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THE EVOLVING EU-NATO RELATIONSHIP

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Introduction

This short paper seeks to present an insider's view of the growing EU-NATO relationship in the critical formative period between March 2000, the start date for the creation of the EU's military structures, and March 2003, the month in which the 'Berlin plus' arrangements finally came into effect and the EU launched its first-ever military operation, CONCORDIA, an operation with recourse to NATO assets and capabilities. It will conclude with some thoughts for the future, as Operation ALTHEA gets underway in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the EU's Defence Agency is launched.

The paper focuses principally but not exclusively on the military-to-military relationship; it does not seek to cover the transatlantic politics over this period.

It is based, except where indicated, on the author's primary source records. The follow-up long paper will examine six principal themes, in the sequence in which they first arose during the developing EU-NATO relationship: liaison; intelligence, geographic, command, control and communications; capabilities; security, exercises and training; policy; and operations. This short paper focuses on the first and the last: liaison and operations.

Liaison

The first military officer to be recruited by Solana, the EU's High Representative, walked through the doors of the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels on March 13th 2000. Within one month, this Head of the EU's interim Military Staff (iMS), as he was then called, and NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) had had their first lunch together and within two months, Head iMS and NATO's Director International Military Staff (DIMS) had done the same. Why so? Whilst it was a glimpse of the blinding obvious that informal military-to-military contact had to be opened up, as quickly as possible, with priority to contact between the EU iMS and NATO's military strategic level of command (SHAPE at Mons), both the politics and the bureaucracy within NATO HQ at that time dictated that such contact could only be of a very informal nature. Such informal military-to-military meetings developed and continued, for nearly three years until the EU-

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NATO Berlin plus arrangements officially came into force, as the principal way for the practitioners to prepare themselves to implement the political decisions to come.

One of the most pressing issues to discuss was capabilities, since the EU iMS had been tasked to produce, within some three months, a first-ever catalogue of what capabilities were required of the EU Member States to fulfil the Helsinki Headline Goal requirements. The first informal dinner to brainstorm this issue amongst professionals took place with SHAPE colleagues in May 2000. The EU-NATO relationship on this issue will be described further under the capabilities heading.

After that first Summer break, informal contacts were broadened by the EU iMS to include NATO HQ's International Staff (IS- the non-military Secretariat, which plays such an important role in NATO on issues such as capabilities and exercise planning) and scientific staff (NC3A- the agency responsible for research and development issues such as modelling).

In early 2001, the politico-military climate was adjudged appropriate in both NATO and the EU for some less informal but still limited contacts: the first EU iMS briefing of NATO Assembly parliamentarians took place in February; the first informal meeting with SHAPE military staff, without a meal as a pretext and principally to discuss capability issues, took place in April; and DSACEUR briefed the EU Military Committee for the first time that June.

Following initial informal contacts during 2000, more formal military-to-military linkage with the WEU Military Staff also began in earnest in early 2001, to ensure that none of the seminal work which this small, first-class team of military professionals had done since the mid 90s was lost in the maelstrom of their run-down, then disbandment.

A particularly high liaison priority for the EU was with the US Department of Defense, to ensure that the Pentagon was correctly informed, from the 'horse's mouth', as to what the ESDP initiative entailed. Such informal briefings had started in Spring 2000 and were developed during the course of 2001.

By the Summer of 2001, the EU Military Staff (EUMS- now officially a permanent EU structure and having dropped the 'interim') had been authorised regularly to brief nominated points of contact both from the candidate countries for EU accession (the then 'plus 15') and the non-EU European members of NATO (the then 'plus 6'). These contacts proved useful in bringing up to speed on the EU's ESDP 'acquis' not only those countries who would become Member States in May 2004 but also, at that time, in keeping the military of Norway and Turkey au courant with developments.

In Spring 2002, the politico-military situation allowed NATO HQ International Military Staff contacts with the EUMS to harden up into a forum to support the joint meetings of the EU and NATO Military Committees that had started to take place. These 'Military Committee Support Team' meetings proved valuable in providing the means for a more

structured discussion on a wide range of military issues. By the Autumn of 2002, the inter-institutional climate had enabled the first informal meetings, on capabilities issues, involving members of NATO HQ's IS and of the EU Council's General Secretariat.

The 'big bang' breakthrough in EU-NATO relations, of which more in the long paper under the policy heading, took place in December 2002. This was immediately followed by the promulgation of an EUMS action plan to follow up fast, at practitioner level, on all strands of the relationship. One of the principal spurs for this was an operational one, since an EU military operation (CONCORDIA- its very first) was to take over from NATO in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in just three months time. An informal meeting between the Director-General of the EUMS and DSACEUR, the probable Operation Commander for CONCORDIA, took place just three days after the political breakthrough; and the first months of 2003 saw the deployment of an EUMS liaison officer, then of an EUMS liaison team, to DSACEUR, and of a DSACEUR liaison officer to the EUMS. This strand is developed further under the next heading.

Operations

Preparation and planning at the political strategic level for Operation CONCORDIA began in earnest in the EUMS after the March 2002 European Council². The principal EU task throughout the Summer and Autumn of that year was the preparation of the overall 'general concept' for all strands of EU activity in FYROM, of which the military operation was to be a part. To this end, an ad-hoc Council General Secretariat coordination team, including members of the EUMS, was formed up.

The liaison aspects of the EU-NATO relationship for the planning and preparation of CONCORDIA have already been covered. After the December 2002 breakthrough, the pace of the operational relationship accelerated in earnest. The EUMS was tasked to start developing the Initiating Military Directive (IMD), which would enable DSACEUR, the 'probable' Operation Commander, to start the military strategic level of planning. The frequency of military-to-military meetings between EUMS and DSACEUR's staff increased dramatically and spread across the entire range of disciplines, from command to communications, from finance to logistics.

On 28 January 2003, the EU Chiefs of Defence, meeting in Brussels with DSACEUR present, cleared the IMD, which the PSC then approved that same afternoon, authorising the EU military authorities to send it officially to DSACEUR as soon as he had been

² EC Barcelona decision (SN 100/02 ADD1 paragraph 61): "expresses EU's availability to take responsibility, following elections in FYROM and at the request of its government, for an operation to follow (AMBER FOX), on the understanding that the permanent arrangements on EU-NATO co-operation ("Berlin plus") would be in place by then. To this end... requests the relevant political and military bodies of the Council to develop as of now, in consultation with NATO, the options to enable the EU to take the appropriate decisions."

officially appointed as the Operation Commander. On 6 February, NATO officially decided (using a 'silence' procedure) that DSACEUR could be made available to the EU for this purpose. The following evening, the EU Council officially appointed (by a 'simplified written' procedure) Admiral Rainer Feist (DSACEUR) as the Operation Commander and the Chief of Staff EUMS officially released the IMD to him. On 12 February, Admiral Feist presented his Operation Plan for CONCORDIA to the EU Military Committee and issued his first warning message for force contributions from the Member States, the 'plus 15', the 'plus 6' and the third countries he had been politically authorised to invite. He held his force generation conference at Mons on 20 February, with 28 countries participating, and issued his second activation message for forces the following day. The Political and Security Committee, with DSACEUR present, noted his Operation Plan on 28 February.

The launch of CONCORDIA in March, its successful execution then termination in December 2003 and the launch of the follow-on EU Police Mission (PROXIMA) are all well documented³. But two key points emerged from the preparation and planning phase:

?? Even though CONCORDIA was a modest operation, in size, mission and duration, the range of issues that needed to be tackled, both within the EU and between the EU and NATO, was just as wide as for any larger operation.

?? It is most unlikely that the official EU-NATO activity, all being done for the very first time, that was eventually squeezed into the first three months of 2003 would have been accomplished without the three years of informal EU-NATO contacts that had preceded it.

Some Thoughts for the Future

Operational cooperation between the EU and NATO continues to grow. Their agreement on a concerted approach to security and stability in the Western Balkans⁴ paved the way for the launch of Operation ALTHEA in BiH⁵. It should be possible for further such agreements to follow in other parts of Europe's 'new neighbourhood', such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

In the capabilities field, the new European Defence Agency should, over time, add value in to the force transformation efforts in both the EU and in NATO; a closer working relationship between the EU and NATO's Allied Command Transformation (ACT) could be foreseen.

In the policy field, it should be possible further to develop cooperation, already initiated, between EU and NATO in combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The December 2004 European Council⁶ also endorsed the detailed proposals

³ For CONCORDIA, see <http://ue.eu.int/arym>, for PROXIMA, see <http://ue.eu.int/pesd/proxima/index.asp?lang=EN>.

⁴ Agreed on 29 July 2003, see EU Council document 11605/03 (Presse 218).

⁵ On 2 December 2004, see http://ue.eu.int/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=745&lang=en&mode=g.

⁶ See EU document 16238/04 dated 17 December 2004.

for the implementation of "European Defence: NATO/EU consultation, planning and operations", allowing for the EU civilian/military cell to begin its work as scheduled, including for the establishment of an operations centre which should be available by January 2006; the proposals also served as a basis for agreement with NATO on the establishment of a small EU cell at SHAPE and NATO liaison arrangements to the EUMS.

But for me, the EU-NATO relationship will be crucial in further developing a strategic culture in Europe favouring the early, rapid and where necessary robust intervention, which is needed both for EU and NATO tasks. Two of the main fields are likely to include:

?? The largely unsung 'nuts and bolts' areas, not widely known outside Alliance cognoscenti, of: operational and tactical-level command, control and communications; doctrine and procedures; interoperability and standardisation. These are areas where the EU has so far taken the deliberate decision not to attempt any unnecessary duplication, because NATO does it so well.

?? And, through projects like the NATO Response Force and the EU Battlegroups initiative, not only in the transformation of European armed forces into being truly rapidly deployable on combined joint operations but also in fostering interoperability between European and US forces.