

# A European way of war?

Report on seminar held at the Centre for European Reform,

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## 1. An inevitable division of labour?

Seminar participants agreed on one thing: European nations have a comparative advantage over the US in peacemaking, peacekeeping and reconstruction. The US is not good at 'the war after the war'. This is why the US strongly encouraged the deployment of NATO (primarily European) troops to Afghanistan, and it is possible that NATO will also be brought into Iraq. The US seems unable to sustain over 120,000 troops abroad for more than a year. Furthermore this division-of-labour trend looks set to continue, as the US is unlikely devote much efforts or funds to improving its peacekeeping capabilities, while it continues to spend vast sums on advanced warfare technologies.

The technology gap is increasing between the US and European countries: the best performing European countries spend around 7 per cent of their defence budgets on R&D, compared to 15 per cent in the US. One senior British analysts argued that the US will improve its ability to wage war with greater precision, and will continue to be less interested in the 'war after the war', leaving European countries to clear up the mess. European military inferiority leaves Europeans little option, according to a British academic because advanced technology does not help in the area of ground superiority - which is required for peacekeeping - to the same degree as it helps with air superiority, which is vital for today's warfighting. Europe's lack of defence R&D and technology spending thus consigns Europe to a peacemaking and peacekeeping role.

According to a leading British strategist these different doctrines compound the division of labour. The Vietnam generation of US defence analysts and politicians were convinced that the US should have a military doctrine that prepared it for a major war, and felt vindicated by the Gulf War of 1991. The length of wars is getting increasingly shorter, while the 'war after the war' is getting longer and more difficult. Europe cannot compete with the American major war doctrine, and so must concentrate on making peace and keeping it.

## 2. Should the EU accept to do 'just' peacekeeping?

The division of labour between the US and European countries caused disagreement over how best to integrate European defence, and how the military and political relationship between the US and Europe should be redrawn. Should EU military integration be designed to mop up after American intervention? Or should the EU concentrate on improving its own warfighting capability? Is the EU a suitable institution for defence co-operation, or would a combination of NATO and new shifting coalitions be more suitable?

Most participants agreed that the Europe should not restrict itself to mopping up after the US. A greater division of labour would encourage the US to behave irresponsibly: they could conduct wars without having to deal with the long-term consequences. European countries must therefore spend more on their ability to fight wars. Some argued that being consigned to 'picking up pieces' would decimate EU geopolitical legitimacy: having sharp teeth brings political results. Or more specifically Europeans cannot influence the Pentagon, and how it conducts its campaigns, unless it has something to offer.

On the other hand, NATO is being increasingly ignored by the US, which is keen to build coalitions for each war it undertakes, rather than have to deal with messy political squabbling and collective decision-making. Static European defence budgets do not help. The US does not really need military help from other countries, and only asks for it to give its interventions legitimacy. The EU failed to reach consensus over Iraq, and any European approach to warfare should allow differences of opinion and other coalitions to be formed. An industry insider hailed the NATO transformation programme, especially the NATO response force, because it would provide a possible 'sphere of combination' of EU and US forces.

### **3. How to integrate European forces**

However, it is far from clear whether the EU can, or should, create a viable fighting force. A senior French defence analyst called for more to be spent on R&D. Great Britain and France are 'way behind the curve', and are in a similar position technologically to the US in 1991. He considered European forces to be far too heavy for co-ordinated warfare. For integration to be effective, forces need to be slimmed down. The proposed European Rapid Reaction Force, of 60,000, would be too small even for Balkans-sized operations, such as Kosovo. But he was also keen to insist that, a priori, there is no reason to believe that the EU was incapable of carrying out autonomous military operations, or playing a supporting role to US-led intervention. EU forces would have to cope with a smaller budget, but could 'kick in doors' rather than use a wrecking ball to 'bring down the house'.

A senior UK diplomat disagreed. A European Security and Defence Policy would be about crisis management, rather than major interventions in another state. There is a 'fragile, incremental consensus' for inter-operability and shared command for small-scale peacekeeping operations. An EU political stance, let alone EU participation in a US-led operation, would be impossible to achieve, as the EU would never accept subordination.

An active military officer also emphasised the fragility of integration. He used the example of EuroMarFor, the European maritime force, to show how hollow EU command and control can be. That force was deployed to the Gulf during the Iraq crisis, but really only flew the EU flag as a symbolic measure. Moreover it is the fruit of integration by only four countries: France, Spain, Italy and Portugal. A former UK commander with lots of Balkan experience stressed that different nations within the EU have different competences, which should be fostered. Britain and France could stick to military warfare, and leave other countries to concentrate more on homeland security, which participants agreed had been ignored by Solana's draft security strategy. Similarly, procurement and R&D strategy should reflect the national defence differences. Some participants thought it unlikely that the EU could co-operate in acquisitions, and that only 5 or 6 countries accept the need for increased spending on technology and more strategic co-operation.

Finally, some went so far as to express their concern that the lack of defence spending in the EU would harm its ability to keep the peace. With the increasing sophistication of US military operations, there are many more deaths from friendly fire. Better command integration, as well as better spending on C4ISR would help keep casualties down in non-combat situations.

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