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CSDP and NATO: Rethinking the Transatlantic Security Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the European Union's (EU) security relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States (US) through the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Skeptics have decried the rise of CSDP as a new security pillar, arguing that it is an attempt to balance against NATO and the US. I argue that this criticism is false. A comparison of two CSDP military operations, European Union Force Chad/CAR (EUFOR Tchad/RCA) and European Union Force Althea (EUFOR Althea), shows that operational success is heavily dependent on the EU's ability to use NATO assets through the Berlin Plus agreement. While EU security integration has progressed, it continues to suffer from a significant capabilities gap; without access to NATO capabilities, CSDP military operations face many challenges. I conclude that CSDP is not threatening the transatlantic relationship because the EU remains a limited hard power actor in promoting and securing international security.

KEYWORDS

CSDP, NATO, Berlin Plus, transatlantic security relationship, capabilities gap

INTRODUCTION

The Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) represents an important step forward in security integration in the European Union (EU). Agreed upon through the 1998 St. Malo Declaration, CSDP operationalizes the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) through an intergovernmental structure. Emphasizing both military and civilian capabilities, CSDP missions have been underway since 2003 and seek to promote regional stability. However, some skeptics have decried the rise of CSDP as a new security pillar, arguing that it undermines the importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and threatens the US-EU transatlantic security relationship through its balancing effect (Rynning, 2011). I argue that this criticism of CSDP is weak and rather a misconception. The EU has invoked the Berlin Plus agreement to conduct two CSDP military operations thus far. A comparison of one of these operations with a non-Berlin Plus military operation of comparable scope reveals that operational success is heavily dependent on the EU's ability to use NATO assets through the Berlin Plus agreement: without access to NATO's capabilities, CSDP military operations face many challenges and often end prematurely or in failure. While EU security integration has progressed, it continues to suffer from a significant capabilities gap, making any serious fear of the development of CSDP as a competitive European security pillar misplaced.

This paper will explore the EU's security relationship with NATO and the US through the framework of CSDP. Through a comparison of two case studies, I will show that the EU is more successful in its CSDP military operations when utilizing NATO assets. Part one will provide necessary background information regarding (1) the larger transatlantic security debate, (2) the EU's capabilities gap and efforts to address this issue through the establishment of the European Defense Agency (EDA), and (3) the EU-NATO Berlin Plus agreement. Part two will focus on two CSDP military operations – European Union Force Chad/CAR (EUFOR Tchad/RCA), launched in 2008, and European Union Force Althea (EUFOR Althea), launched in 2004. First, a rationale for why these cases were selected will be provided. Next, specifics about each operation and the overall assessment will be discussed. Part three will analyze why EUFOR Althea was a more successful operation. It will argue that the EU is reliant upon the Berlin Plus agreement for assets and capabilities for the success of its large-scale CSDP military operations. Therefore, the fear of CSDP balancing against NATO and US interests is unfounded. Finally, I will conclude that despite the operationalization of CFSP through CSDP, the EU remains a limited hard power actor in promoting and securing international security.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The transatlantic security relationship has significantly evolved since the creation of CSDP. As its member states collectively constitute a major player in NATO, the US has developed strong security links with the EU. However, since the end of the Cold War, US interest in Europe has declined and the US has called upon the EU to share the burden of maintaining peace and security in the international system. Interests between the transatlantic actors have also diverged, causing a desire within the EU for some degree of autonomy that allows them to act separately from the US. This inclination for self-sufficiency led to the creation of CSDP in 1998, which was seen as a “threat to undermine NATO's status as the preeminent security organization” (Joachim, 2010, p. 42). Although the US wanted to engage in burden sharing with the EU, the attitude towards CSDP was unfavorable because US

government officials worried that the rise of a European security pillar would balance against NATO for power and influence. In order to emphasize that the US would not support CSDP if it undermined NATO's influence, Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State during the Clinton administration, developed the "3 D's" (Keohane 2009, p. 128). These outlined the three preconditions for US support: "no de-coupling of the US from Europe, no discrimination against non-EU NATO members, and no duplication of NATO assets" (Keohane, 2009, p. 128). De-coupling and duplication became large concerns during the Bush administration as the US viewed the EU's new role as an international security actor with reluctance. Meanwhile, the EU defended its decision to act independently of NATO by arguing that CSDP is helping them develop into a more viable security partner for the benefit of the transatlantic relationship. This viewpoint has gained more acceptance under the current Obama administration as CSDP is no longer considered as strong of a threat to US military power and influence.

The main reason CSDP is no longer seen as threatening to US influence is that the EU suffers from a significant capabilities gap. Combined EU defense spending is nearly €200 billion per year; however, the EU does not spend efficiently (European Defense Agency, 2010, p. 2). This has resulted in a gap between what the EU possesses and what it can actually utilize. Furthermore, while the EU has approximately 1.7 million active duty troops among all EU member states, it struggles to deploy even 4% of them because member states' militaries are still geared towards traditional Cold War scenarios (Cross, 2011). This has contributed to a severe lack of available troops for CSDP, undermining the overall effectiveness of several military operations. There have been many political initiatives to address the shortage of military personnel and equipment. In 1999, EU member states agreed to the Helsinki Headline Goal, which called for the ability to "deploy rapidly and sustain forces capable of the full range of the Petersberg Tasks" (De Waele, 2011, p. 56). The target was to have forces ranging up to 60,000 personnel capable of deploying within 60 days for a period of at least one year (De Waele, 2011). However, progress was slow and the goal was replaced in 2007 by EU Battle Groups. The implementation of these groups signifies a declining military ambition as they consist of only "1,500 men, being ready for command within 10 days" and sustainable for a maximum of 120 days (De Waele, 2011, p. 57). The European Council has yet to agree to call upon a Battle Group, forcing CSDP operations to rely upon a weak Force Catalogue system (Cross, 2011). In order to address the capabilities gap and thereby increase the EU's ability to provide personnel and equipment for CSDP military operations, the EDA was established in 2004 to aid in "identifying operational requirements, stimulating the necessary research and expenditure, and strengthening the industrial and technological base of the European defense sector" (De Waele, 2011, p. 54). As a facilitator of collaboration, the EDA was created with the hope of increasing the EU's military presence in the international system by eliminating duplications, promoting defense spending, and integrating research among member-states (Keohane, 2004). But its success has been limited thus far, resulting in a CSDP suffering with sub-par military capabilities.

In order to overcome the EU's lack of military capabilities and promote inter-organizational cooperation, the EU and NATO agreed in 2003 to a special arrangement known as Berlin Plus. This agreement provides the EU with "assured access to NATO assets and capabilities" (Bergeron, 2004, p. 41) for CSDP operations in locations "where NATO as a whole is not engaged" (Bergeron, 2004, p. 41). After NATO has declined to intervene in a given crisis and unanimous approval among members is given, the EU may utilize Berlin Plus to

augment their “force generation and operational planning capabilities” (Bergeron, 2004, p. 42) for CSDP operations, thereby overcoming its own military capabilities gap. As will be shown through two contrasting case studies, the Berlin Plus agreement has proven to affect whether CSDP military operations are ultimately successful. When utilizing NATO assets and capabilities, operations have been much larger and more effective overall. In comparison, when the EU alone has been responsible for funding and providing the necessary resources, operations have been slow to deploy and have been plagued by planning and execution problems. Although obtaining the unanimous decision to provide NATO assets to the EU can present some challenges – namely delaying deployment – the Berlin Plus arrangement remains the best option for the EU to utilize when conducting CSDP military operations. It not only strengthens EU-NATO cooperation, but also helps the EU overcome its capabilities gap.

CSDP MILITARY OPERATIONS – EUFOR TCHAD/RCA AND EUFOR ALTHEA

I will utilize case studies of EUFOR Tchad/RCA and EUFOR Althea to support the argument that due to CSDP’s reliance on NATO assets and capabilities for military operations, the fear of the rise of CSDP as a competitive European security pillar is a misconception. These case studies were selected because they are the largest CSDP military operations conducted with and without Berlin Plus. First, EUFOR Tchad/RCA will be discussed as it did not involve the Berlin Plus agreement. The operation suffered from a lack of resources, leading to a handoff to the United Nations (UN). These elements make it a useful comparison to EUFOR Althea, which is the most recent military operation to use the Berlin Plus arrangement. EUFOR Althea greatly benefited from the use of NATO assets and capabilities, leading to one of CSDP’s largest military accomplishments.

EUFOR Tchad/RCA

EUFOR Tchad/RCA was launched in March 2008 for a duration of one year as the largest military operation not invoking the Berlin Plus agreement. The decision to launch an operation stemmed from concern regarding the instability on the Chad-Sudan-Central African Republic (CAR) borders (Helly, 2009). Groups living along the borders were involved in many types of violence, especially since the “first massive flows of refugees from Darfur started to cross the border with Chad in 2003-2004” (Helly, 2004, p. 340). With Chad suffering from an internal political crisis, there was little to no control of “attacks from Sudanese and Chadian armed groups and Janjaweed militias against specific ethnic communities [or] the use of certain camps for recruitment of combatants and child soldiers” (Helly, 2004, p. 340). These factors contributed to a highly insecure region undergoing a humanitarian crisis, prompting France to propose EU engagement in the region in 2007.

Following adoption of the Crisis Management Concept in September 2007, “the French diplomatic machinery was mobilized to convince European partners as well as reluctant Chadian authorities” (Helly, 2004, p. 341) to accept and contribute to the CSDP military operation. UN Security Council Resolution 1778, adopted in October 2007, approved the deployment of a CSDP military operation in Chad and the CAR (Helly, 2004). It established the operational headquarters in Mont Valerien in France, which contributed to a communication gap between personnel at headquarters level and those at ground level. The aims of EUFOR Tchad/RCA were threefold: “[firstly] to contribute to protecting civilians in danger, [secondly] to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and...humanitar-

ian personnel by helping to improve security, and [lastly] to contribute to protecting UN personnel, facilities, and equipment” (Helly, 2004, p. 339). This mandate complemented the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) as both hoped to tackle the regional effects of the Darfur conflict by focusing on the protection of civilians and promoting the rule of law.

A total of 3,700 troops were deployed from 23 EU member states and 3 non-EU members including Russia, Croatia, and Albania for EUFOR Tchad/RCA (Helly, 2004). However, from the beginning, there was a lack of interest among EU member-states to intervene as the force generation process “started painstakingly, with very few member states willing to contribute significant troops and resources” (Helly, 2004, p. 340). This was in part due to the fact that the situation on the ground in Chad presented many challenges with the larger threat of a regional crisis and different rebel groups. But it also reflects the EU’s inability to collectively provide adequate military personnel and equipment for large CSDP operations. France took on the role of the main financial and troop contributor, “shouldering probably 80% of the total costs” (Helly, 2004, p. 350). Furthermore, there were serious logistical limitations that delayed full operational capability being reached until September 2008. Ensuring tactical air assets proved problematic as “it took months to obtain a limited number of urgently needed additional helicopters, which were eventually provided by a state outside the EU, Russia” (Vines, 2010, p. 1096). As a complex and large military undertaking, EUFOR Tchad/RCA required a considerable number of troops and equipment. The EU failed in providing these in a timely manner, highlighting its capabilities gap and continued inferiority to NATO as a hard power international security actor.

Overall, EUFOR Tchad/RCA was too large of a military engagement for the EU to effectively carry out. Although Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) like Oxfam and International Crisis Group stated that the operation had contributed “to a safer environment and a certain sense of security among both the population and the humanitarian community,” (Helly, 2004, p. 345) the fact remains that CSDP failed in reaching full operational capability until halfway through the mandate. This likely impacted the decision to not renew the operation past its initial mandate of one year. Instead, it was replaced by UN forces under the MINURCAT mandate in March 2009 as originally planned. The lack of political will and material commitment by EU member states in this operation supports the argument that CSDP continues to suffer from capabilities shortfalls when acting without access to NATO assets. This undermines its power and influence as an international provider of security and stability through military means, quelling US fear of the rise of a competitive European security pillar.

EUFOR Althea

EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina was launched in December 2004 as the second, and, to date, most recent CSDP military operation to utilize Berlin Plus. It is an ongoing operation, reflecting the EU’s continued interest in ensuring security in the Balkan region. Shortly after Bosnia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, the state experienced a violent ethnic war that “pitted Bosnian Muslims, Croat Bosnians, and Bosnian Serbs against one another” (Keohane, 2009, p. 212). The EU proved inept in effectively dealing with the war and bringing about peace and stability in the state. The war was brought to an end only when NATO militarily intervened and the US brokered the Dayton–Paris peace agreement (Keohane, 2009). After the war ended in 1995, NATO continued their presence

in the state, deploying 30,000 troops in the Stabilization Force (SFOR) in 1996 (Keohane, 2009). NATO's SFOR operation ended in June 2004, when the organization announced that SFOR would be replaced by a CSDP military operation, which became EUFOR Althea (Keohane, 2009).

Full handover of the operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina from NATO to the EU required approximately six months due to the technicalities of the Berlin Plus agreement. However, once "the precise meaning of EU access to NATO assets and capabilities, especially for planning" (Keohane, 2009, p. 213) were agreed upon, the "operational planning phase was relatively smooth" (Keohane, 2009, p. 213). EUFOR Althea was officially launched in December 2004 after NATO withdrew its involvement in the state and the UN adopted Security Council Resolution 1575, permitting EU engagement through CSDP (Keohane, 2009). As this operation involved the Berlin Plus agreement, the EU had access to NATO assets and capabilities for operational planning and execution as well as force generation. Importantly, EUFOR Althea's headquarters was "co-located with NATO in the former SFOR headquarters" (Keohane, 2009, p. 215). This not only promoted EU-NATO cooperation, but also helped the EU determine their operational planning strategy with an understanding of the situation on the ground. The EU would have been incapable of doing this without the Berlin Plus agreement, leading to a more unrealistic and ineffective mandate like that of EUFOR Tchad/RCA. The CSDP operation's official order was "to ensure compliance with the 1995 Dayton-Paris peace agreement, support the international community's High Representative, and assist the local authorities with a number of tasks" (Keohane, 2009, p. 211). These objectives were designed to deter any potential recurrence of civil war, and if such an occasion arose, CSDP forces were equipped with the necessary resources for military force.

Unlike in the case of EUFOR Tchad/RCA, this CSDP military operation did not suffer from a capabilities gap, largely due to the fact that it benefited from NATO assets through the Berlin Plus agreement. Without NATO personnel, equipment, and headquarters, the operation would have faced more challenges considering its scale and longevity. However, with the help of NATO members, such as Turkey, the EU deployed 7,000 troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004, making this the largest EU military operation in CSDP's history (Keohane, 2009). Taking into account the EU's capabilities gap and the fact that only 4% of its troops, or 68,000 soldiers, are deployed on average, the EU would have found it difficult to commit such a large number of troops to one single operation (European Defense Agency, 2010, p.19). Therefore, EUFOR Althea's success was dependent upon NATO. The EU remains a limited promoter of international security through hard power, solidifying US supremacy in this sphere of influence. As the goals of the operation continue to be met, the number of troops deployed has decreased. Currently, 22 EU member states and five non-EU members are contributing a total number of 900 troops to EUFOR Althea (Keohane, 2009).

Thus far, EUFOR Althea has been a very successful CSDP military operation. It "has demonstrated a successful and promising implementation of the Berlin Plus arrangement in the field" (Koops, 2010, p. 53) as NATO assets and capabilities have proved integral to meeting the operation's mandate. Through this operation, the EU has been able to restore its once tarnished credibility among Bosnian citizens as a promoter of regional peace and security. EUFOR Althea has positively contributed to "collecting weapons, patrolling and intelligence gathering" (Keohane, 2009, p. 216) as well as "capturing war criminals and tackling organized crime" (Keohane, 2009, p. 217). Progress in each of these areas is aiding Bosnia's overall security and stability, which are essential preconditions for future acceptance into the

EU as a member state. Lastly, through this operation “a dense network of frequent and effective interactions between EU and NATO military staffs and strategic planners has been progressively forged” (Koops, 2010, p. 53). These interactions will likely prove useful in future operations involving the Berlin Plus agreement, and stabilize any threat perception by the US regarding the rise of a competitive European security organization in CSDP.

THE IMPACT OF BERLIN PLUS AND LESSONS LEARNED

As shown through the two case studies, NATO continues to play a significant role in the ultimate success of large-scale CSDP military operations. Although the EU is well integrated and more easily able to agree on the tactics of operations than NATO, the capabilities available significantly impact operational success. By providing the EU access to NATO assets and capabilities, the Berlin Plus agreement greatly supported the planning and execution of EUFOR Althea. On the other hand, EUFOR Tchad/RCA was an engagement by the EU alone. Therefore, it suffered from the effects of a large EU capabilities gap, making the operation less successful than expected. As one of the largest CSDP military operations to date, EUFOR Tchad/RCA could have benefited from the Berlin Plus agreement in several ways. First, the ability to use a NATO headquarters in Chad could have facilitated better planning and execution strategies. Coordinating the operation from MontValerien in France was difficult as there was a gap in communication between personnel at headquarters level and personnel at ground level. This contributed to a lack of understanding, which could have been avoided if the operation had access to the established NATO headquarters in the region. Second, EUFOR Tchad/RCA failed to meet full operational capacity until halfway through the operation due to the EU’s inability to generate enough forces and equipment. Access to NATO capabilities and assets through Berlin Plus would have greatly helped in overcoming this challenge, resulting in quicker operability and a stronger, more influential CSDP operation overall.

Taking into account the weaknesses of CSDP and the impact NATO can have on its operations, it is clear that the EU has limited capacity in comparison to NATO when engaging in large military operations. The Berlin Plus agreement greatly aids in both planning and execution phases as “the EU is still not in a position to run a long-term and complex military operation, such as Althea, on its own without recourse to NATO’s capabilities” (Koops, 2010, p. 55). Therefore, if the EU hopes to retain its standing as a promoter of international security through the use of force, it should attempt to utilize the Berlin Plus arrangement whenever launching a complex and intense military operation. There are some caveats to this strategy, most important of which is that the “arrangement is shrouded in uncertainty about when NATO will act and when it will not” (Maves, 2011, p. 7) due to NATO’s right of first refusal to engage in a particular region. This right places NATO – and, by extension, the US – in a more powerful position than the EU. NATO has a degree of control over the EU’s emerging capability for force projection because the success of CSDP military operations relies heavily on access to NATO capabilities and assets. NATO decides when to share these through its right of first refusal, relegating the EU to a dependent position and essentially making any sort of power balance against US interests impossible. This will likely remain the status quo until the EU strengthens CSDP by overcoming its capabilities gap. The proposal to create a permanent operational headquarters in Brussels and EDA efforts to create more efficiency in defense spending (Keohane, 2004) will need to be taken seriously to bolster the development of the EU’s own capabilities.

CONCLUSION

The assertion that the emergence of CSDP represents the rise of a new security pillar capable of balancing against NATO and US interests is false. Considering the EU's large capabilities gap and resulting reliance on NATO assets for military operations, CSDP does not threaten NATO's position as the preeminent security organization in the international system. The EU remains limited in its ability to utilize force to promote international stability and security, especially when it is unable to utilize the Berlin Plus agreement. The EDA's efforts to strengthen military capabilities will likely require some time to take significant effect. However, this does not mean that CSDP cannot improve in the meantime. Instead of concentrating on large-scale military operations, the EU should temporarily reconfigure its focus to civilian and civilian-military combined missions as it has proved more successful and influential in this area. Doing so will enhance its ultimate development into a smart power, capable of utilizing a combination of soft and hard power in the international system.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

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