

Europe's militarism

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Argument about whether there should be a common European defence policy has been going on intermittently, at a slowish pace, for many years. Member-states of the European Community thought that co-operation was an intergovernmental duty, and for a long time they did not seek to give any role to the European Commission in this. It was at the Treaty of Maastricht that the issue took on a more urgent aspect, although even then most of the important organisational decisions were far from settled. Not until most of the European members of Nato had become involved in acts of war against Yugoslavia, in 1999, did this question suddenly burst into the centre of attention, after a strong shift in British policy, which was expressed in a meeting of the British and French at St. Malo in December the year before. From then on, things moved quickly.

By March 2000, the European Council had established two interim bodies. One consisted of military representatives of the Chiefs of Defence of Member-states, meeting together as a Council Group. This was intended to furnish military advice to the Interim Political and Security Committee. The Council Secretariat was, at the same time, reinforced by a second body: a group of military experts seconded from Member-states. These were called the Interim Military Staff, and were composed of some twenty military experts and eight civilian secretaries. It was anticipated that they would form the nucleus of the future permanent Military Staff, and that their numbers would be augmented up to a target of forty-five. Working under the guidelines of the European Council meeting at Cologne, as interpreted in various Presidency reports, the European Council in Helsinki agreed the following targets:

'Co-operating voluntarily in EU-led operations, Member-states must be able, by 2003, to deploy within sixty days and sustain for at least one year military forces of up to 50,000 to 60,000 persons capable of ensuring

humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management including peace-making (the so-called Petersberg Tasks), in accordance with Article 17 of the Treaty of European Union; new political and military bodies and structures will be established within the Council to enable the Union to ensure the necessary political guidance and strategic direction to such operations, while respecting the single institutional framework.'

The requisite political and military bodies, which were agreed at the European Council meeting in Nice, (and which provided, in Ireland, a powerful argument for the 'no' lobby in the ensuing referendum on the Treaty), are already being established within the terms laid down there: a standing Political and Security Committee; the Military Committee; and the Military Staff to which we have already alluded. The legality of all this hasty activity is now placed in some doubt by the Irish referendum result.

In fact, to marshal an army of 60,000 within sixty days many more personnel will be needed, and in November 2000 the Council of Defence Ministers meeting in Brussels recognised this fact by pledging at least 100,000 troops from among whom the Rapid Reaction Force could be drawn. They also committed to a 'Force Catalogue' of 400 fighter 'planes and 100 warships, ready to act up to 4000 km outside Europe's boundaries.

However, the pledges must not be confused with the facts. The military experts think that the number of troops needed to stand ready to be drafted has been grossly underestimated, and some of them believe that at least twice as many troops should be available. But the practical question is whether a Europe which has been suffering from the blizzards of neo-liberalism and cuts in public and social spending will be able to summon up the political will to muster half as many.

Helsinki did not restrict itself to the discussion of logistic problems. It sought to establish some political framework for the proposed co-operation. Part of this concerned candidates for accession to the European Union, and European Nato members who are not members of that Union. It would be necessary to create intermediate structures to involve them in dialogue and the exchange of information, and to consult them on responses to crises.

The question of parallel operation with Nato gave rise to a decision to offer a standing invitation to those Nato members which were not members of the EU to participate in any particular operation if they wished, provided that Nato assets were involved in such an operation. Where Nato assets were not to be used, then participation would be subject to the agreement of the Council. Candidates for accession to the EU might also be invited to participate in operations.

It was also agreed that Russia, Ukraine and other European States involved in dialogue with the Union 'and other interested States' may be invited to participate in EU-led operations. All the States from outside the EU that decided to participate by deploying significant military forces would acquire the same rights and obligations as those incurred by participating Member-states of the EU, in the conduct of the operations in which they became engaged. An ad hoc

committee of contributors would oversee the conduct of each operation. Non-participating Member-states would be entitled to attend this committee.

The decision to end an operation would be taken by the Council, after consultation with the participants in it.

There is a glaring omission in this accord. It nowhere seeks to define the relations between the EU force and the United Nations Organisation. But this is the only international agency which has the lawful power to sanction those military actions which require authorisation. Direct self-defence apart, the EU Rapid Reaction Force will not have the right to go anywhere without such authority. But nowhere is this problem appropriately considered.

Be that as it may, the vexed question of the relationship of the new force to Nato still provokes almost as many divergent answers as there are participating governments.

It is very clear that the emergence of this policy commitment owed everything to the development of the Nato intervention force in Yugoslavia. True, the commitment for a Common Defence Policy was made in the Maastricht Treaty, long ago in 1992. The abstract commitment of Maastricht was to be made concrete in the Amsterdam Treaty five years later. But even these specific engagements would certainly have taken some time to turn into practical policies, were it not for Nato's undeclared war on Yugoslavia, which was ominously characterised as a 'peace-making operation'.

Eleven Member-states of the European Union took part in the Nato operation. The legal status of their intervention makes an important precedent: Nato simultaneously breached the Charter of the United Nations, and the terms of its own founding Treaty, when it made war on Yugoslavia. The original Nato Treaty committed its members to acting at all times within the framework of the UN Charter. Under this the only authority legally capable of launching such a war as that against Yugoslavia, is the Security Council. This was never asked.

If we examine the political meaning of the Nato onslaught, several important questions emerge. First of all, the relations between the United States, Europe and Russia were gravely complicated by the offensive against Yugoslavia. The UN Security Council, with the veto assigned to its five permanent members, had been a cornerstone of the immediate postwar settlement in 1945. The veto was designed to prevent the interests of major powers from being challenged or trampled underfoot, since it was felt that peace could not be guaranteed without respecting those interests.

But both Russia and China were excluded from the decision to authorise the bombing of Yugoslavia, and this gravely exacerbated a growing political crisis in the UN, but also in Russia, the relations between European Governments and Russia, and the climate of uneasy agreement between Russia and the United States. Subsequently, public opinion in China was scandalised by the bombing of China's Embassy in Belgrade.

Russia had already been severely threatened by the eastward expansion of Nato, to include former members of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation. Before the

ending of the Cold War, a large part of the European left, and the European nuclear disarmament movement, called for the simultaneous dissolution of both alliances, the Warsaw Treaty, and the North Atlantic Treaty. When the Warsaw Treaty broke apart, there was a short period of time during which attempts to find an overarching basis for European security were tentatively made. But inexorably, first American, and then European pressure increased to incorporate former Warsaw Treaty members into the North Atlantic Treaty. The defence imperatives involved in this decision were probably far less important than the economic effect of changes in military procurement, as the new Member-states undertook to modernise their armed forces, purchasing substantial amounts of military equipment from the United States and elsewhere.

We shall keep our eye on this question, which affects other decisions in the relationships between Europe and the United States.

It may be said that the Balkans provided grounds for an assertion of United States hegemony over the European political space. The subordinate role of the European powers could not have been more clearly asserted, once Nato moved over on to a war footing.

This was the first Nato war, and the paramount supremacy of United States forces was instantly apparent. Growing frustration brought a number of European Governments into more and more open dissent from the main thrust of Nato policy, which might very well have cracked the Alliance apart if the war had not been brought to an end as a result of the intervention of the Russians. The role of different European powers in securing this intervention still needs to be fully explained.

At least part of the impulse to realising the promises of the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties comes from the fierce resentment of some European powers of American domination in the military sphere. But the will to create a European force does not necessarily become the fact, and there is a systemic ambivalence in the relations between American and European governments. This is very clearly expressed in the formula of Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State to the Clinton administration. This has been summed up as the 'three Ds': no decoupling, no duplication, and no discrimination.

'No decoupling' expresses the fear that Europeans might become autonomous, and seek to act together in ways which might undermine the American interest. Either they might lose interest in Nato, pursuing their own priorities: or they might form up a factional bloc to try to challenge American hegemony. 'No duplication' was directed mainly at preventing the emergence of a separate military planning body resembling Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE), or at least the argument which was stated sought to inhibit such replication of functions. But the real fear was that the French and Germans might succeed in triggering a European duplication of intelligence gathering, reconnaissance satellites, and mechanisms for controlling military initiatives. Partly, of course, this is a refinement of the argument about decoupling. But mainly, it concerns the order books of the major providers of

high tech military facilities. The third D concerned discrimination, and it largely boiled down to the problem of Turkey. Mrs. Albright wanted the Europeans to include the Turks, who have a lot of soldiers, who are considered to fill body-bags more competently than can Americans. But relations with Turkey strike fiercely at the heart of European foreign policy co-ordination, because the present distance between the Turks and Europe has been fixed by Turkish shortcomings in the field of human rights. If military considerations are so nakedly to overrule concern for human rights, then agreement about foreign policy has been subordinated to military convenience.

And yet there can be no doubt that Turkey's forces are by no means the least of the threats perceived by the Russians. It has been argued¹ that worries about the Turks may have strongly influenced the Russian decision to abandon the pledge of 'no first use' of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Bush will no doubt be at least as much concerned with the three Ds as was Mrs. Albright. Does this mean that Europe will reject the fourth military 'D', which is Dependence?

The kind of military investment necessary to allow Europe to match or overtake American superiority is no doubt theoretically possible. But in the absence of a serious threat of war between those powers, it is unlikely that European democracies could sanction the enormous burden of taxes which this would require, particularly when neo-liberal dogmas are putting pensions and social welfare payments under remorseless downward pressure. But here again, such military expenditure as European Governments may wish to incur for the new Rapid Reaction Force may represent substantial procurement decisions, which might well be orders lost to the North American military industrial complex. Seldom said, this must be one of the important reasons for American perturbation about the militarisation of the European Union, which have sometimes generated threats from the State Department to withdrawn intelligence co-operation from the European allies. Unfortunately for both parties, even their agreement might not persuade European public opinion, which will not want to cut pensions and health services in order to pay for militarism.

Towering over these problems, since the inauguration of President Bush, is the problem of National Missile Defence, which was already a threat under the Presidency of Bill Clinton, and is now a direct menace. 'Son of Star Wars' as it is known, is not simply a dubious technological attempt to provide a missile shield for the United States. It is also a direct, and likely lethal threat to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, whose destruction could all-too-easily destroy the foundation of existing nuclear disarmament agreements, and directly provoke a new nuclear arms race and widespread nuclear proliferation. There is no doubt that the majority of European peoples will oppose any such development. But a number of European Governments will be profoundly uneasy about such developments.

Those governments which seek to solve their energy problems by expanded imports from Russia will not want to complicate their commercial relations by

building baroque, and probably dysfunctional, military structures. The economic interests of America and Europe have often been incongruent. In the midst of this new military crisis, they can become conflictual.

There are those who think that divergences between the European members of Nato and the United States imply the need for stronger European military co-ordination. We should resist such arguments. There is clear space for a pacific Europe, which can co-ordinate its peaceful economic co-operation for the benefit of its peoples. The fostering of a world-wide readiness for military intervention is the wrong path for such a Europe to choose.

For sure, there are many international tensions which have been inherited by the modern world, and which do require the co-ordination of international action and solidarity.

If I might cite one area which gives us numerous negative examples of the effects of great power influence, it would be that of Timor, where superpower support for the Indonesian authorities, and intense military assistance for the Indonesian army, brought innumerable horrors on to the heads of the suffering people of Timor, before their recent deliverance, which came, in large part, at the hands of a powerful movement of solidarity.

Unfortunately, negative influences of superpower interventions are far more numerous than any positive examples. Europe suffered enough from internecine wars over the last two centuries, to enable it to develop strong antibodies which should be carried into the new international situation, to prevent us collectively from participating in a new round of regional power blocs and military exchanges. In the nuclear age, even one such exchange can threaten the end of civilisation.

During the Cold War, we became habituated to a bipolar world, in which the struggle for peace was greatly simplified. Briefly we have been living through a period in which the new world order depended on one solitary megapower. But this dependence is completely unsustainable, even though it is unlikely to be challenged by military force. The Russian military power was not undermined by military force, but by economic weakness and political conflict. The insane effort to expend billions on Star Wars may or may not provide a last burst of military Keynesianism, enabling economic recovery in the United States, but it surely is designed to increase the danger of world-wide conflict.

Yet the dangers to the rest of the world are so great that the necessary peace movement can hardly fail to prevail. Such a peace movement should be more than capable of dissuading Europe from the military path, and providing the necessary climate in which can grow an alternative culture of peace.

References

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