Report

The future of European militaries

Monday 25 – Wednesday 27 September 2017 | WP1559

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2018 will mark twenty years since St Malo, but the dialogue is exactly the same, even if the threats are not. If Europeans are to collectively meet those threats some states will need to give up sovereignty and [militarily] specialise.

Executive summary

Future war will demand a smart mass of forces able to exert influence and effect across great distance very quickly. Therefore, given the emerging threat array Europe's armed forces need to be bigger, stronger, and more agile, smarter, and with far more capability and capacity than they enjoy today, allied to sharper intelligence-led indicators that are better able to warn of pending danger. The US remains Europe's cornerstone ally and NATO the foundation Alliance. However, pressures world-wide on US forces are likely to increase. Therefore, equitable burden-sharing will demand greater European strategic autonomy allied to increased European strategic responsibility and assertiveness, built on a European future force that is a true amalgam of national and EU-led, NATO-friendly integrated efforts and better able to act as a credible first responder. Europeans will need a combined future force able to undertake at least one major joint operation and three smaller joint operations. To create such a force European leaders need to act collectively now.

Core message

European militaries will need (at the very least) to undertake three security and defence roles, possibly simultaneously. First, to deter Russia and if needs be defend NATO and the EU from an armed Russian incursion. Second, to help stabilise states and regions in chaos, which in turn threatens European security. Third, to ensure and assure interoperability with the US future force.

The future of European militaries conference raised a series of fundamental questions, and was an important statement of European strategic fundamentals in a future fast-changing world. What will be the centre of gravity of European forces in the twenty-first century? Should a European future force be focused on the warfighting high-end of the conflict spectrum, or the medium to lower end? What balance between force mass and force manoeuvre must European militaries aspire to? Is there sufficient consensus among, and between, Europeans to fashion what would look like a European force credible across the conflict spectrum?

There is clearly a growing gap between the threats Europeans face collectively, the ability of any one European state to deal with them effectively, and the capabilities

and capacities Europe's armed forces could deploy if called upon to act in a crisis or a series of crises. To close that gap European militaries will need to embrace broad spectrum innovation that combines technologies, skills and knowledge into a radical future force concept. However, such a radical approach is unlikely to be embraced whilst European leaders lack strategic foresight and political confidence. Strategic confidence will be vital to realising a more strategically assertive Europe, which in turn will be vital for a Europe able and willing to be more strategically responsible with armed forces to match. Given the public mood in much of Europe there is a further question that European leaders must answer for their citizens; why do Europeans need armed forces at all? Indeed, before a European future force can be realised European leaders must also make the case for such a force.

Many of the current gaps in European military capability and capacity are due as much to a lack of political leadership and will to prioritise military requirements over other interests as to inadequate defence spending. Supply chains are not integrated at European level, creating considerable inefficiencies. Interoperability is more critical than ever with fewer troops increasingly integrated in multinational formations, but serious interoperability shortcomings remain between NATO forces. Remedying interoperability shortcomings does not require much money but rather focused political attention on various industrial issues. Without strategic foresight and confidence generating the necessary political leadership and will, most of the recommendations below will never be implemented, leaving current military gaps unfilled and a radical future force concept unattainable. The consequences will be ever greater risks to the safety, security and prosperity of European citizens.

Recommendations

The NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) is the interoperability pivot between improved European forces, enhanced transatlantic interoperability, and a deeper and more realistic NATO-EU strategic partnership. The EU has a vital role to play in the modernisation of European militaries. Therefore, it is vital that not only NATO and EU security and defence planning mechanisms merge, but that both institutions forge further agreements over the pragmatic division of labour that would afford both the Alliance and Union a critical pool of forces, able to operate to effect under either flag, with sufficient mass and agile manoeuvre to meet the bulk of likely missions.

- European defence planning must be able to satisfy national requirements, enable pan-European cooperation, and ensure interoperability with US, Canadian and other forces. An enhanced and convergent concept of EU and NATO defence planning is needed to enable Europeans to make the right force and resource choices. This includes preparing for the impact of disruptive technologies, and the US 'Third Offset', 'which is part of a new Revolution in Military Affairs' in the US.

- Credible deterrence and defence rest on the twin pillars of military capabilities and capacity. Given the growing pressures on US forces world-wide there could be contingencies which force the US to choose between theatres in the case of parallel or simultaneous crises. European militaries

must, at the very least, be capable of effective first response in and around Europe.

- The European command and control (C2) structure needs to be sufficiently robust to enable Europeans to be force providers, command European operations, and organise European militaries into a far more coherent and consistent force.

- No single European country can any longer afford complete strategic autonomy. It should be acceptable to all European countries to allow allies to cover some gaps.

- Smaller European states should be organised into EU and NATO compatible groupings that enable them to generate real military effect and to 'plug and play' with larger 'hub' powers under the Framework Nation Concept (FNC).

- The NDPP should act as the interoperability pivot between improving European forces by promoting enhanced transatlantic interoperability with advanced American forces, as well as the practical mechanism for fostering a deeper and more realistic NATO-EU strategic partnership.

- Procurement and acquisition must be re-established on new, common and shared requirements that underpin national, EU and NATO defence industrial policy and practice with the aim of shortening radically the fielding times of new equipment.

- Acquisition and innovation cycles must be accelerated. The private sector, not the defence sector, is driving the development of integrated technologies, particularly in the area of 'fin-tech'. It is vital Europe's armed forces collectively develop a concept of 'mil-tech' to harness new capabilities for the defence sector.

- NATO and the European Defence Agency (EDA) must harmonise their respective efforts to 'operationalise' innovation and ensure security of supply and re-supply, identify which skills and technologies European forces need, and ensure the European research and technology (R&T) effort is far more focussed efficient, and sustained.

- NATO and the EU must be far better able to talk to each other at all levels, and during all stages of a crisis.

- The US needs to be clearer about the future strategic partnership it seeks with its European allies.

- Europeans must better understand the role of force across the conflict spectrum from hybrid war to cyber war to hyper war.

- Takeaways from Russia's massive Zapad 2017 exercise include: a) cross-border intelligence-sharing must be 'better than ever'; and b) the Enhanced Forward Presence has reassured Allies but more forces are needed throughout the NATO Command Structure.

- 'Speed of recognition' is vital. For too long during the Crimea crisis allied governments refused to 'believe their eyes' that Russia was using 'Little Green Men'.

- The Allies should create an A2/AD 'bubble' over the Baltic States.

Main report

The conference focused on six themes: threat and response; force structure, military capabilities and capacities; the implications of Brexit for European security and defence; technology and future war; institutional and command relationships; and the future of European militaries, NATO and an evolving transatlantic relationship.

Threat and response

Europe faces a range of threats that in turn reinforce the need for strong and cohesive European militaries.

1. This is an age of interdependence, globalisation, and complex threats that call for a new military balance between the US and its Allies as well as for a new relationship between the EU and NATO. Threats range from the direct challenge of states such as Russia and North Korea, to more esoteric ones such as cyber and hyper war. The role of Europe's armed forces in combatting transnational crime, terrorism and unregulated mass migration constitutes an additional element of threat and response. Russia is getting bolder with the Russian state mobilised for aggressive action. European militaries thus need to be part of credible security and defence structures able to challenge Russia across the conflict spectrum, with the aim of making the Baltic States 'indigestible'.

2. European forces will also have a broader security role to help stabilise sources of instability that threaten Europe. The need for European states to intervene will vary from continent to continent, in Asia alongside the US as well as at times in the Middle East and Africa, and possibly autonomously from the US. Whilst it is unlikely Europeans will act in pursuit of such 'strategic autonomy' for some time to come, European leaders will at least need to envisage this autonomy.

3. If the transatlantic security relationship is to be maintained as a credible cornerstone of European security, European forces will need to generate the capability and an ability to ease the pressure on global-in-reach, but over-stretched US forces. Indeed, with US forces engaged the world over European strategic autonomy will become more important, but could and should only be undertaken if developed in solidarity with the US and in a NATO-friendly way. Any credible European strategic defence architecture that involves cyber and space-based capabilities would, by definition, also require far deeper European strategic and defence-industrial cooperation. The EU's 2016 Joint Declaration to Improve the European Security Landscape has already given member-states the right to act in such a direction, with PESCO (permanent structured cooperation) reinforcing moves towards developing over time the military capabilities and capacities needed to promote European strategic autonomy and to strengthen the Alliance.

Force structure, military capabilities and capacities

'Capacity and coherence is vital'

The need for military vision is pressing, not least because of the impact of new destructive technologies and the increasing cost of defence. Western states suffer from an imagination deficit, and miss an architect's vision.

4. The conference addressed two fundamental questions: how to balance force readiness with preparing European forces for the future; and how to ensure that the future of European militaries is shaped by strategy rather than austerity? Given the pressing

nature of contemporary threats it is vital that European governments do not become too distracted by the debate over the future force, important though it is, and also focus on what Europe needs for sound defence here and now. Indeed, as European militaries decline in relative terms the need for multinational design becomes ever more important. This is because 'the key metric for effective deterrence and defence is capacity if there is to be a fully-balanced response'. There are some steps being taken in the direction of design, but whilst they are to be welcomed they are driven more by cost-saving than the needs of sound defence. The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is an example of a pragmatic and practical step by Northern European countries to work more closely together. Other examples include the German-led Framework Nation Concept (FNC), to better promote the use of exercised, effective, and interoperable military coalitions.

5. Unless European militaries respond through innovation to the scale and pace of change in military technology, there is a real chance that Europeans will soon be unable to afford the capabilities needed to mount a credible defence. Russia's burgeoning anti-access, area denial (A2/AD) capabilities were a case in point. Such A2/AD is part of a developing layered defence that in an emergency Europeans could only hope to penetrate with a comprehensive panoply of weapons many European forces lack. For example, NATO's dual-capable aircraft (DCA) are designed to carry both conventional and nuclear weapons but are unlikely to be able to penetrate Russian air defences, thus undermining the nuclear deterrence credibility that remains central to the ethos of the Alliance.

6. There was a by and large shared view that defence had to be more Europeanised. There are differing views regarding the role of the EU in this process. One line of argument asserts that it must lead to a far greater role for the EU in the defence of Europe, because only the EU has the political legitimacy to convince European citizens of the need to re-invest in European militaries. Europeans will only ever become 'strategically responsible' if they were also truly 'strategically autonomous'.

7. A differing view prefers a 'Europe' that if it is to be more 'strategically assertive' also needs to be NATO-centric. Indeed, in this view, focussing the main future force effort on NATO offers the shortest and most realistic way to achieve European militaries capable of engaging effectively across a range of contingencies.

8. There was little appetite for a fully integrated European Army, à la European Defence Community of the 1950s, even if one view held that 'European strategic autonomy had to be strengthened within [the EU], not in parallel with NATO', because of its political dimension, and because that is what is implied (in effect) by EU treaties. There was some belief in the need to 'think of the EU as a virtual country and begin defence planning as such'. This was a minority viewpoint, but there was more widespread support for greater efforts to converge the security interests of EU member-states, to create a common defence culture within Europe, and to facilitate 'European strategic leadership'. There was an emphasis on practical convergence driven by the demands of operations and the need to accelerate procurement and acquisition, with the focus for the latter on much greater synergy between national and EU efforts.

The implications of Brexit for European security and defence

'Article 50 will not undermine Article 5'

Britain's security is inseparable from that of the rest of Europe, and post-Brexit Britain will seek a new security partnership with the EU. Prime Minister May in her September 2017 Florence speech also confirmed that Britain will seek a new EU-UK security treaty.

9. Given the current threats Europe and the wider Euro-Atlantic community faces, it is vital for Europeans to continue to work together on the basis of shared mutual interest. Britain alone provides 20% of the EU and European force catalogue, with the 'UK

delivering much to the security of Europe'. Come Brexit, and also because of a lack of coherence between European forces, the EU will lose 30% of its British high-end military capability.

10. Britain wants more (and much closer) EU-NATO collaboration with London firm in the belief that Brexit need not weaken Euro-Atlantic security. That is why Britain seeks a deep and special future relationship with the EU. However, concern was expressed that bilateralism was not enough, and that the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has a value in its own right without which Britain would be undermined.

11. Britain will seek to remain close to CSDP. Britain wants to remain a significant force contributor to CSDP missions and to continue to lead European operations, having commanded EU Operations Atalanta, Althea and Sophia. Britain will also seek closer collaboration between European defence industries, and to that end supports the €5.5bn European Defence Fund announced by the European Commission in June 2017 to promote innovation and defence-industrial convergence.

12. However, it is likely to be difficult for the UK to make these significant contributions to CSDP from outside the EU unless new mechanisms are created to allow London to remain part of the decision-making process. Will it be feasible to systematically loop the UK into EU foreign and security policy discussions, thereby factoring in UK 'exceptionalism'?

13. Moreover, how will the UK relate to Commission funding for defence R&T? If single market rules are increasingly applied to the defence and military spheres it could throw up new regulatory barriers and limit the available space for EU-UK cooperation. One could anticipate UK participation in classic CSDP activities, which are likely to remain intergovernmental in nature, but if EDA moves closer to the Commission and takes on an inter-pillar function it could be more difficult for the UK to stay connected. Given the urgent need for defence modernisation in Europe, with much of such effort focussed on the EU, Brexit raises new questions over whether Britain can be part of an EU-led European 'offset' strategy that seeks to exploit new technologies as part of a reinvigorated European defence.

14. New security areas which are not territorially bound to the EU, such as cyber, could provide substantial scope for EU-UK cooperation post Brexit. The UK and EU could also work together to fill certain gaps left by shifting US policy, such as at the UN, where they have shared interests in peacekeeping operations and other areas. Overall there is a critical need for a treaty between the EU and UK to set out structures, processes and areas for foreign, security and defence collaboration after Brexit.

15. There was widespread agreement on the need for action – Brexit or no Brexit. It is now time for EU leaders to really mean what they say on CSDP as they can no longer hide behind British reservations.

16. All European states are struggling with the twin problems of capability-cost and affordability, which undermine all efforts to build a coherent and credible European future force. Like its European counterparts Britain is struggling to strike a balance between the demands of a credible defence and its cost. In an effort to strike such a balance Britain is currently engaged in a National Security Capabilities Review in an attempt to ease pressures on a hard-pressed defence budget and which will report in 2018. The aim of the review is to refresh the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review and strengthen Britain's defences through the lens of modern deterrence and across the conflict spectrum from hybrid war to cyber war to hyper war.

Technology and future war

'Wars will be won by armies with the best knowledge'

Developments in 'disruptive technologies' will fundamentally change the character of war. These developments include Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine-learning,

human enhancement, genetic manipulation, data analytics, simulation, behavioural science, drone technologies, quantum-based sensors 'that make oceans transparent', cyber warfare, synthetic technologies and nano-technologies linked to 3D printing, hyper-sonic weapons, smart weapons, unmanned combat aerial vehicles as part of future swarms, and big data.

17. It is the private sector, and not the defence sector, that is driving future fast technological change, such as in the area of 'fin-tech'. However, whilst the European military response to such change is at best patchy, the European defence sector as a whole is far behind such developments and failing to exploit them, unlike their American, Russian, and Chinese counterparts. Therefore, it is vital that Europe's armed forces collectively develop a concept of 'mil-tech' to better harness new capabilities for the defence sector. Such a concept will require a profound mind-set change and a radically altered approach to the development and structuring of the European defence, technological and industrial base (EDTIB).

18. The aim must be to enhance lethality, connectivity and interoperability, particularly at the level of sustained warfighting operations. That aim, in turn, will demand that Europe's defence industries are much less protected and given sufficient contracts to help drive such change. Cost is driven up by small R&T budgets and production runs which offer few economies of scale. As one participant said, 'quality is better than quantity, especially if deployed in large numbers'.

19. The EU has a vital role to play in promoting the mil-tech-future force partnership, particularly through the progressive harmonisation of member-state requirements, including co-ordinated annual improvements. To that end, established mechanisms such as PESCO could provide the framework for all the necessary actions to drive forward improvements, so long as they are compatible with the work of NATO organs such as the NATO Support and Procurement Agency and the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA). Without such functional structures and real, deep cooperation between the EU and NATO as well as between the nations, the future of European militaries will look bleak.

20. There needs to be a Europe-wide understanding about how best to innovate with European militaries taking far greater advantage of existing technologies. Indeed, innovation should be enshrined at the heart of any future force concept and defined as creative strategic and military-strategic thinking allied to the better application of existing platforms and systems with new technologies to reinforce contemporary deterrence and defence. Such an outcomes-led approach to innovation is feasible but will again require the re-purposing and combining of existing forces in new ways. If not, the result will continue to be 'purposively obsolescent European militaries', permanently behind others in the race for critical and comparative military advantage and that are hollowed out and unnecessarily duplicated. They would thus be unable to meet either the force-on-force challenge or broader security obligations.

Institutional and command relationships

'Modern deterrence is more than the threat of nuclear force, and stretches across the conflict spectrum from hybrid war to hyper war via cyber war.'

Given the fast evolving nature of threats it is vital that NATO and EU forge a deep institutional and command strategic partnership so that European militaries are better prepared for a 360 degree, full spectrum of security and defence tasks.

21. The 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit had been helpful in taking the debate to the nations about the respective roles of the EU and NATO over 'who does what'. It is an essential question for the future of European militaries with which the US and UK would also want to align themselves, even if producing a coherent answer will be a painful process.

22. However, many existing multinational formations, such as rapid reaction forces and battlegroups, on which so much political capital was expended in the late 1990s, are becoming increasingly obsolete and unusable for anything but the most permissive of operations. Whilst there was a prevailing belief at the conference that European militaries need to come together far more systematically to confront the dangers Europeans collectively face, one participant summed up the challenge by suggesting that, 'all things we want to pool we cannot because of political barriers to political unity'.

23. In one view, EU defence will support NATO because it will help convince European citizens of the need to invest in defence. There is a division though over whether the EU or NATO is best placed to drive forward 'force convergence'. However, there was broad agreement that the necessary frameworks are already in place to realise the radical change to the European future force that all view as necessary.

24. The challenge though of bringing the EU and NATO closer should not be underestimated. Indeed, the challenges go far beyond internal disputes between Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey, or the complexities associated with trying to make failing 1990s partnership arrangements such as Berlin-plus work. The EU and NATO are very different institutions, and whilst the former can (on paper at least) bring together a panoply of powers in a crisis, the latter is very much a pol-mil mechanism focussed on collective defence.

25. For too many years and too often the defence of Europe has been effectively reduced to a political struggle over which institution – EU or NATO – should act as the focal point of European defence. Given the fast evolving nature of threats such a debate looks increasingly like 'the institutional tail wagging the strategic dog'.

26. Therefore, if force convergence fails there is a danger that Europe's stronger military powers would step beyond institutional frameworks to fashion an ad hoc defence. If truly 'European solutions' are still beyond reach, at least ad interim, one way forward could be found by further developing the Framework Nation Concept of coalitions and adapting them to become the primary force modernisation change agent. Such an approach would see the focus of force modernisation remain at the national level with groups of national forces seeking together to become progressively 'multinational by design', and not default.

27. There was broad consensus that the now twenty-strong FNC must be linked closely to NATO's Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and be determinedly focussed on operations. However, one of the most contentious issues concerned the creation of a new EU strategic headquarters that would mirror some of the functions of NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe or SHAPE. Some participants believe the establishment of such an EU headquarters was 'absolutely necessary to promote European strategic responsibility via greater European strategic autonomy'. Others saw such an effort as a form of 'grandiose gesture politics' and regarded it not only as a waste, but as creating 'unnecessary duplication' at a time of limited forces and resources.

28. Whatever the command arrangements it was agreed that European command and control (C2) structures needed to be sufficiently robust to enable Europeans to become far more effective as force providers, command European operations, and organise European militaries into a far more coherent and consistent force.

European militaries, NATO, and an evolving transatlantic relationship

'NATO must be made to work'.

29. Maintaining coherence and interoperability between European, US and Canadian forces is vital.

30. The current US administration is reasonably conventional about European defence even if the American people are ambivalent about NATO and alliances in general. The

US Administration would be happy to see Europeans further develop European defence as long as such efforts remain NATO-friendly, and help the Alliance demonstrably adapt to meet the security and defence concerns of Americans. However, there must be some sense and soon on the part of the Administration and Congress that NATO and strengthened European militaries are helping to foster more equitable burden-sharing, as such an effort will be crucial to the maintenance of a strong transatlantic relationship. One sign of such a shift in European military capabilities could be a European determination to act as effective first responders in and around Europe during a major crisis. Of particular concern to the US is the challenge posed by both a lack of European political agility AND military capability during a crisis. In a scenario of a major crisis on NATO's eastern flank, the Baltic States would probably not last seven days, but the Bundestag would not permit movement of forces for at least seven days.

31. At present the European force pool is very shallow and lacks the mass to meet even current obligations. The theme of the 2018 NATO Brussels Summit will be 'coherence', with the aim of easing some of these concerns. Specifically, the aim is to ensure that all the graduated response plans (GRP) are credible and can be populated with sufficient force and resource to be usable and deployable. At the heart of the effort is a simple reality; the NDPP should be the interoperability pivot between improving European forces, promote enhanced transatlantic interoperability with advanced American forces, and serve as the practical mechanism for fostering a deeper and more realistic NATO-EU strategic partnership. However, whilst participants agreed that the EU has a vital role to play in the modernisation of European militaries, and that it is vital that NATO and EU security and defence planning mechanisms converge, there was contention over how best to forge a pragmatic division of labour. Such a division of labour could afford both the Alliance and Union clear and respective roles underpinned by a critical pool of forces, able to operate to effect under either flag, with sufficient force mass and agile manoeuvre to meet the bulk of likely missions.

32. Europe needs a 'military Schengen zone'. In 1981 there were some 300,000 US troops in Europe, whilst in 2017 there are 30,000 'which must be made to look like 300,000'. However, NATO convoys confront political, institutional and bureaucratic red tape that seriously hinders force movement and thus effective crisis response. For example, the US wants at a minimum guaranteed access to European rail (as was the case during the Cold War when rail networks were in public ownership) to foster military freedom of movement. At present forces are prevented from embarking on a military demonstration mission that could deter an adversary and prevent conflict.

33. Whilst the development of more capable European spearhead forces is and must remain the essential *sine qua non* of European force modernisation, there are also a range of enabling non-military structures and mechanisms upon which Europeans should spend money to enhance readiness, and at the same time realise the 2% GDP NATO Defence Investment Pledge (DIP). These investments would include resilient fuel supplies and enhanced military-ready transportation infrastructures.

The European future force agenda

'Just do it!'

European armed forces could find themselves fighting a major war, and far sooner than many European leaders or peoples today realise.

Political leadership and the European future force

34. European leaders must go back to basics and properly reconsider European defence in the round, even if Europe's political leaders have lost the craftsmanship that once shaped Europe's defence. The essential reason for weak European forces is a lack of European strategic responsibility. Such responsibility, and the greater strategic assertiveness it could foster, would mean a greater degree of European strategic autonomy. A degree of unavoidable duplication that would underpin such autonomy

could be a price worth paying.

Purpose of the European future force

35. Given the developing threat array a smart European future warfighting force of sufficient mass, that one could term 'a community of forces', will be needed, reinforced by enhanced skills and deep knowledge, capable of agile manoeuvre and processing information quickly, and established on effective intelligence that affords sensitive and real time indicators of danger. Such contingencies will thus demand a force pool big enough to cope with relatively slow-moving but large-scale 'policing' deployments, as well as very fast-moving high end engagements and everything in between. At present, European militaries lack both the capability and the capacity to effectively address one such contingency, let alone consider a whole suite of multiple dimension missions.

Making the public case for the European future force

36. One of the many challenges will be to sell such a force, and its associated cost to publics that have been long used to peace. However, only such a force could credibly maintain deterrence and defence, undertake effective crisis management if needs be, act as a warfighting first response to a high-end crisis, and maintain interoperability with the US future force. The political key that unlocks the future of European militaries will need to be a politically acceptable mixed economy of existing forces and structures combined with new technologies and innovation. Innovation will be as much people-focused as technology-based, with defence education and training vital to enabling and empowering the future soldier, sailor, and airman/woman.

The price of failure

37. What would be the price of not affording such a force? Not only would Europeans lack a credible defence, there is every reason to believe the US might one day decide that defending Europeans who will not defend themselves is too costly. The irony is that Europeans could probably generate just such a future force with roughly existing defence investment levels (roughly €200bn per annum) if they were willing to properly integrate their forces, and with money left over for serious R&T. However, an integrated force that is not overseen by integrated command and a supreme political authority to match could also become a 'showcase force', bereft of decision making and with command structures unlikely to be used. Therefore, the future of European defence still points to militaries patched together into an imperfect defence patchwork. What matters now is how best to stitch that duvet together.

Defence, deterrence and the European future force

38. Much has been made of the Enhanced Forward Presence, and the presence of small pockets of US and Western European forces in the Baltic States. Some see them as 'trip wires', but as one participant put it, 'trip wires to what?' If US forces are engaged in a crisis in Asia-Pacific or elsewhere, and European forces are unable to move in strength (if at all) for several days (and the Russians know that), does the EFP really provide conventional deterrence? If not, then Article 5 will not only cease over time to be credible, but the weakness of European conventional forces could reduce the threshold for nuclear use.

Future scenarios and the European future force

If the US, Canada and Europeans find themselves facing several crises simultaneously it will also be vital that Europeans are able to bring all forms of state/institutional power to bear. For European militaries that will mean avoiding a mono-obsession with Russia so that they are agile and large enough to address a range of very different challenges, threats and risks that emerge quickly. The consequences of chaos on Europe's southern border are a case in point, and which even today threaten to overwhelm state structures.

Conclusion

Where should Europe start? At the very least a concerted effort is needed to shape a common vision of the security environment and a common threat perception built on a virtual European security space. Agility in the force context means a force that can respond quickly to a range of contingencies. Future European militaries will also need to be able to out-think as well as out-fight an enemy. Responding in kind to an attack by a heavy enemy force may be imprudent. Europeans need to demonstrate the link between a smart force, defence and deterrence, for example through proven use of Special Forces to exact an asymmetric price from an enemy by destroying infrastructure, pipelines etc.

The bottom-line (and, as ever, the bottom-line in Europe is about money) is that defence simply cannot get any cheaper for Europeans. It is also a bottom-line that begs the fundamental question raised in the conference; how many more reminders do Europeans need to properly invest in strategically-relevant European militaries credibly able to deter and defend? Indeed, even if Europeans do (finally) spend 2% GDP on defence (thus realising an extra $100bn each year) of which 20% must be spent annually on new equipment, such moneys will also need to be spent wisely and in a properly co-ordinated way. That pre-supposes a much greater emphasis on measured and measurable outcomes, and the abandonment of the input culture beloved of politicians preferring to give the impression they are spending more on defence than they are.

Paradoxically, the re-recapitalisation of European defence may be an unintended consequence of Brexit. Europe's arguably strongest military power is about to leave the EU. Britain is also increasingly emphasising maritime-amphibious military power. Whilst Britain's future defence may well be indivisible from the future defence of Europe, the British could well be overtaken by new political and institutional realities. Even if NATO remains the supreme locus for the defence of the Euro-Atlantic area, it could eventually be held aloft by two new pillars – the Eurosphere and the US-sphere, with Britain very much part of the latter – new security treaty with the EU or not.

What is clear is that all of the above will undoubtedly be difficult to realise. Perhaps a starting place, for all its myriad complexities, could be a new NATO Strategic Concept that champions the 'adapted Alliance' called for at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, and which paints a strategic picture of this and the next world that is sufficiently compelling to push European leaders over a threshold formed by competing demands on hard-pressed national exchequers. The alternative is that Europeans continue to appease a dangerous reality, recognise only as much threat as they individually believe they can afford, and simply await disaster.

The future of European militaries is thus a conundrum. Why it is a conundrum is summed up by one word, or rather the absence of it that dogged this conference as it has so many of its kind for so many years past, namely leadership! Indeed, as one participant put it, 'Can Europe NOT afford to be strong?' The answer from this conference is no, but for that realisation to break through where it is needed Europe's leaders will also need to break free from the complacency which for too long has afflicted European militaries, and give them the tools they will need if they are to afford Europeans a twenty-first century defence able to underpin European diplomacy and to protect European interests.

As Frederick the Great once said, 'Diplomacy without weapons is like music without instruments'. There is clearly still a great deal of 'music' that needs to be written if the future of European militaries is going to be anything but a one-hit wonder. One can indeed ask the question whether Europeans have already left force modernisation too late. Only history will be the judge of that.

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Wilton Park | November 2017

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