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**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION  
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- POLICY DEPARTMENT -**

**NOTE**

**The EU Battlegroups**

**Abstract:** This paper provides an introduction to the EU Battlegroup Concept for ESDP Crisis Management Operations. It then gives a first assessment on Member States commitments to reach their objective of having two Battlegroups on stand-by between 1st January 2007 and 2010.

Any opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament.

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# The EU Battlegroups

## 1. Origins of the Battlegroup Concept

The new Battlegroup concept is regarded as an important part of the implementation of the defence aspects of the 2003 European Security Strategy and as an integral part of the new Headline Goal 2010 (that follows on from the 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal).

The idea of developing such a concept was initially floated at a bi-lateral Franco-British summit in Le Touquet on 4 February 2003 and was made more explicit in the 24 November 2003 meeting, in London. At that meeting the two countries referred to the need, building upon the precedent of the French-led autonomous EU Operation *Artemis*, for "credible Battlegroup sized forces" – of about 1,500 soldiers each with appropriate transport and sustainability– to be created so as to strengthen the EU rapid reaction capability to support United Nations' operations.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the military instruments (such as the previous Rapid Reaction Force outlined in the original 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal) of the EU were firmly anchored to the goals advanced in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). France and the UK, first at St Malo in 1998 and then at Le Touquet in February 2003, have highlighted the close relationship between the values of the CFSP and the objectives of its military instrument, by agreeing that:

“the potential scope of ESDP should match the world-wide ambition of the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy and should be able to support effectively the EU’s wider external policy objectives to promote democracy, human rights, good governance and reform.

In London on 24 November they further stated:

“Our two countries now wish to build on these first steps in crisis management operations in two areas: the relationship between the EU and the UN in the field of crisis management; and further work on capability development. ... we now propose that the EU should build on this [operation *Artemis*] precedent so that it is able to respond through ESDP to future similar requests from the United Nations, whether in Africa or elsewhere.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed the November 2004 summit confirmed that the experience of Operation *Artemis* in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – the first autonomous EU-led military operation launched in June 2003 at the request of the UN Security Council – would be the benchmark for developing the Battlegroups for EU missions.

The Franco-British proposal - referred to as ‘Battlegroups’ by the British or ‘Tactical Groups’ by the French - was endorsed by Germany in February 2004, and, on February 10, was submitted to the Political and Security Committee, which, in turn, asked for the Military Committee’s opinion on the technical aspects of the concept (February 18 2004). It subsequently gained further support at the Brussels informal defence ministers and Chiefs of Defence Staff meeting, on 5/6 April 2004.<sup>3</sup> An initial target date of 2007 was set for achieving the first

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<sup>1</sup> "FRANCO-BRITISH SUMMIT LONDON, 24 NOVEMBER 2003 STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN SECURITY AND DEFENCE DECLARATION", see: [http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/UKFrance\\_DefenceDeclaration,0.pdf](http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/UKFrance_DefenceDeclaration,0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external\\_relations/cfsp/intro/gac.htm#esdp260404](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/cfsp/intro/gac.htm#esdp260404)

operational Battlegroups (and early expectations ranged from 6 to 10), although the EU could have two or three of them available much sooner based on existing capabilities and voluntary contributions under the Headline Goal Force Catalogue.

Endorsement of the Franco-British-German concept first took place at the 17-18 May Joint Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers' Council which then led to the concept being integrated into the new Headline Goal 2010 which was formally adopted at the June 2004 European Council.<sup>1</sup>

At the same European Council the Member States acknowledged that the original Helsinki Headline Goal "..." had not been achieved but adopted the new Headline Goal 2010 (which included the BG Concept).

## **2. What is a Battlegroup?**

The Battlegroup Concept consists of highly trained, battalion-size formations (1,500 soldiers each)<sup>1</sup> – including all combat and service support as well as deployability and sustainability assets. These should be available within 15 days notice and sustainable for at least 30 days (extendable to 120 days by rotation). They should be flexible enough to promptly undertake operations in distant crises areas (i.e. failing states), under, but not exclusively, a UN mandate, and to conduct combat missions in an extremely hostile environment (mountains, desert, jungle, etc). As such, they should prepare the ground for larger, more traditional peacekeeping forces, ideally provided by the UN or the Member States. Not surprisingly, the development of the battle group concept implies the availability of strategic lift and combat support capabilities. In this respect, the concept is linked to the Helsinki Headline Goal process and its ambitions to make up key identified capability shortfalls.

The Battlegroup concept is seen as a key 'mobilizing' tool. A battle group will consist of highly trained, battalion-size formations (1500 soldiers each)<sup>2</sup>—including all combat and service support as well as deployability and sustainability assets.

The Battlegroup has been described by officials as a specific form of rapid response whereby it is the minimum military effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations, or for the initial phase of larger operations.

According to the Headline Goal 2010, the Battlegroups should be rapidly deployable, sustainable and interoperable (when in multinational format). The November 2004 Declaration on European Military Capabilities reiterates this by adding an objective to achieve "overarching standards and criteria". These were initially agreed in March 2005 and refer to "availability, employability and deployment, readiness, flexibility, connectivity, sustainability, survivability,

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union, ESDP Presidency Report, Annex I, 'Headline Goal 2010', Brussels, 17–18 June 2004, URL <[http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/2010 Headline Goal.pdf](http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/2010%20Headline%20Goal.pdf)>. The Headline Goal 2010 was approved by the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 17 May 2004 and endorsed by the Brussels European Council of 17–18 June 2004. It was first introduced in a French 'Non-Paper' entitled 'Towards a 2010 Headline Goal'. This was further elaborated by an Italian Presidency Paper and again by a British 'Non-Paper' focusing on implementation and entitled 'The road to 2010'. See also: [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external\\_relations/cfsp/intro/gac.htm#cfsp170504-02](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/cfsp/intro/gac.htm#cfsp170504-02)

<sup>2</sup> An official of the British Ministry of Defence, in an interview with the author, described a battle group as the smallest self-sufficient military operational formation that can be deployed and sustained in a theatre of operations. The concept draws on standard NATO doctrine: e.g., the NATO Response Force 'land component' is a land brigade configured tactically with 5 battle groups.

medical force protection and interoperability." The overarching standards and criteria should also form the basis of Member States development of criteria for "evaluation/certification".<sup>1</sup>

## *2.1 Interoperability*

Whilst interoperability is a complex technical subject, in its simplest meaning it refers to the ability of one set of forces (land, sea, air) to communicate and operate with another (this is equally important within a country (joint air, sea and maritime operations) and between countries). It has become a key objective for modern armed forces, it is crucial for multinational forces (such as within EU, NATO or UN) as well as for those Member States intending to take part in *ad hoc* coalitions of the willing (such as Desert Storm or more recently in Iraq). Interoperability is relevant to the Battlegroups because they can be formed by a Framework Nation or a multinational coalition of Member States.

NATO has led the way in overcoming European and Transatlantic difficulties of interoperability by developing agreements on military standards and procedures known as STANAGS. These will form the basis of EU Member States interoperability discussions. Nevertheless, there are expected to be significant challenges for the Battlegroups in particular for actual interaction of military units from different member states which might not be familiar with training and working together. Difficulties with interoperability of equipment may also arise. The Headline Goal 2010 also includes an objective to improve European interoperability in the areas of communications during this period. It states that to improve communications at all levels of EU operations by developing appropriate compatibility and network linkage for all communications equipment and assets (both terrestrial and space) by 2010.

A further key element in overcoming interoperability problems for deployment of multinational forces will be the pre-deployment training. Whilst the Member States have not been able to agree an EU level Standard of Training for Multinational Battlegroups, they have agreed to improve inter-operability within each individual multinational Battlegroup through training at the national level. The HG 2010 adds that the Member States are committed to develop quantitative benchmarks and criteria for national forces committed to the Headline Goal in the field of deployability and in the field of multinational training.

## *2.2 Deployability and Sustainability*

In order to meet the criteria to be deployed within 10 days of a Council decision to launch an operation this requires pre-identified and committed forces and assets. The BGs must also be sustainable for 30 days with sufficient assets identified to extend the initial intervention to 120 days. Therefore the BGs must have "pre-identified operational and strategic enablers such as strategic lift and logistics."<sup>2</sup> Although there are shortfalls in the availability of key enablers, in particular strategic air lift, the Member States are committed to finding the necessary enablers for each Battlegroup in order for it to be ready for use from 1 January 2007.

The Headline Goal 2010 includes objectives to improve the situation regarding the shortfall of enablers during this period whereby the Member States are committed :

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<sup>1</sup> Capability Commitments Conference, Brussels 22 November 2004. see: <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/MILITARY%20CAPABILITY%20COMMITMENT%20CONFERENCE%202.11.04.pdf#search=%22november%202004%20capability%20commitments%20conference%22>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

- to implement by 2005 EU joint coordination in strategic lift (air, land and sea) as a step towards achieving full capacity and efficiency in strategic lift by 2010;
- to transform (in particular for airlift) the European Airlift Co-ordination Cell into the European Airlift Centre by 2004 and to develop (between some member states) a European airlift command by 2010;
- *to complete by 2007 the establishment of EU battle groups, including the identification of appropriate strategic lift, sustainability and disembarkation assets;*
- to acquire the availability of an aircraft carrier with its associated air wing and escort by 2008;

For those Member States not able to contribute to a Battlegroup, or that wish to make additional contributions, a database will be developed for niche capabilities that provide added value to the Battlegroups.

### 2.3 Decisions-making

The Battlegroup concept includes an ambition to have a decision on the launch of an operation within 5 days of approval by the Council of the Crisis Management Concept. Following a Council decision to launch an operation the aim is to have forces deployed on the ground within 10 days of the decision. The concept implies that the Battlegroups will be made up of assets and capabilities held at 5 to 10 days readiness. The initial requirement is for the forces to be sustainable for at least 30 days (extendable to 120 days by rotation). They should be flexible enough to promptly undertake operations in distant crisis areas, under—but not exclusively—a UN mandate, and to conduct combat missions in an extremely hostile environment (mountains, desert, jungle, and so on). As such, they should prepare the ground for larger, more traditional peacekeeping forces, ideally provided by the UN or member states.

## 3. Current Status of Member States Commitments to the Battlegroups

At the 22 November 2004 Military Commitments Conference the Member States made a "Declaration on European Military Capabilities" which set out priorities for the Battlegroups. The declaration included:

In May 2004 the GAERC concluded that commitments would be sought from Member States in order to achieve an initial Battlegroup capability in early 2005 and complete availability in 2007. This commitment was met with "Initial Operational Capability" provided for by the UK, France and Italy in 2005, followed by a combined Germany-French capability, a collaborative Spanish, Italian, Greek and Portuguese capability as well as a collaborative French, Dutch and Belgian capability in 2006.<sup>1</sup>

From 2007 the Member States committed themselves to a "Full Operational Capability" with "the capacity to undertake two concurrent single-Battlegroup-size rapid response operations, including the ability to launch both such operations nearly simultaneously". The process of generating the Battlegroups for the Full Operational Capability took place through Battlegroup

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<sup>1</sup> The exact make up of the Battle Groups during the "Initial Operational Capability" is described as "The United Kingdom and France have each committed to providing a Battlegroup during first half of 2005, and Italy will provide a Battlegroup for the second half of 2005. Germany and France will commit joint Battlegroups for the whole of 2006, with alternating leadership, supported by Member States such as Belgium. Also in the first half of 2006, a multinational Battlegroup, based on the framework of the Spanish-Italian amphibious and landing forces (SIAF) with Portuguese and Greek capabilities, will be available."

Coordination Conferences, which took place in May 2005 and November 2005. The table below details the current contributions of the Member States, which have committed to providing 4 Battlegroups per year i.e. two for each period of half a year.

**Table on the current status of Member states contributions to the Battlegroups**

Initial Operational Capability	1st half 2005		2nd half 2005		1st half 2006		2nd half 2006	
	UK	FR	IT	Nil	DE + FR	ES + IT, EL and PT	FR + DE and BE	Nil
Full Operational Capability	1st half 2007		2nd half 2007		1st half 2008		2nd half 2008	
	DE + NL and FI	FR + BE and LU	IT + HU and SI	EL + RO, BG & CY	SE + FI, EE and NO	ES + DE, FR and PT	DE and FR + BE, LU and ES	UK
Full Operational Capability	1st half 2009		2nd half 2009		1st half 2010		2nd half 2010	
	IT + ES, PT and EL	Nil	CZ + SK	FR + BE (TBC)	PL + DE, SK, LV, and LT	UK + NL	IT + RO and TR	Nil

*Key to Country Code: UK - United Kingdom, FR-France, IT-Italy, DE-Germany, ES-Spain, EL-Greece, PT-Portugal, BE-Belgium, NL-Netherlands, LU-Luxembourg, HU-Hungary, SI-Slovenia, RO-Romania, BG-Bulgaria, CY-Cyprus, SE-Sweden, FI-Finland, EE-Estonia, NO-Norway, CZ-Czech Republic, SL-Slovakia, PL-Poland, LV-Latvia, LT-Lithuania, and TR-Turkey. NIL-means no BG has been committed and TBC-to be confirmed.*

The current state of play on the number of Battlegroups as of August 2006 indicates a strong commitment by the Member States to have a Full Operational Capability by 1 January 2007. Currently, there remain shortfalls, to achieve two Battlegroups per 6-month period, for the second BG during the first half of 2006, and for the second BG during the second half of 2010. We are still awaiting confirmation from the French and Belgian led BG in the second half of 2009. The overall picture highlights a strong commitment by the Member States to meet their original objective of 2 BGs on standby per-six-month period between 2007 and 2013.

The table shows that whilst BGs can be formed from a single nations contributions including its Operational Headquarters (such as UK in 2005 and 2006 or France and Italy in 2005), the majority of Battlegroups are based upon a lead nation (known in the EU as a Framework Nation) that either draw upon that same nations OHQ (such as UK, France, Italy, Germany or Greece) or from one of the 5 multinational OHQs made available to the EU (provided by UK, France, Germany, Italy and Greece) for ESDP missions. An example of the latter is the first BG in the first half of 2008 whereby Sweden is the Framework Nation with troops from Finland, Estonia and Norway (known as the NORDIC BG) and whereby the UK provides the Multinational OHQ.



To-date 21 Member States have volunteered to lead or be part of a BG. Denmark does not take part in EU actions which have defence implication due to its opt out under (Article 6 of the Protocol on the position of Denmark annexed to) the TEU. Ireland and Austria have so far not confirmed their role in any EU Battlegroup, however discussions continue at the national level about how such a role might affect their traditional status as neutral countries. Malta is also absent from a BG. Four non-EU countries will take part in the BGs, including Norway as a member of the so-called NORDIC BG, and three EU candidate countries Romania, Bulgaria (in the 2005 Spanish-led and 2010 Italian-led BG) and Turkey (in the 2010 Italian-led BG). It remains unclear if the inclusion of Cyprus in the Greek-led Battlegroup in the second half of 2007 will be able, if needed, to draw upon the EU-NATO 'Berlin Plus' arrangements.

#### **4. Outstanding issues for the Battlegroups**

The battle group is not a completely flawless concept: in particular, it leaves open the question of follow-on forces. The battle group is sustainable for 120 days, while the UN force-generation process (the most likely source of follow-on forces) takes six months, creating an obvious gap. However, the Headline Goal handles this by linking its specific references to the battle group concept (also more moderately described as 'minimum force packages') with a more comprehensive concept of intervention whereby the EU has the ability 'to deploy force packages at high readiness as a response to a crisis either as a stand-alone force or as part of a larger operation enabling follow-on phases'.<sup>1</sup> This provides a critical point of departure for further work to aid force planning for EU crisis management, but the text of the Headline Goal 2010 leaves the details incomplete.

Another major addition is the statement that 'Procedures to assess and certify these high readiness joint packages will require to be developed'.<sup>2</sup> Such procedures will potentially add a qualitative and quantitative breakthrough in allowing forces assigned to the EU not only to be committed and counted in "catalogues" but also to be verified and vetted in order to substantially improve defence planning processes.

Whether the BGs will be "paper armies" for discussing "catalogues" or become actual capabilities that can be deployed for crisis management was the focus of much discussion between 2003-2006. However, the Member States have dismissed earlier criticism by stepping forward and volunteering firm commitments for the period 2007-2013. Of course the final analysis on the success of the Member States will be made during the operational period between 2007 and 2013 when the BGs will be deployed and perhaps even used. The initial analysis indicates that the Member States have already improved on the original Headline Goal RRF commitment (of 60, 000 troops) by volunteering the smaller but real and deployable capabilities of the BGs.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union see footnote 1 page 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.