The tasks these missions represent, involving peacekeeping, stabilisation and reconstruction, are arguably of greater military-strategic complexity than the all-out war fighting that Clausewitz had in mind. When looking at the operations undertaken in 2006 as a cross-section of the contemporary tasks of European militaries, it is possible to identify some recurring conceptual elements of military strategy – deterrence, interposition, local capacity building and offence. It also becomes clear, however, that these elements may be insufficient and are often bedevilled by problems of implementation resulting from unclear objectives, ad hoc C2 arrangements and persistent capability shortfalls.

### **5.1 Deterrence**

Deterrence embodies the idea that the presence of a military threat discourages potential adversaries from undertaking any undesirable action out of fear for retaliation. Deterrence with nuclear weapons was at the centre of Cold War strategy, but it resurfaces in a more limited conventional sense for crisis management purposes. The mere presence of intervening armed forces in a crisis zone would then already serve as a factor of stability. The case of EUFOR RD Congo provides a useful example. The objective of the EU force was to secure elections. This was to be achieved by deterring the electoral contenders to resort to force to manipulate or challenge election results. Limiting the mission duration in advance to four months, however, undermined the logic of deterrence. The very scenario that was to be avoided – the militias of the presidential candidates fighting it out on the streets of Kinshasa – materialized with a couple of months delay. The above-mentioned deployment of main battle tanks to UNIFIL was also described with reference to their deterrent effect.

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<sup>38</sup> For a general discussion about the inherent complexity of military strategy, see R. Betts, 'Is Strategy and Illusion?' (2000) 25/2 *International Security*, pp. 5-50.

<sup>39</sup> T. Farrell, 'Humanitarian Intervention and Peace Operations' in: J. Baylis et al. (eds.), *Strategy in the Contemporary World* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, pp. 313-334).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. R. Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (Allen Lane, London, 2005).

Deterrence is not without its problems. Deterrent measures always risk being misperceived as aggression: battle tanks or close air support (starting with intimidation fly-by's) qualify as a double-edged sword for peacekeeping purposes. The deployment of EUFOR RD Congo could also be interpreted as signalling a lack of confidence in MONUC. In the EU Military Committee, for example, doubts were voiced over the risk of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: preparing for worst-case scenarios can add fuel to the fire. The general idea that intervention forces by their mere presence constitute a stabilising factor, however, retains great appeal in European thinking about crisis response operations.

## **5.2 *Interposition***

In traditional peacekeeping doctrine, a neutral force can function as a buffer in order to foster confidence and a secure climate in which conflict parties can implement a peace agreement and demobilise their forces. Although the experience with UN peacekeeping in more complex conflict situations during the 1990s resulted in some well-publicized failures – Bosnia and Rwanda to name but the most obvious – the use of armed forces as a buffer continues to serve in those situations where clearly identifiable actors end their hostilities without having resolved the underlying conflict. The expansion of UNIFIL in 2006 serves as a good illustration. The UNIFIL area of operation would serve to prevent Hezbollah from redeploying south of the Litani river on the one hand and prevent the Israel Defense Forces from moving back into Lebanese territory on the other.

In the UNIFIL case, the objective was to provide an interposition force to make a cease-fire acceptable for all parties. More ambitious objectives in terms of disarmament and demobilization were cautiously avoided. UNIFIL was put in place explicitly without being dependent on progress in addressing the underlying political conflict. In other words, it was based on the hope that its mere presence would foster the stability needed – but in itself insufficient – for political dialogue. From that point onwards, the force became a vulnerable bystander in terms of the political process. This begs the question what would happen if the security environment would turn non-permissive or outright hostile.

## **5.3 *Local Capacity Building***

Training local security forces generally serves as the exit strategy for crisis response operations. Local security personnel trained to take over from intervention forces serves as a critical enabler for sustainable local governance. In Afghanistan, the military strategy of ISAF relies heavily on the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) through embedded support (the so-called Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams - OMLTs). As Western armed forces cannot remain present in distant theatres indefinitely, the need for security providers after the departure of intervention forces becomes a primary concern from day one.

Local capacity building always functions in a larger operational context. ISAF's aim is to provide a minimum level of stability to foster development and governance. This is pursued through three lines of operation. The first is to provide basic security through direct military operations against insurgents and indirectly via embedded

support (the OMLTs) to the ANA. The second is to foster reconstruction via the PRTs by conducting infrastructure projects, advising local authorities etc. The third (and most problematic) line of operation is to enable local governance through training police and strengthen government institutions. In terms of generating long-term political effect, it are the second and third lines of operation that will function as benchmark for success. In the context of the Congo, military intervention is equally intertwined with training local personnel: EUFOR RD Congo complemented the already ongoing efforts of the EU in security sector reform (the civilian missions EUPOL and EUSEC RD Congo).

#### **5.4 Offence**

Military operations always carry along the possibility of the use of force. Even in crisis management and stabilization operations, the security environment can change and violence may occur. The operations under discussion, while expeditionary, were not intended as offensive operations, but in order to make the elements mentioned above work, the threat of escalation needs credibility. Deterrence explicitly relies on the threat of the use of force, interposition needs military credibility and local capacity building needs a minimally secure environment in order to take place.

ISAF stands out as an instructive example in this regard. Upon the deployment of British forces to the south of Afghanistan, the then Defence Secretary John Reid stated “We would be perfectly happy to leave in three years and without firing one shot”.<sup>41</sup> The original strategy relied on establishing secure zones in which development initiatives could take place.<sup>42</sup> These ‘ink spots’ would then gradually be expanded. This was complemented by robust Rules of Engagement, allowing for military strikes against perceived security threats. As ISAF forces encountered fierce resistance, however, the mission expanded and came to include large-scale counter-insurgency offensives (Operation Medusa in September 2006, Operation Achilles in March 2007).

Nevertheless, the use of the offence for stabilisation and crisis management purposes remains highly controversial in Europe. In various capitals the debate about the engagement in Afghanistan is flaring up. The reticence amongst some Allies to deploy their ISAF forces in the south or east results in sharp disagreements in NATO, creating worries about a two-tier Alliance of “those who are willing to fight ... and those who are not”, as phrased by the US Defence Secretary Robert Gates.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, concerns over force protection may also lead to a reluctance to deploy ground forces and rely more on air power. This may prove to be counterproductive by generating more civilian casualties and failing to provide protection for the local population.

#### **5.5 Problems of Implementation**

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<sup>41</sup> BBC News, ‘UK troops 'to target terrorists'’ <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/4935532.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4935532.stm)>, 24 April 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007), pp. 117-120.

<sup>43</sup> Financial Times, ‘Gates warns of ‘two-tier’ NATO’, 7 February 2008.

Military strategy may well need a sound conceptual basis, it critically depends on effective implementation as well – and even then it can offer no guarantee of success. However, the operations in 2006 show that the implementation of strategy in the practical realm suffered from major problems. In the line of Farrell's observation that peace operations do not sit well together with the principles of war, three main areas of concern can be identified. These are unclear objectives (often multiple, sometimes outright contradictory), ad hoc and malfunctioning C2 arrangements and persistent capability shortfalls in force generation.

When an ongoing multinational operation is described by various partners either as a war, a counterinsurgency campaign or a peacekeeping operation, as was the case with ISAF in 2006, one can wonder to what extent there is a meeting of minds on the military objectives. Everyone may agree on a well-functioning and stable Afghanistan as a desired end state, but on the question how to get there, little consensus can be found so far. On the operational level, this translates into various types of restrictions that capitals impose on the use of their forces (the so-called 'caveats'). As such, some ISAF troops and ANA contingents into which NATO trainers are embedded cannot be deployed throughout the country. The existence of these caveats makes a truly integrated approach impossible and renders the planning of operations infinitely more complex. The issue of caveats was present for EUFOR as well: several troop contributing countries, including lead nation Germany, largely restricted the use of their contribution to the area of Kinshasa. Effects of mass are lost, surprise becomes difficult to achieve and public diplomacy efforts are seriously hampered. In the case of UNIFIL, interposition was not accompanied by specific benchmarks for progress. In the light of the current political deadlock in Lebanon, what the peacekeepers are meant to do, or how long they need to stay become questions impossible to answer. In the case of EUFOR RD Congo, the long-winded political debate preceding the operation prohibited early activation of the military headquarters to start planning. As a result, the EU Military Committee was not fully involved in the development of the Crisis Management Concept and the translation of political aims into clear military tasks by means of the Concept of Operations was hampered.<sup>44</sup> This brings us to the question of C2 structures.

2006 proved there exists substantial institutional flexibility for deploying European forces abroad. While this illustrates that political pragmatism can trump institutional sensitivities and adapting to the situation at hand is in general a quality of its own, it may have negative consequences for having a well-functioning command and control structure in place. The delegation of the European Parliament that visited the EUFOR RD voiced strong criticism about the long and seemingly burdensome command chain, running from Brussels over Potsdam and Libreville to Kinshasa.<sup>45</sup> German officers in retrospect admitted that the process of multinationalizing the OHQ proved far more difficult than expected. Furthermore, EUFOR was operating at the request of MONUC, but their command chains were fully separated and coordination was limited to the exchange of liaison officers. It is difficult to see how this would foster a

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<sup>44</sup> Dutch Ministry of Defence, 'Eindevaluatie EUFOR Democratische Republiek Congo' <[http://www.mindef.nl/actueel/parlement/kamerbrieven/2007/10/20071001\\_kamerbriefeindevaluatieco ngo.aspx](http://www.mindef.nl/actueel/parlement/kamerbrieven/2007/10/20071001_kamerbriefeindevaluatieco ngo.aspx)>, 1 October 2007.

<sup>45</sup> K. von Wogau, *Visit of the ad hoc Delegation to Kinshasa (DRC) – 06-09 November 2006 – Chairman's Report* (European Parliament Subcommittee on Security and Defence, Brussels, Meeting of 19 December 2007).

clear link between ends and means should more challenging situations have arisen. In Afghanistan, the issue of caveats, as discussed above, breaks the C2 structure down into isolated pieces. In the case of UNIFIL, the intriguing combination of strategic guidance from the European and UN side under the form of the SMC may be a pragmatic ad hoc solution for rapidly overcoming institutional hurdles, but it breeds intense bureaucratic rivalry at HQ level and raises questions over who is at the helm of the operation – the DPKO or the troop contributors.

A third issue is the persistent lack of necessary resources in terms of manpower, material and soft power support (development and reconstruction) for conducting operations. Force sizing criteria are often overruled by political or budgetary considerations, resulting in thinly stretched forces bogged down by capability shortfalls such as tactical air transport. James Quinlivan already put forward the argument that stability operations could demand very large numbers of troops as the size of the required force is primarily determined by the size of the local population.<sup>46</sup> From this perspective, even the relatively robust ISAF operation is heavily overstretched. The fact that the estimated military requirement is consistently 10-15% short of being fulfilled only aggravates what is already a very pressing problem. Force generation proves to be difficult for any operation European militaries are engaged in, illustrating that 2006 and onwards marked the limit of budgetary overstretch. Furthermore, the value of surgical operations like EUFOR, small in size and short in time, for large and long-troubled theatres like the DRC is not clear.<sup>47</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

In the course of 2006, European militaries acquired extensive operational experience in a variety of theatres. On paper this makes for a fertile ground for lessons learned and reflection upon future deployments. Nevertheless, the mood seems to be rather pessimistic. To a large extent, this is related to the lack of progress in the various theatres. Lebanon is gripped by political uncertainty and the future of UNIFIL is mired in uncertainty. Violence in Afghanistan has continued unabatedly and the appetite to step up the effort or even continue at the current level for an extensive period is wavering. Parts of the DRC remain a war zone and the regime in Kinshasa is losing popular support.

The experiments that have been conducted in 2006 made clear that innovative solutions could be found for new scenarios. In particular, the flexibility offered by institutional pluralism became clear: all institutional frameworks available to European cooperation proved to have their own advantages and drawbacks. Some developments, such as the deployment of German troops in faraway Africa, may constitute a deeper shift in how Europeans think about sending troops abroad. However, fundamental questions over military strategy are bound to resurface. The main criticism of the operations discussed above is that they have been launched on an overly political basis with scant attention for military-strategic considerations. The need for an ideal balance between ends and means will always be muddled by the prevailing political context. Military operations that change little on the ground can still be useful for political purposes if they generate the desired effect in terms of

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<sup>46</sup> J. Quinlivan, 'Force Requirements in Stability Operations' [Winter 1995] *Parameters*, pp. 59-69.

<sup>47</sup> As far as the DRC is concerned, the UN peacekeeping operation, while large and expensive for UN standards, remains hopelessly overstretched from the perspective of Quinlivan's forces sizing criteria.

perception. But when using the military instrument for purposes other than conveying political messages, the idea that force can only be used as an instrument of policy if applied in a careful and considerate manner, should have lost none of its potency.

As the debate is ongoing with regard to updating NATO's *Strategic Concept* and the *European Security Strategy*, it may be time to renew the appreciation of military strategy. While grand strategy is intensively debated, the military component may receive much superficial discussion on issues such as mandate, overall troop numbers, national participation, but scant regard for technical detail. European states have very different military strengths and diverse attitudes towards the use of force. Correspondingly, different visions on international security problems persist. But as European states have to collaborate and conduct combined missions, convergence takes place and a nascent strategic culture may be in the making. From an operational perspective, however, it is primordial this includes convergence in thinking how to instrumentalize the use of military power for political purposes. This conceptual exercise can rediscover useful elements from previous experiences – Cold War strategy, UN peacekeeping doctrine, imperial policing – but a clear and integrated strategic paradigm for interpreting and dealing with contemporary crises has yet to be forged. The conceptual discussion will need to be complemented with the necessary know-how regarding operational implementation. This needs to happen in full respect to the primacy of politics, but the political leadership just as much needs to recognize what the military realistically can hope to achieve and what it will cost. In 2006, European states moved into a different dimension in terms of operations. Now, the search for strategy is on.