

Hearings:

The Security Strategy and the Future of the European Security and Defence Policy.

**European Parliament,
PHS Building, Room 4B001
Thursday 13 July 2006
Rue Wiertz 60,
1047 Brussels,
Belgium**

Evidence presented by Professor Michael Cox (with the assistance of Felix Berenskoetter and Eva Gross)
Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE
M.E.Cox@lse.ac.uk;

Introduction

In seeking to assess ESDP's international role and the implications of ESDP for the Transatlantic relationship, it is essential first to provide an impressionistic picture of the world as it is currently is, and is likely to remain for the foreseeable future. In the most general terms, ESDP has arisen in an international system shaped by what I term here the three 'realities' of the modern world.

1. The first reality is the fact of unipolarity. In this world, the United States, by virtue of its global reach, military capabilities and ideology, is capable of shaping the course of international affairs in ways that make all other actors – including Europe - seem like 'bit players'. This is not a situation that especially concerns the United States. However, it has concerned other actors – including many Europeans - who have drawn the not illogical conclusion that until something was done about this, then Europe could neither have much influence in Washington itself nor upon international affairs more generally. Indeed, until such time, it would, to use Robert Kagan's well-known and less than positive remark made about Europe in 2002, remain 'Venus' in a world dominated by the American 'Mars'.
2. The second reality relates to Europe itself. Here, there was (and remains) a serious mismatch between what Europe now is as a global economic player and what it has been able to achieve as a foreign policy actor. The reasons for this 'gap' have been much debated. Indeed, on the margins of this debate, there are those who believe that Europe can never be an international actor and that its power will always remain profoundly 'soft'. ESDP I would argue is, in part, a response to such arguments. It is also the most determined effort to date to bring about a closer approximation between Europe's heavyweight role in the world economy and its hitherto marginal role in the world of hard security.
3. The third reality relates to the new world of security itself. Of course, states still matter and conventional state threats still exist. However, some of the greatest threats now facing the international system do not arise from state aggression so much as from state failure, of which Afghanistan and former Yugoslavia are perhaps the best (but not the only) modern examples. This not only requires a different kind of approach to security and different instruments to bring about security. Under conditions of globalization where developments in one part of the world can very quickly translate into consequences elsewhere, it quite literally demands it.

Rationale for ESDP

Understanding the world and the general context within which the demand for ESDP arose in turn requires an assessment of the purpose and tasks of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), in particular in its relationship to NATO and, thus, the US.

There are two possible ways of thinking about ESDP:

- (i) As either standing in a competitive or balancing relationship with the USA and NATO
- (ii) Or as complementing NATO in a broadly cooperative relationship with the US

While there are those who hope in some abstract way that ESDP will one day emerge to achieve the former, in concrete terms ESDP cannot be seen as counter-balancing the US and/or NATO. There are two reasons why. One, ESDP is simply too weak militarily. Two, there are many states in Europe who would oppose any such move on the grounds that it would be – or would be perceived as being – 'NATO busting'

Specifically, ESDP answers both (a) an objective security need and (b) is in part of an identity-building enterprise to establish the EU's presence as an independent, distinct and credible international actor. These two objectives are not mutually exclusive and are bridged through the notion of enhancing the EU's international 'credibility'. They are contained in the view that ESDP is:

- a logical continuation of EU political integration
- a response to EU 'failures' of 1990s in the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo as catalysts)
- a reaction to decrease in US commitment to Europe, desire to reduce European dependence on US

These factors make ESDP the product of a political compromise between three aims:

- (i) Building an alternative to NATO (France),
- (ii) Strengthening the European pillar of NATO (UK),
- (iii) Deepening European Integration and maintaining the 'European Peace Order' (Germany).
(and a good deal of fence-sitting between the French and British position)

The United States and ESDP

Since the beginning of the Cold War - and certainly since its end - there has always been a marked American ambivalence towards Europe. On the one hand, it has supported Europe making a greater contribution to global security, if for no other reason than to lower the 'burden' upon itself. On the other hand, it has always opposed any move by the Europeans to build up their 'own' security institutions. This is not because the United States is exceptional as a great power. Rather it is a great power and so fears, and thus opposes, any alternative arrangements outside of its control that would have the potential to challenge its hegemony.

Since the end of the Cold War, US policy towards Europe has been shaped by two factors:

- (i) The view that Europe's strategic importance has gone down and that US military responsibilities/commitments on the European continent should and ought to be reduced;
- (ii) Yet still maintaining US political influence on European affairs – partly because of residual fears about Russia, partly because it helps sustain stability in the region, and partly to maintain influence in a crucial region.

Given its own leadership position within the Alliance, the US – naturally enough - prefers NATO as the primary security institution through which to maintain its position on the continent. The US however is not sentimental about NATO. NATO's relevance in this respect depends on how the US defines its own interests (a) in terms of perceived threats to US security and (b) the role Europe can play in helping the United States addressing these threats.

This lack of sentimentality found its most developed form during the late 1990s and in Bush's first term. NATO it was now often said was more burdensome committee than military asset. This view now appears to have fewer supporters in Washington. Indeed, over the last three years, Europe's value as a 'partner' for Washington appears to have increased enormously. Three reasons explain this not insignificant shift;

- (i) A recognition in Washington that global security not only requires dealing with recalcitrant states such as Iraq and Afghanistan but involves helping rebuild these nations as well – something that the United States has never been very good at, and for which its military has not traditionally been trained;
- (ii) A serious fear amongst many in US policy circles that divisions between itself and its European NATO partners not only weakened its own efforts in Iraq but actually undermined the legitimacy of US actions;
- (iii) The unexpected level of costs that the US has incurred in Iraq and thus the need for it to draw upon the resources of its allies.

In spite of the general rapprochement with 'Europe' during Bush's second term, on security matters at least the US still prefers to work bilaterally with national governments rather than the EU. There are four reasons for this:

- A skepticism about the EU's ability to "get things done" in crisis situations due to (i) plurality of interests among Member States, (ii) slow decision-making process, (iii) reluctance of some to engage militarily.

- A belief that decisions on security and defense are made at the national level and not in Brussels;
- A preference to select partners according to need ('coalition of the willing');
- A continuing suspicion that France is intent on using the EU as part of its long-term strategic aim of creating an alternative to NATO.

More generally, there is no consensus or single line in Washington about ESDP. Indeed, a survey of the relevant literature reveals at least three 'American' positions:

- (i) That ESDP is no more than a 'paper tiger' with little real long-term potential – hence it should be ignored.
- (ii) That ESDP is a potential rival that will move 'Europe' outside US control – hence it should be opposed.
- (iii) That it has the potential to become a robust or useful partner that will assist the US in addressing security threats – hence it should be encouraged.

European strategic thinking and overlap with US. Is there a Mind Gap?

The question of whether ESDP should be conceived of as an alternative to NATO, and the extent to which this alternative is competing or complementing NATO requires a comparison of strategic outlooks among Member States and the US. According to the *European Security Strategy* (2003), the EU faces five main threats:

- WMD Proliferation
- Terrorism
- Organized Crime
- Failed States
- Regional Conflict

The key questions are: To what extent can/are these addressed by the US and thus engaged through NATO? Or can or should there be burden-sharing, even a defined division of labour with?

- (i) NATO playing the role of global military actor
- (ii) And ESDP acting as a regional civilian/normative power?

Answering these questions requires clarifying the 'burden' that is to be shared. This requires an analysis of the extent to which Europeans (among themselves) and the US agree on (a) the threat scenario and (b) the appropriate instruments to address these threats.

Although the five challenges listed in the ESS are similar to the ones listed in the 2003 National Security Strategy (the former being to some extent a response to the latter), when looked at closely there are important differences:

The NSS

- proclaims global responsibility for liberal order and maintaining US military dominance
- considers terrorism 'of global reach' and rogue states as main threats. They are portrayed as faces of the same evil and quasi-natural allies who hate freedom (and, by extension, the American way of life).
- traces threats of terrorism to socio-political tensions in the 'Muslim world'
- directly links the threat of WMD's to terrorism and rogue states, who are both considered irrational actors that regard WMD's as weapons of choice, thereby forming an inseparable 'threat triangle'
- holds that the strategy to address these threats is spreading ideas of liberal governance ('democracy'), if necessary through offensive military action (aimed at regime change) under US mandate.
- Does not regard international law as an effective instrument to address security issues but as constraining US freedom of manoeuvre

The ESS

- contains a tension between proclaiming global and regional-only responsibility
- identifies regional instability and conflict (failed states) as the biggest challenges to the EU. They are seen as fostering the threats of WMD proliferation, terrorism, and organized crime.
- does not give terrorism the status of the primary threat (as in the NSS), only refers to a 'fight' rather than a 'war' against terror, refraining from a sense of emergency conducive to applying exceptional measures.
- does not see terrorist acts, and motives for committing them such as political alienation, as rising out of non-democratic or Muslim societies but also sees such conditions in European societies
- does not link the threat of WMD's to rogue states but to the existence and proliferation of WMD's *per se* and, thus, to the ineffectiveness of international regimes controlling its spread and use.
- advocates a strategy of conflict prevention and 'crisis management', as well as the strengthening of the UN and international law more generally

Should ESDP go global? Necessities and Risks

Since 2003 ESDP has gone 'global' with missions in Aceh and the Congo. Geographically, this goes beyond the immediate neighbourhood of potential member states, most obviously The Balkans, and countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

But the EU's global reach has been selective, both geographically as well as in the nature of the mission (civilian vs. military): in Aceh the EU is seen as an honest broker and enjoys a high level of trust; in the DRC, military missions have been conducted on French initiative to show that the EU is in fact a military actor. In none of these cases has there been a significant conflict with the US or NATO over these EU operations, and neither of these cases represents a significant crisis with security ramifications for the EU. One exception is Sudan, where both the EU and NATO are active. As a military actor - rather than civilian - the EU's global reach is confined to the Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa.

But this begs the question: should ESDP go 'global'? As the threats listed in the ESS (above) are said to be global in nature, and ESDP is one of the tools at the EU's disposal to address these threats, conceptually the answer has to be 'yes'. However, while the EU should think globally, it is still not clear how one defines the 'European' national interest in global terms; where and where not to intervene; and *which* failed states and *which* regional conflicts should the EU be concerned about? These are hard questions which will determine the character and scope of ESDP.

ESDP as creating EU identity. Is this all window dressing?

There is a high degree of symbolism in ESDP operations. After the 'failure' in the 1990s Europeans first needed to show that it could assume security functions in the Balkans with EUPM, Concordia and EUFOR Althea, and there were arguments that these missions were designed to succeed. Also, the Balkans had already been pacified. But, especially as the EU as a security actor matures, symbolism and substance are not mutually exclusive: the value added of ESDP operations is that the EU has a range of military/political/economic tools at its disposal that it can deploy in a given country or region.

If ESDP is to establish the EU's identity as a credible international security actor, it must be clear that such an identity can only be established by being able to operate independently from the US. This includes independent decision-making capabilities and control of planning and operating structures. The establishment of the EU's identity as an international actor does *not* imply that it is to be established *against* the US (or NATO). ESDP's trademark of 'comprehensive security' means that the EU is developing a 'European' way to identify and address security issues. At bottom, the question is whether this approach closes or deepens the EU's capabilities-expectations gap.