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**EU'S EMERGING MILITARY POLICY  
AND THE MENA AREAS**

*by Roberto Aliboni*

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## EU'S EMERGING MILITARY POLICY AND THE MENA AREAS

by Roberto Aliboni<sup>1</sup>

The American component in the EU Middle East Policy cannot be considered in isolation.

The transatlantic relationship has a complex character and, for this reason, there are linkages between different issues. The influence of transatlantic relations and the U.S. on what the EU does or does not do in the Middle East is not necessarily tied to the Middle East itself and to specific Middle Eastern issues debated in transatlantic relations. It may stem from other issues.

One such broader issue is the role of NATO and the Western world with respect to international order. This issue does not necessarily concern the Middle East or the Middle East only, still it is bound to have an impact on EU relations with the Middle East.

In the last years, while issues relating to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)- the Peace Process, Iran, Iraq, Libya - brought out transatlantic differences, strong agreement emerged on co-operation to manage crises internationally.

This trend is not related to the Middle East and the Mediterranean. It has been stirred by the successive crises in the Western Balkans. Still, the outcome of this fresh transatlantic understanding, given appropriate political and legal conditions, may concern the MENA areas as well. In sum, while current European attempts to develop a crisis management capability are strongly linked to the Atlantic context, they potentially concern the Middle East and North Africa as well.

In this context, it may be of interest to go into more detail by

- first, illustrating very briefly the main features of what the EU is developing under the name of CESDP (Common European Security and Defence Policy) within the framework of its already established Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP);
- second, explaining in which way the CESDP links up with the Atlantic Alliance and its upcoming enlargements;
- third, drawing some conclusions about how these new, more articulated transatlantic capabilities may affect the Middle East and the Mediterranean: will they bring about a Europe destined to be more subservient to the United States (to use traditional anti-imperialist jargon), i.e. a more compact, less articulated Atlantic Alliance (to express a more relaxed view), or will they present the MENA regions with opportunities and allow the EU to play a role more in tune with these regions' expectations?

### **What the EU is preparing for**

In a few years (ca. 2003), the EU should have available to it a force of 50-60,000 troops readily deployable to implement the full range of the so-called "Petersberg tasks", namely tasks connected to humanitarian and crisis management interventions, including peace enforcement and post-conflict peace-building.

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<sup>1</sup> Roberto Aliboni is Director of Studies, International Affairs Institute-IAI, Rome.

These forces will be on call and made answerable to the EU as well as NATO, whenever they are asked to intervene by legitimate international collective security bodies, like the UN or OSCE. They could also be made directly available to the latter. EU forces would take action either in the framework of EU-led operations, or in NATO-led operations, or in EU-led operations in which NATO facilities would be made available (Combined Joint Task Forces-CJTFs).

A twin organisation for civilian crisis management is being developed by the EU that should be able to take advantage of the combined resources of the members states and the European Commission. To that purpose, a Committee for Civilian Crisis Management has already been set up within the framework of the Council of Ministers. The European Commission has started developing its own crisis management units, in particular a Rapid Deployment Facility intended to provide immediate financing. An interface mechanism co-ordinates the Commission and the Council.

### **The CESDP and the European Security and Defence Identity in NATO**

While CESDP's decision-making is independent with respect to NATO decision-making, one must not forget that it is part and parcel of a political process whereby the U.S. and EU, in combination with the other allies, seek to establish a new, more coherent, and stronger transatlantic relationship with a view to developing crisis management so as to foster international order.

The conditions under which the emergence of this European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within the NATO framework is envisaged - as aptly pointed out by the US Secretary of State - are: (a) non-decoupling between the allies; (b) non-duplication of structures and means; (c) non-discrimination with respect to non-EU NATO countries and candidates countries. For these conditions to be assured, negotiations are going on between the EU, NATO, and the other countries involved, so as to come to a comprehensive and inclusive transatlantic system of consultations and decision-making. Given that this transatlantic process is supposed to be without prejudice to EU autonomy, is it likely that EU-led operations will be decided by the European Council against the wishes of the United States and the other actors involved in the game?

The U.S. insisted during the Cold War that the European allies should make greater efforts in non-Art. 5 operations carried out by NATO, but to no avail. In contrast, it has been the gradual transformation of NATO into a crisis management organisation that has given way to US-EU co-operation in non-Art. 5 operations, such as in the Western Balkans. What is new about the ESDI/CESDP process is the U.S. acceptance that such allied co-operation can take place in a more articulated and flexible structure (that is not necessarily only in NATO) and even without its participation.

In this perspective, the likelihood of the EU taking action alone is not only technically but also politically feasible, in the sense that the EU is not to act necessarily and exclusively as an arm of the Alliance. At the same time, I believe that the EU will never act against the Alliance or without consulting it. On the other hand, it is very likely that the ongoing process of articulation of military forces will bring about a reinforcement of the existing bodies of transatlantic and EU-US consultation and will foster new ones.

It is difficult to predict the institutional future of transatlantic relations in the framework of the process we are talking about. France does not accept the principle of a "green light" from the United States. True, the latter has been trying to introduce such a

principle in the form of a right of “first refusal”, which it should be given with respect to crises the EU would want to tackle. Hopefully, the Atlantic allies will be able to organise common decision-making out of the shared need to act harmoniously rather than on the basis of an Orwellian concept<sup>2</sup>. My opinion is that obvious positioning and bickering in the course of negotiations will not hinder a balanced and solid result in the transatlantic perspective.

It must also be stressed that the development of the EU’s military policy and the ESDI is not only a European interest; it reflects American interests as well. In fact, the ESDI was finally enshrined by NATO Council in Washington D.C. in 1999 and the CESDP was initiated in Cologne soon afterwards, not so much to assure EU participation in NATO and other international initiatives (which is largely assured), but to leave the Europeans the option of intervening in case a US intervention were desirable but domestic institutional conditions would make it unfeasible. The Balkans are a case in point and are at the root of the 1998 British-French St Malo Declaration which set the ongoing CESDP process in motion.

These factors should reinforce the EU role and give it more autonomy in the complex process of transatlantic renewal that is now taking place.

### **Impact on the EU Middle East and Mediterranean policies**

These developments no doubt contribute to post-cold war changes in the Atlantic Alliance and bring about a strengthening of the latter. The effects of such strengthening are also magnified by the fact that NATO is enlarging and will thus encompass, sooner or later, an area that comprises Central- and South-eastern Europe.

A malevolent or pessimistic interpretation of these developments suggests that they correspond to the strengthening of the American component in the EU’s foreign and military policies, including of course those towards the Middle East and the Mediterranean. In other words, to an increase in European dependency on the U.S., with the consequence that the EU's and Europe's weak role in its southern approaches will endure.

In fact, these developments lend themselves to diverse interpretations. One is that the West is preparing a big stick to intervene whenever and wherever it would like in order to suppress national liberation movements, open the way to globalisation so as to impoverish Third World nations and strip them of their authenticity, and assert Western hegemony and power. This interpretation is very negative with respect to the future of the EU Middle East policy. It looks at the ongoing EU military development as the supreme stage of Western imperialism.

However, this interpretation ignores a number of important trends and factors which shape EU policy (as well as transatlantic relations) and suggest a more complex scenario:

- it must not be overlooked that the cornerstone of the EU agenda for crisis management remains its international legality; all EU statements make clear that interventions have to be made under the direction of the UN Security Council or a recognised regional security body, like the OSCE or the OAU;

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<sup>2</sup> The speaker does not want to imply that he likes the principle of democratic centralism. However, there is no doubt, in his view, that democratic centralism is preferable to formulas similar to the medieval “*ius primae noctis*” or the ecclesiastic “*nihil obstat quominus imprimatur*”.

- the transatlantic dimension (the American component) of these developments cannot be understood as a simple increase in EU dependency on the U.S.; on the contrary, greater EU military capabilities and resources will increase European leverage and bring about more flexibility and relaxation in the Alliance *vis-à-vis* conflicts and crises; if there is an Orwellian trend in transatlantic relations, it cannot be changed by “rationality” or “justice”, but through the consolidation and globalisation of the EU's political and military role; an EU Middle Eastern policy more in tune with shared regional interests and aspirations cannot be the result of a transatlantic disruption; it could result, on the contrary, from a shift in the transatlantic balance of power; the beginning of such a shift perhaps being the current attempts at setting up a common crisis management capability;
- the influence of liberalism over realism in the whole of the EU should not be underestimated either; this influence does not come only from the nature of the foreign policies of the “neutral” (Finland, Sweden etc.) and smaller (the Netherlands, Denmark, etc.) members of the EU; liberalism has also largely penetrated the foreign policies of the larger EU countries, even those with a long-standing tradition of *Realpolitik*; the Euro-Med Partnership, despite all its shortcomings, is strong evidence of the liberal concepts presently leading EU international policy, as are policies directed to other areas, like the South-eastern Europe Stability Pact ; in this perspective, the will of the EU to assume a role in crisis management should not give way to misconceptions: it is not an instrument for asserting a renewed imperialist or colonialist role but for taking responsibility as a peaceful global power;
- it must be stressed that the development of the CESDP - presently focused on the establishment of a crisis management force - entails a full policy of security co-operation, including early warning, conflict prevention and confidence-building measures (though the latter are to be limited, for the time being, to measures of a declaratory and operational nature) and disposes of a wide array of military and civilian instruments; crisis management must be seen in this wider perspective and the wider policy of security co-operation it allows for;
- there is interdependence and a positive correlation between the new role the EU is trying to acquire and a more conclusive EU Middle Eastern policy; the new EU policy can provide opportunities for both Europe and the MENA countries;
- whether the EU will succeed depends very much on whether its intentions are understood correctly and trusted by its intended partners, among which the countries in the MENA regions are prominent; in this sense, the most urgent EU task is clarification, information and confidence-building diplomacy in the region; at the same time, MENA countries should adopt more constructive policies in relation to security co-operation with the EU than they have done so far in the framework of the Barcelona process.