

**Global Tensions and Their Challenges
to Governance of the International Community**

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**Staying on Course – the Quadrilateral Defence Summit
and the European Security and Defence Policy
in the wake of ‘9/11’ and Iraq**

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In early February 2003 three states caused a shock wave through NATO. France, Germany and Belgium did what is ‘not done’ as on 10 February their explicit refusal halted the ‘silent procedure’¹ that Secretary-General George Robertson had initiated following the US request for Alliance support in the framework of their plans with regard to Iraq. On 19 February the Allies did reach an agreement on defensive measures to assist Turkey, but that was not the real subject of the debate from the beginning. What the ‘three rebels’, as they were soon dubbed, did oppose were the other American requests, i.a.: making available air bases to the US, protection of the passageway for US Navy vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean by Allied ships, replacing American troops on the Balkans and in Afghanistan, and considering a NATO post-conflict peacekeeping mission in Iraq.² These requests clearly started from the assumption that military action would be taken in any case and therefore could not be but rejected by Paris, Berlin and Brussels, which did not want to forestall a peaceful solution to the Iraqi crisis, which at that time still seemed possible. This crisis in the Alliance added on to the divergence in European and American foreign and security policy that became evident after ‘9/11’; its consequences for the security architecture potentially far exceed the Iraqi question.³

A Fundamental Debate on the Role of NATO

The differences with regard to NATO’s role in Iraq must be seen against the background of a much more profound debate on the role of the Alliance that has been going on ever since the end of the Cold War. The question that arose then was whether NATO, because of the diminishing importance of its collective defence core business after the disappearance of any direct military threat to the Allies in Europe, would become less important in the future. Or, quite contrary, would the Alliance adapt itself creatively to the changed security environment and focus on new tasks? The first scenario would entail a secondary role for NATO, as a type of ultimate guarantee against long term security threats, whereas in the other option NATO would continue to be the leading security organization, especially with regard to the so-called ‘new threats’.

The first modification of the Alliance’s Strategic Concept, in 1991, was rather modest and for the greater part continued along the lines that had been drawn during the Cold War. It probably came too early for a real departure of Cold War strategic thinking to be possible. But at the 1999 Washington Summit, when the Strategic Concept was modified a second time, the Alliance resolutely chose to reorient itself and took upon itself the task ‘to engage actively in crisis management, including crisis response operations’ – clearly an extension of Article 5 on collective defence and thus a silent amendment of the North Atlantic Treaty. Just like WEU and now the EU (the ‘Petersberg Tasks’) NATO would henceforward engage in crisis management. Immediately the question arose as to the geographic scope of these ‘non-Article 5 operations’: can NATO act worldwide or does its scope of action remain limited to the North Atlantic area?

The objective of the crisis management task is ‘to enhance the security and stability of the North Atlantic area’. As with collective defence, this geographic stipulation must be interpreted in a flexible way. Just as collective defence can require action against the territory of the aggressor, it may be necessary in order to maintain the stability of the North Atlantic area to operate outside that region. Only in the latter case the grey area is much larger. When does a crisis outside the North Atlantic area threaten our security? Does this concern only

crises in our immediate periphery or is a wider scope of action implied? These questions never received a general answer and thus have to be judged case by case.

In all events it is clear that a number of Allies, notably France, have serious doubts when it comes to ‘out-of-area’ operations, as became apparent already during the 1991 Gulf War, in which NATO was not allocated any operational role. At the time of the crisis in Albania in 1997 the US themselves had it be understood that NATO would not be the world’s policeman and that neither the US nor the Alliance would intervene in a conflict in which in their judgement no American interests were at stake – from which it can just as well be deduced that according to the US worldwide NATO actions must be possible when American interests do are in jeopardy. The debate on NATO’s intervention in Kosovo in 1999 rather concerned the legitimacy and the legal base of the operation: was an explicit Security Council mandate necessary or not? As with other NATO operations on the Balkans, whether Kosovo was within the Alliance’s geographic authority was not a matter of debate, since these are all on the European continent.

After ‘9/11’ however and the war that was declared on global terrorism by the Bush administration, the US began to really urge for a worldwide operational role for NATO. The National Security Strategy that the US adopted a year later in September 2002 states that ‘NATO must build a capacity to field, at short notice, highly mobile, specially trained forces whenever they are needed’ and that ‘the alliance must be able to act wherever our interests are threatened’. This led to the concrete proposal to set up a NATO response Force (NRF) that should be able to deploy up to 20 000 troops anywhere in the world within 7 to 30 days. In the run-up to NATO’s Prague Summit (21 November 2002) France and Germany, among others, voiced their doubts with regard to this project. French Defence Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie stated that the NRF can operate exclusively within the NATO area. Doubts were also raised as to the compatibility of the NRF and the Rapid Reaction Force that the EU is creating. In the wake of ‘9/11’ dissident voices did not ring that loud however and the creation of the NRF was approved, ‘ready to move quickly to wherever needed, as decided by the Council’, in the framework of the objective to prepare the Alliance ‘to deter, disrupt, defend and protect against any attacks on us’, including terrorism.⁴ A formulation that is sufficiently vague to reach consensus, but also one that, from the US perspective, allows for worldwide NATO operations, notably in the context of the global fight against terrorism. Committing the NRF does require a (unanimous) Council decision, but by creating this force NATO does seem to be instrumentalized in function of the new number one priority of American foreign policy.

Different Views on Security

Contrary to appearances in Prague and – probably – US expectations, the recent crisis in the Alliance with regard to Iraq shows that the fundamental debate on the role of NATO is far from being closed.

At the base of the dispute on Iraq is a fundamentally different conception of security. The US National Security Strategy allocates a prominent place to the use of military force, including preemptive action, for the US ‘will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed’ – as they clearly did in the case of Iraq. The European states however, including France, Germany and Belgium, prefer to exhaust all other, peaceful means of crisis management (from preventive diplomacy to economic sanctions) before turning to the use of force. The issue of debate is thus not if, but when the use of force is permitted. This view on

crisis management follows from the EU’s long-term security policy, which emphasises conflict prevention through dialogue, cooperation and partnership in a whole range of inextricably related policy fields which together determine peace and stability: human rights, democracy and the rule of law, socio-economic development, confidence-building measures etc. These are the global public goods to which everyone is entitled: international stability and security, an open economic world system, an enforceable international legal order and global welfare; if the gap between haves and have-nots in terms of these global public goods becomes too wide, the world system itself is destabilized. Rather than on threats and how to protect oneself from them, this policy focuses on achieving positive objectives, which stimulates long-term stability.

This broad – or comprehensive – and multilateral – or cooperative – approach to security clearly emerges from e.g. the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict, which was adopted by the Göteborg European Council (June 2001), and from the attempts to integrate the states in the European periphery in an encompassing network of relations (the Stability Pact for the Balkans, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership etc.). The successful transition of Central and Eastern Europe, probably the biggest European achievement since the start of the European integration project itself, is the most prominent example of this approach. It is this approach too that under the heading of ‘proximity policy’ was recently promoted by the Commission as an enhanced framework for relations between the Union and its neighbours.⁵ The ‘proximity policy’ aims to achieve an ‘area of shared prosperity and values’ by joining close partnerships with the Union’s neighbouring states, which should lead to profound economic integration, intense political and cultural relations and a joint responsibility for conflict prevention. To that end, the Union should offer very concrete ‘benefits’, in the field of trade e.g., which should be linked to progress made in the neighbouring states towards political and economic reform. When confronted with acute crises like Iraq, the Union more often than not does not succeed in achieving consensus on how to respond, which results in little or even no effective action being taken. But when it comes to long-term policy the comprehensive and cooperative approach to security does seem to emerge as the EU characteristic.

The Union’s response to ‘9/11’ reflected this same approach. Military action against the specific perpetrators of the act was supported, but with its call for ‘an in-depth political dialogue with those countries and regions of the world in which terrorism comes into being’ and for ‘the integration of all countries into a fair world system of security, prosperity and improved development’, the European Council opted for a ‘root causes approach’ as the main way of dealing with terrorism.⁶ It should be added that for the time being the EU has not yet designed a strategy which would allow these global ambitions to be fulfilled, but in its ‘near abroad’ the Union does play a leading stabilizing role. For the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its military pendant, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), ‘9/11’ thus did not present a turning point. Rather it served to confirm the view that a foreign and security policy that rests too exclusively on military means as the sole instrument of policy cannot achieve long-term stability, nor can it ensure national security. ‘9/11’ and the events that followed, notably the declaration of a war on terrorism and the invasion of Iraq, did highlight though the major differences between the EU’s and the Bush administration’s views on how to achieve security.

In view of these opposite strategic visions, it is hardly amazing that France, Germany and Belgium opposed the – indirect – use of NATO assets, and thus also of their troops and equipment, for the US’ Iraq policy. Of course, other motivations probably played as well –

electoral in Germany and Belgium, ‘gaullist’ in France – but the strategic view and the principal position do seem to be the real driving forces.

Precisely because this underlying opposition is situated at the strategic level, its consequences potentially extend far beyond the specific matter of Iraq. On the one hand there seems to be little role left for the yet to be created NRF, now that it has become clear that a number of Allies will not condone the use of NATO as an instrument for US policies with which they cannot agree. Consensus on the deployment of the NRF thus seems to have become quite improbable, unless for uncontested small-scale operations – which then can just as well be executed by the US or the EU alone. On the other hand the US have now experienced that they cannot ‘a priori’ be sure of Allied support for all of their policies; the use of NATO assets such as the NRF thus cannot be a fixed element in their planning. So the debate about the role of NATO, about ‘out-of-area’ and about the organization of the Alliance is open once again.

It seems safe to assume that in the future the US will rely – even – less on the Alliance. Until now the US always sought the Allies’ political support for any military interventions they planned, but requested only indirect military support from NATO, e.g. replacing American troops and making available bases, as well as NATO involvement in peacekeeping following an intervention. Actual military operations were always implemented by the US themselves, sometimes together with a ‘coalition of the willing’. The invocation of Article 5 after ‘9/11’, for reasons of a political and symbolic nature, after which operations in Afghanistan were conducted by a US-led coalition rather than by the Alliance, is the obvious illustration of this constellation. The decision to set up the NRF seemed to indicate a change in the opposite direction, i.e. the direct involvement of NATO in worldwide military operations, but that option now clearly is the subject of debate. The US had probably expected that in the context of the war against terrorism the Allies would unanimously approve of a worldwide role for NATO, but that has proved to be miscalculated. ‘We [NATO] will sustain a common perspective on the threats to our societies’, the National Security Strategy says – it is exactly that shared evaluation of the threats that is lacking.

Enhancing European Military Capabilities

The question is of course: what role then is left for NATO to play? What could a reorganized security architecture look like? Put differently, this is the question as to the alternative of the ‘three rebels’. That they disagree with the US approach, and hence refuse to have NATO put to use in that framework, is obvious. So is the fact that they aspire to an EU that is a strong international actor able to bring its own accents to bear. But what exactly does that mean? For besides a crisis for NATO, Iraq also meant – another – crisis for the CFSP. It was demonstrated yet again that in the face of a crisis the EU seldom comes to effective action.

‘9/11’ did not bring about a change of pace in the development of the ESDP, which was actually slowing down at that time, three years after the Franco-British Saint-Malo Declaration reinvigorated European military integration. The reason was that in the European view, the military instrument is of little value in dealing with, and especially in preventing terrorism. It was rather European police, intelligence and judicial cooperation that were strengthened in the wake of ‘9/11’. What ‘9/11’ did stimulate in the field of ESDP was a call for the introduction of a provision that would allow the use of ESDP means within the territory of the EU in case of terrorist attack (a so-called ‘solidarity clause’), which constitutes

a focus on the security of the Union itself that was absent from the ESDP before, as well as proposals to reformulate the Petersberg Tasks so as to include the fight against terrorism, although objectively their wide formulation actually already includes everything but collective defence. A reformulation would indicate policy priorities within the Petersberg Tasks, but would not really change their content. Both proposals were taken up in the defence working group of the European Convention, group number VIII, chaired by European Commissioner Michel Barnier.

Now, following Iraq, the first lesson that France, Germany and Belgium drew was the urgent need to further enhance the EU's military capabilities, in order to back up European diplomacy. Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt took the initiative to call a defence summit of the three states plus Luxembourg (which military is closely integrated with Belgium) in Brussels on 29 April 2003. The purpose of the meeting was to assess whether, since obviously not all EU Member States are willing to go to the same lengths just yet, it would not be possible to set up a 'core group' or 'avantgarde' with a smaller number of states in order to accelerate the development of the ESDP. A similar plea was already to be found in the Barnier-working group; the 'de Villepin-Fischer initiative', the Franco-German contribution to the Convention on defence, also called for the introduction of some sort of enhanced cooperation. Next to a number of elements on which a consensus had already developed in the Convention, such as the creation of a European armaments agency and the solidarity clause, proposals launched by the Belgians also included bringing together existing multinational military units in a broader integrated framework by way of enhanced cooperation, defining convergence criteria for military integration (notably in the field of investments) and setting up a European operational headquarters.⁷

Objectively European military integration can indeed considerably be brought forward. The creation of the Headline Goal, the Union's 60 000-strong rapid reaction force, is well underway, but in the end this still concerns just a fraction of the armed forces of all Member States combined. It should also not be forgotten that the figure of 60 000 was arrived at on the basis of the needs for peacekeeping operations on the Balkans as they appeared now about 10 years ago. In view of the new tasks in the fields of conflict prevention and crisis management that the EU has taken upon itself, these numbers no longer correspond to current needs. A number of Member States, by way of some sort of enhanced cooperation, could assign a larger share of their armed forces to a multinational framework with a permanent multinational staff, organized along the lines of the Eurocorps, but on a larger scale and including army, navy and airforce components. Existing multinationals units, like the Eurocorps, could possibly be merged into this broader framework. Because it includes a larger permanent element (a staff, manoeuvres etc.) such a framework allows for deeper integration as to concepts, procedures and equipment than the Headline Goal, which essentially is a catalogue of units and equipment that do not cooperate on a permanent basis. Participation could be linked to financial as well as functional convergence criteria (interoperability, projectability, sustainability). In such a framework, based on the planning of required capabilities by the staff element, a degree of task specialisation can be introduced, to the benefit of the smaller Member States especially, which then no longer should have to maintain the whole range of units and equipment. This multinational framework could be put at the disposal of the EU in its entirety.

The draft Constitution articles on external action, which were released by the Convention Praesidium just a few days before 29 April, already provided for the institutional framework for such a type of enhanced cooperation, within the Treaty. Draft Article 20 (Article III-208 in

the revised version of the end of May) allows Member States ‘which fulfil high military capability criteria and wish to enter into more binding commitments in this matter with a view to more demanding tasks’ to establish ‘structured cooperation’ between themselves. The Member States concerned then define ‘the military capability criteria and commitments’ that have to be met in order to participate in the ‘structured cooperation’, which can be asked by the Council to carry out tasks on behalf of the Union.⁸

One of the capabilities that can be created in such a framework is a ‘European headquarters’ that is capable of planning and conducting large-scale operations for the whole range of Petersberg Tasks (up to peace enforcement). The Union would then gain an autonomous capability in the field of command & control and would not necessarily need to have recourse to NATO means (in casu SHAPE) as it now can under the Berlin+ Agreement. For small-scale operations the EU can also use the national headquarters made available by the Member States or the headquarters of the existing multinational forces, but when it comes to large-scale operations it lacks the command & control capability that is necessary to effectively make use of its military instrument (the rapid reaction force) if a political decision to that end is taken. SHAPE on the other hand is not really geared to EU-led operations. Besides, it remains doubtful whether NATO assets will always be available when the EU requests them; a situation in which NATO planning capabilities, which are not exactly infinite either, are engaged in other tasks is far from hypothetical. A separate headquarters is thus indispensable for the operational autonomy of the EU. As Lord Robertson himself put it: the NATO only option is not an option – provisions must also be made for EU operations without the use of NATO assets.⁹ Now that the EU rapid reaction force is getting there, the first EU operations are underway, in Macedonia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Belgian initiative certainly is a timely one.

In the field of armaments cooperation as well a lot can be done. The European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP) is up and running, but it only concerns the gaps in the Headline Goal, while its bottom-up approach (Member States make extra efforts on a voluntary basis) makes for a rather slow process. Just as with the armed forces, the efficiency of defence procurement can be considerably enhanced if a larger share is coordinated at the European level. A European armaments agency, which can be built on the basis of the best functioning elements of existing frameworks for cooperation, should cover the whole cycle of procurement: identifying and harmonizing needs and requirements, orientating R&T, setting up cooperative production programmes and coordinating off-the-shelf procurement with third parties. An agency could also manage a joint budget for equipment in function of the needs of ECAP or of a ‘structured cooperation’; this would allow for gaps to be closed faster than in the current bottom-up approach. The R&T panel of the Western European Armaments Group (WEAG), OCCAR (which serves to manage cooperative production programmes) and ECAP, including the Informal Advisory Group (IAG) that coordinates the ECAP project groups, can be the building blocks of an agency.

A New Security Architecture?

If the EU, with all Member States at once or by way of ‘structured cooperation’, succeeds in building a performing, integrated European military capability that can deal with the whole range of Petersberg Tasks in an autonomous way, this will also have consequences for relations within NATO.

Such a European capability could be deployed in a NATO as much as in an EU context; it would thus at the same time constitute the European pillar of NATO at the level of the military capacity. This would of course have implications at the political level: NATO could evolve into an equitable two-pillar organization, within which the EU would speak with one voice. Creating a European caucus within NATO would actually be in line of the Treaty on European Union. It would also end the current situation in which the US, under the motto of ‘divide et impera’ deal with selected Member States and ignore the EU as such – the slight references to the EU in the US National Security Strategy are an open confirmation of this attitude. With regard to non-Article 5 operations, each pillar would then itself assume first-level responsibility in case of crises on its side of the Atlantic. The overarching NATO level would only be activated either if the means of the pillar concerned would not suffice to subdue the crisis or if the other pillar for political reasons would choose to be involved from the beginning, e.g. because it feels important interests are directly at stake. The European pillar would then not be obliged to take part in US operations against which the EU has political objections, like the invasion of Iraq. With regard to collective defence, NATO would remain the ultimate guarantee for the security of all Allies, although perhaps in this field too each pillar could at first itself take responsibility.

The role of NATO in such a constellation is a middle one between the worldwide and proactive Alliance that the US aspire to and the refusal a priori of all out-of-area operations. If both pillars would agree on a specific intervention, it could be conducted under the flag of NATO, anywhere in the world. An example of such a case is NATO’s contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. At the request of the states leading ISAF III, the Netherlands and Germany, and Canada, which has put up its candidacy to lead ISAF IV, NATO on 16 April decided to support the operation with an in-theatre headquarters, a force commander and strategic coordination and command & control by SHAPE. ISAF remains a UN operation, but the NATO element should enhance continuity. At the NATO summit in Madrid (3 June), the Alliance decided to support Poland in the role it is taking on in Iraq, along the same lines as its involvement in Afghanistan. In the other event, if the pillars would disagree politically, operations would be limited to one pillar only. As to capabilities, this pillar could act autonomously or with the use of NATO assets as provided for in a standing arrangement (such as the Berlin+ Agreement). Contrary to the current constellation, non-participation in an operation by the other pillar then need no longer be considered a breach of transatlantic solidarity. If on the other hand the security of one of the pillars would be directly threatened, in a real Article 5 situation, solidarity would be complete and unquestionable. Next to the operational dimension, NATO would of course remain an essential diplomatic forum for consultation and dialogue on security and defence, at 19, at 20 with Russia and Ukraine, and with the members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.

Rather than attributing a formal ‘right of first refusal’ to NATO, deciding whether an operation would be run by one of the pillars or by the Alliance as a whole, would be a matter of consultations between the Allies. An unconditional right of first refusal for NATO is too rigid a mechanism, which does not answer to all contingencies. The EU decision of 5 June to launch a humanitarian operation (code-named ‘Artemis’) in the region of Ituri in the Democratic Republic of Congo (an operation without the use of NATO assets) is a case in point. This decision, the project of which apparently was the object of fierce US criticism at NATO’s Madrid summit,¹⁰ was taken following a request by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the EU directly. In cases like this, the spirit of the Alliance calls for complete transparency on the part of the pillar concerned vis-à-vis the other Allies, which should have the opportunity to participate, and this was indeed provided for by the EU, but making such

operations conditional on formal NATO assent would inordinately detract from the autonomy of both the EU and the UN. Besides, it should not be forgotten that the US have for a long time been on the demanding side as to greater European efforts for crisis management in the European periphery, notably on the Balkans. In the very beginning of the conflict in former Yugoslavia e.g. the US were most reluctant to intervene in what they deemed to be a European problem and only did so after the EU had demonstrated not to be up to the task. The Albanian crisis of 1997 provides a similar example. A two-pillar NATO would also allow for more equitable burden-sharing between the Allies.

In a two-pillar structure, each pillar would build its own integrated military capacity, while at the level of NATO the necessary command & control mechanisms should be provided to enable these capacities to be used in a NATO context if required. A rapid reaction capability like the NRF would thus rather be built at the level of each pillar. From a purely military point of view, the NRF seems to be complementary to the Headline Goal, which in its original set-up focused on capabilities able to intervene within 30 to 60 days, rather than 7 to 30 for the NRF – although in the meantime the EU has decided to look into the need to have capabilities that can be deployed within just 5 days, which is an absolute necessity in the event of evacuation operations or humanitarian crises. Politically speaking however, setting up such a capability at the level of NATO would undoubtedly lead to grave discussions as to when or not it can be committed.

Pleas for a more balanced Alliance, on both sides of the Atlantic, almost date back to the foundation of NATO itself. But for the first time since, the EU is building an operational military capability, so for the first time there is a real possibility to create a two-pillar structure. This window of opportunity has not gone unnoticed. Prime Minister Verhofstadt, among others, has called for a strong European pillar within NATO, while Finnish general Gustav Hägglund, Chairman of the EU Military Committee, has held a remarkable plea for a thoroughly reorganized security architecture.¹¹ Now that it has become clear that Europe and the US do not always necessarily share the same views, this is probably the only way that NATO can survive.

NATO should however not be the sole forum for transatlantic cooperation, for it concerns only the politico-military dimension of international relations. A comprehensive transatlantic partnership between the EU and the US is in order, to establish close coordination and cooperation in the whole range of fields that together determine stability.

Rebels with a Cause: the Need for a European Strategic Concept

Enhancing the military capabilities will not suffice to make the EU into a performing international actor. The internal EU crisis on Iraq was caused not by the absence of a military capacity, but by the impossibility of finding a political consensus. Even if they would have had a fully operational European military capability ready at hand at the time, the Member States would still have been divided over the course to follow: intervene militarily right away or allow more time for inspection and verification. Because of the absence of a shared political view, the outcome for the EU would probably have been the same. A performing military instrument would certainly have increased the credibility of any European alternative to resolve the crisis, e.g. with regard to providing the means for long-term inspections, but precisely on a possible alternative consensus could not be found. The direct link between Iraq and the quadrilateral defence summit of 29 April should therefore be put into perspective, as

did Prime Minister Verhofstadt himself, who notably stressed that his original initiative on ESDP dates back to the summer of 2002.¹²

This goes to show that what the EU needs is a common strategic concept for its external action. A strategic concept is a policy-making tool that, starting from the Union's interests and values, outlines the overall long-term objectives that the EU wants to achieve and the basic categories of instruments that it will apply to that end. It is a reference framework for day-to-day policy-making in a rapidly evolving and ever more complex international environment. As long as a common view at this level is lacking, as well as the willingness to act together, as a Union, the EU will be a fickle international actor, which sometimes will, but more often will not come up with responses to the crises which it is confronted with.¹³ To which ends the EU will use its military capacity is also the question that public opinion wants to see an answer to – without it, any defence initiative rests on unstable ground. Without a European strategic concept, a two-pillar NATO is unrealistic either: how can the EU be the first level of responsibility for crises in the European periphery if it lacks a common vision on conflict prevention and crisis management? Further enhancing Europe's military capabilities should therefore be accompanied by the elaboration of a strategic concept. If a number of Member States set up a core group for defence, they should not forget the strategic dimension. Without it, building a military capability is meaningless.

Comprehensive and cooperative security can be the basis of a strategic concept. In its periphery (or proximity), where its interests are most directly at stake, but where it also has the greatest responsibility, the EU should itself assume the leading role in promoting peace and stability. Here a strategic concept can be brought into practice by setting up close partnerships for very concrete cooperation in all fields of international relations, as the Commission has proposed. At the global level, the EU must actively contribute to reinforcing the institutionalised multilateral framework, the UN, in order to make sure that strong global institutions can manage these same fields of international relations and enhance access to the priority global public goods. Such a strategic concept would emphasize structural conflict prevention. An agenda that is based on positive objectives rather than threats and that is pursued through partnerships and multilateral institutions rather than unilaterally, strengthens the legitimacy of EU action and prevents the Union from alienating others.

Peace and security cannot be achieved by military means alone, but demand an encompassing, multidimensional approach, which integrates the whole range of available instruments of external action. The wealth gap between and within states, lack of democratic institutions and respect for human rights, non-observance of international law etc. are as much factors of instability as armed conflict, terrorism and proliferation. Yet, while the EU certainly must not become another 'superpower', the military instrument is the necessary end-piece of this approach. The notion of a 'civil power' Europe does not exclude the use or threat of military means, but only within the bounds of international law, notably UN Security Council resolutions, and as an instrument of last resort, when other means have been exhausted. Besides, military means can also be used non-coercively, as a vital instrument of conflict prevention (observer missions, protection of aid workers, peacekeeping etc.). Sometimes no other option is left than military action – in those cases too the EU must assume its responsibility.

29 April: Summit against the Odds

The quadrilateral defence summit took place under a bad moon. The basic idea behind the initiative, i.e. that the close cooperation between France, Germany and Belgium during the Iraq crisis could provide the foundation for permanent enhanced cooperation between them plus Luxembourg in the defence field, was sound enough. But things went wrong from the mere announcement of the summit, in the margin of the 21 March European Council, as Belgium failed to consult France and Germany beforehand. As 29 April came closer, the critic's voices began to ring louder, especially in Anglo-Saxon circles, where the four were denounced as anti-American 'Einzelgänger' without the defence posture required to fulfil their grand ambitions. 'Call of this silly meeting', ran the headline in *The Wall Street Journal*.¹⁴ Spain's Foreign Minister Ana Palacio as well was markedly harsh on the four.¹⁵ And finally Paris and Berlin seemed to have rear-thoughts themselves, which had to do with questions of national sovereignty, cost and the non-participation of the British. In his own country Prime Minister Verhofstadt was accused of electoral motivations, in the light of the federal elections of 18 May. Greece, which initially had expressed its interest, retracted and under heavy pressure had it be known that as Chairman-in-Office it had to abstain from participating in the summit.

The critics were proven wrong though, for the summit produced a surprisingly concrete declaration.¹⁶ 'A declaration positively brimming over with specific proposals', EIS-European Report called it.¹⁷ In the first place the four undertook to jointly defend a number of proposals in the Convention: an armaments agency and the reformulation of the Petersberg Tasks, as had already been provided for in the draft articles on external action, and the creation of a European Security and Defence College. Also a 'general clause of solidarity and common security binding all Member States of the European Union and making it possible to face all kinds of risks concerning the European Union', which goes further than the solidarity clause in the draft articles, which concerns only terrorism. The four further proposed that the Convention would adopt the notion of a European Security and Defence Union (ESDU) as institutional framework for enhanced cooperation in the field of ESDP. This ESDU should allow for deeper integration than the formula of 'structured cooperation' in the draft articles. The participating countries would 'commit themselves to bringing mutual help and assistance in the face of risks of all nature', a sort of solidarity clause, and would 'systematically aim at harmonizing their positions on security and defence issues'. They would further 'increase their security and defence efforts, more specifically as to their investment in military equipment', a vague reference to convergence criteria, they would participate in 'major European equipment projects such as the A400M', a call for cooperative procurement programmes, and they would aim at 'strengthening the efficiency of the European military capabilities, by specialisation and pooling of means and capabilities as much as possible', an important reference to the possibility of task specialisation and of enhanced multinational cooperation.

Next to outlining a common position in the Convention, the four also launched a number of very concrete initiatives, all of them open to participation by all Member States. First comes the development of a European rapid reaction capability, based on the existing Franco-German Brigade, in which Belgian commando and Luxembourg reconnaissance units will be included. This capability will be at the disposal of both the EU and NATO, for it is at the same time seen as a contribution to the NRF. It should be mentioned that the Franco-German Brigade already forms part of the Eurocorps; together with the staff battalion, it even is the only unit that is under the permanent operational command of the Eurocorps instead of

remaining under national command. In that sense, it constitutes a small, but symbolically important nucleus of a truly supranational military capability. Enlarging that nucleus therefore also is symbolically significant, but the added value in the operational field appears limited. Other concrete and all very valuable commitments are: a European command for strategic air transport (by June 2004 at the latest) and, in the longer term, 'a common strategic air transport unit', which could be placed under this European command that itself could be extended to include all strategic transport; an NBC protection capability; a European system for humanitarian emergency aid, in cooperation with the Commission and ECHO (European First Aid and Support Team or EU-FAST, after the existing and successful B-FAST in Belgium); European training centres for A400M-crews etc.

The most important concrete commitment is the decision to set up in Tervuren in Belgium 'a collective capability for planning and conducting operations for the European Union', with the four plus all interested Member States, by the summer of 2004. In other words, an operational headquarters that, instead of national means, will be made available to the EU for operations without recourse to NATO assets. This will be a nucleus that establishes liaison with national headquarters and SHAPE and that for actual operations will be reinforced with national staff according to requirements. Such a collective capability is to avoid 'useless duplications and competition', not between the EU and NATO, but between EU Member States' national capabilities, for that is where the real duplication issue is at stake, rather than between the EU and NATO. For at the same time the headquarters will mean a vital reinforcement of the EU's operational autonomy, which fills the current command & control gap in the 'EU operations without recourse to NATO assets' scenario. The four propose that in term the EU itself creates such a capability. They will further themselves not later than 2004 establish 'a multinational deployable force headquarters' for joint operations in the field.

In reply to the reproaches of anti-Americanism and undermining NATO, the four clearly framed their initiative in the context of reinforcing transatlantic partnership. Along the lines of earlier declarations by Verhofstadt and others, strengthening the EU's military capability and strengthening NATO are seen as complementary, which again seems to point in the direction of a two-pillar Alliance. 'In NATO, we do not have too much America, we have too little Europe, and that is what we want to change', German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared after the summit.¹⁸

British and certainly American reactions to the quadrilateral summit were highly sceptical. US Secretary of State Colin Powell had it known that Europe needs more means, not more headquarters¹⁹ – an itchy reaction that probably is the best prove of the fact that a headquarters is indeed the way to European autonomy. But most EU Member States reacted more positively; unexpectedly positively even, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.²⁰ Although official reactions appeared to vary according to the audience, it does seem true that most Member States appreciated the value of the proposals of 29 April; the idea of an ESDU especially seemed to strike ground. Following the meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Greece on 2-3 May, Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou stated that 'many useful ideas have emerged and they should be considered on the basis of their intrinsic, rather than procedural, merit'.²¹ Which was followed by the most significant statement that 'what is clear is that we are in urgent need of a European strategic concept'. The High representative, Javier Solana, was formally tasked with the job of producing a draft strategic document by the Thessaloniki European Council (20 June). Without any doubt this can be called a historical decision, even before having seen the results of Solana's work, because for the first time since the start of the ESDP it breaks the taboo on strategic thinking

in the EU. This taboo came into existence in 1998 when at the moment of launching the building of a European military capability it was expressly decided to circumvent the strategic issue, in order to avoid the risk of the momentum that existed at the time to pass by unused.

Even British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, although being critical, made some surprisingly positive remarks about the summit, referring to earlier Franco-British meetings on defence. Perhaps the British were in a sense also relieved that the summit did not produce any results that were bluntly contradictory to NATO or the US, which would have forced the UK to choose between the EU and the Alliance. Re-reading the Franco-British declaration of the 4 February summit in Le Touquet actually reveals several connecting points that should allow the British to hook onto the four's initiative.²² An example is the idea that, now that the Headline Goal is due to be achieved, new capability objectives should be set, including quantitative and qualitative criteria, which should allow the EU to conduct several operations simultaneously and to improve its rapid reaction capacity. Precisely this could be the objective of an ESDU. A European headquarters however remains difficult to accept for the UK as well as NATO and the US, because it is closely linked to the issue of the political autonomy of the EU. Ever since 1998 the UK has been pressing for improving the efficiency and efficacy of Europe's military capabilities, but London is still very hesitating when it comes to any changes in the political constellation.²³ In the end though the former unavoidably leads to the latter.

Conclusion: and Now to Work

The quadrilateral defence summit did not achieve all of the ambitious objectives – and which summit ever can? For one thing the summit declaration contains only a very vague and implicit reference to the notion of convergence criteria for military integration. For Germany especially, which faces a huge effort for the vital reform of its armed forces, this proved to be politically unacceptable under the present difficult budgetary conditions. In Belgium as well a proposal that was leaked to the press to quadruple defence investments caused great upheaval, before it was officially done away with as a politically insignificant non-paper of a lower member of staff. Yet at the same time, defence certainly became an issue in the formation of a new government after the 18 May elections in Belgium, contrary to what happened in 1999, when defence was left completely unmentioned in the government agreement. In view of the economic and financial context and legitimate social demands, increasing the defence budget seems undesirable. On the other hand, further improvement of the relation between personnel costs and investments and continuing the adaptation of the armed forces to the new tasks, a demanding and far-reaching process that has been started in the framework of the Strategic Plan 2000-2015, cannot be prolonged over too many years either. Perhaps a one-time financial injection, possibly spread over a few years, can provide the answer. Another possibility is the further reduction of the number of troops, so as to release means for investment. The Belgian example demonstrates that awareness of the need to enhance the efficiency and efficacy of the military capability has risen and that the political will to do so, in the context of the ESDP, is present.

Minds were not ready either on 29 April for the integration of a much larger share of national armed forces than is currently the case in a broad multinational framework in which existing multinational units could be merged. In comparison with this ambitious proposal the extension of the Franco-German Brigade that was decided upon does not present much of an achievement. One should perhaps ask whether Member States like France are really willing in

the end to ‘europeanise’ defence to such an extent. Yet ultimately far-reaching integration seems to be the only way of achieving a maximally efficient and fully effective European military capability. In this context, the idea of an ESDU that the four jointly proposed to the Convention creates hope, even though it was not retained in the revised Constitution articles on external action, because it indicates a willingness to consider deeper integration. As it was worded in the declaration, the ESDU was not yet a concrete commitment by the four, but the concept contains a reference to convergence criteria and an important call for task specialisation and pooling of means, which is only possible in the framework of far-reaching integration and joint planning of capabilities. Since not all Member States for the moment have the political will to go as far as that, some sort of enhanced cooperation seems to be the way to deepen the ESDP, whether it will be in the framework of ‘structured cooperation’ or an ESDU. France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg should demonstrate their resolve by being the first to set up such cooperation and thus show the way to others.

The implementation and the follow-up will thus determine the importance of the quadrilateral defence summit. The four now have to make an earnest effort to deepen military integration through a type of enhanced cooperation and to put into practice the concrete engagements in the second part of their declaration, with the European headquarters as jewel in the crown, in order to prove the sincerity of their commitment to the strengthening of Europe’s military capability. If they succeed, they can lead the way to an integrated EU military capability that at the same time constitutes the European pillar of NATO. The willingness to stage an EU operation already is a step in the right direction. Admittedly, part of the motivation for the operation is the desire to show what Europe can do without the Americans. But it is also driven by an earnest desire to do something about a grave humanitarian crisis – which is what the EU’s military capability is all about. The participation of not only France, Germany and Belgium, but of ‘atlanticist’ UK and ‘neutral’ Sweden too proves as much. The long-awaited elaboration of a strategic concept should further detail the objectives of the ESDP as the military instrument of comprehensive EU external action – and should see real and effective commitment on the part of the Member States.

NATO’s rebels might thus just have become the EU’s avant-garde...

¹ The ‘silent procedure’ means that a proposed decision is automatically adopted if no Member State voices any objections before a fixed time.

² Caroline Pailhe, ‘L’engagement de l’OTAN en Irak : la fracture transatlantique’. Brussel, GRIP, Note d’Analyse, 28 January 2003, <http://www.grip.org/bdg/g2019.html>.

³ I want to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Rik Coolsaet, Director of the Security & Global Governance Department of the Royal Institute for International Relations, for the stimulating debate and exchange of ideas.

⁴ Prague Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Prague on 21 November 2002.

⁵ COM (2003) 104 final, ‘Wider Europe – neighbourhood: a new framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern neighbours’.

⁶ Conclusions and plan of action of the extraordinary European Council meeting on 21 September 2001.

⁷ Bernard Bulcke, ‘Duitsland aarzelt over verregeaande EU-defensie’. In: *De Standaard*, 10 April 2003.

⁸ This ‘structured cooperation’ must be distinguished from the Treaty mechanism of ‘enhanced cooperation’ and thus is governed by other rules and conditions.

⁹ Which is one of three possibilities always referred to in ESDP documents, the other two being NATO-operations and EU-operations using NATO-assets.

¹⁰ ‘First African mission for EU peacekeepers’. International Relations and Security Network, Security Watch, 3 June 2003.

¹¹ Guy Verhofstadt, ‘Pleidooi voor een nieuw atlantisme’. Hofstad-lecture, The Hague, 19 February 2003. ‘NATO and EU defence should be merged, says military chief’. In: *The Economist*, Latest Online News, 27 February 2003.

¹² Bernard Bulcke en Bart Sturtewagen, ‘Europa kan niet blijven wachten. Interview met Guy Verhofstadt over de defensietop van morgen’. In: *De Standaard*, 28 April 2003.

¹³ Sven Biscop, ‘In search of a strategic concept for the ESDP’. In: *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol.7, 2002, 4, pp.473-490.

¹⁴ Rafael L. Bardaji, ‘Call off this silly meeting’. In: *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 April 2003.

¹⁵ Ana Palacio, ‘The wrong way to build consensus’. In: *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 2003.

¹⁶ Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium on European defence: conclusions. Brussels, 29 April 2003.

¹⁷ ‘France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg strike out as pioneers’. In: *EIS-European Report*, 30 April 2003.

¹⁸ Ian Black, ‘France, Germany deepen UK rift’. In: *The Guardian*, 30 April 2003.

¹⁹ Philippe Regnier, ‘Un QG européen déjà controversé’. In: *Le Soir*, 30 April 2003.

²⁰ Christian Wernicke, ‘Harmonie statt Hauskrach’. In: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 May 2003.

²¹ Informal General Affairs and External Relations Council (Gymnich), May 2-3: Press Statement.

²² Franco-British summit, Declaration on strengthening European cooperation in security and defence. Le Touquet, 4 February 2003.

²³ Sven Biscop, ‘The UK’s change of course: a new chance for the European Security and Defence Identity’. In: *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol.4, 1999, 2, pp.253-268.