The Origins and the First Years of the European Union Battlegroups

by Tommi Koivula

IT HAS BECOME nearly commonplace to claim that the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has made substantial progress in recent years. A somewhat less obvious statement is that we have within the last few years witnessed a qualitative step in which the EDSP has entered into a new operational phase in which its focus has moved from treaties establishing various institutional arrangements to ways of implementing them.

The emergence of the European Union Battlegroups (EUBGs), which reached their Full Operational Capability (FOC) in January 2007, was an important milestone in this development. From that point onwards, the EU has had a capacity to undertake two concurrent single Battlegroup-sized response operations, including the ability to launch both operations almost simultaneously.

However, while a number of both civilian and military crisis management operations have been conducted under the EU flag since 2003,[1] thus far the Battlegroups have not been utilized in any one of them. As a consequence, there have been occasional signs of frustration because of the inactivity of this standby instrument.

The pages of this article are devoted to the questions of why and how the European Union Battlegroup concept came into existence and where we now stand after a few years of their full operational capability. The inquiry is both European and political in nature: it focuses on the general European and global political currents influencing the emergence of the Battlegroup concept and the early decisions on their utilization.

The structure of the article is as follows. The second section focuses on the background of the European Security and Defence Policy, starting with the post-Cold War international environment and the implications made of it in Europe. This will be followed by a discussion on the stages of the institutional birth of the Battlegroup concept, discussing the Helsinki Headline Goal process, the European Security Strategy and Operation Artemis as the three decisive factors behind its creation. Subsequently, the attention turns to the more recent experiences, with special emphasis on the issue of the use of the Battlegroup as a part of the EU response to the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in 2006 and to the ongoing situations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur. Finally, consideration will be given to the explaining factors behind their non-utilization and their future prospects.

Why EUBGs?

The harsh realities of the post-Cold World War

The story of coordinated European defence

was in practice a taboo during the Cold War. There was an effort to initiate an arrangement called the European Defence Community, which would have included the potentiality of a European Army, but it failed to be ratified in August 1954. Although the Western European Union (WEU) was occasionally referred to as a European forum for discussing security questions, its military significance and political role was marginal. Thus, Western European security remained a Nato monopoly until the fall of the Berlin Wall.[2]

After the end of the Cold War, a latent division of labour emerged between the European Community, which was focused on economic integration, and the Atlantic Alliance, which found fresh impetus in laying the foundations for new political relations with liberated Central and Eastern European countries.[3]

Some efforts were made towards stronger coordination of the defence policies of European countries, but they met with no success. However, progress was more significant in the field of foreign policy. As a concrete result of these efforts, the leaders of the European Community agreed on the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, "which might in time lead to a common defence" in a treaty signed in Maastricht in 1992.[4]

It was soon realised, however, that the post-Cold War world, or post-Cold War Europe for that matter, did not prove to be the peaceful and ever more prosperous place that had been anticipated in the most optimistic accounts. A striking and tragic lesson in this was provided in Yugoslavia, where a series of bloody wars erupted after 1991. Europeans in general and the EU in particular were both anxious and frustrated to see that they were almost completely helpless during several years of brutal war, political instability and continuous violations of international justice by all warring parties. A further embarrassment for the Europeans was that a political solution to the Balkans crisis was only reached after Nato, in other words the United States, a non-European power, became resolute enough to use its political and military might to enforce peace in the area – after the various and often contradictory European voices had fallen on deaf ears.

Another painful reminder of Europe's inability to act took place in Rwanda during the spring of 1994, when full-scale genocide was perpetrated by the extreme Hutus close to the Rwandan government within a matter of only a few weeks, causing the death of at least 800 000 people. All this time the international community looked on and wondered whether something ought to be done.

However, these tragedies were not just examples of European powerlessness. Another failed organisation in this respect was the United Nations, since these cases illustrated the severe shortcomings of the multilateral approach to international security and crisis management.

This was particularly distressing from the European perspective, since the European Union was composed of a number of small and medium-sized states very closely connected to the world economy and with strong interests in maintaining peace and stability all over the world. Europe was already a prominent player in world politics, being a major donor of international aid and assistance and producing a large share of the world's GDP. Still, regarding the capacity to affect military crises elsewhere, the EU and its individual member states lacked the necessary resources. The Europeans were natural proponents of multilateral cooperation, which, however, did not seem to work.

Militarily, the Europeans were almost totally dependent on the resources of their powerful ally, the United States. Basically, the United States was willing to encourage the development of better European crisis management capabilities, at least to the extent that these capabilities would not challenge U.S. military might. The Americans wanted its allies to do more, either on a bilateral basis with the American military, or within a UN or Nato framework, or even within a purely European framework on occasions when the U.S. decided not to be involved.

Thus, step by step, a new kind of understanding of the very basic European security deficit became widespread: even though Europe's political and economic capabilities were considerable, and even though the use of force was neither regarded as the first nor the only way to deal with regional or international crises, such as those in Yugoslavia or Rwanda, it became increasingly common to assess that the EU must have at its disposal a certain level of forces at a certain state of readiness and operational efficiency, if only to widen its range of options when faced with a crisis and to facilitate decision-making at the highest political level.[5]

As a consequence, a reorganisation of Europe's military forces began in June 1992, brought about first and foremost by the Western European Union, (WEU), which defined its operational roles in the Petersberg Declaration. These, later referred to as the "Petersberg Tasks", included 'humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and also tasks of combat forces in crisis management including peacemaking'.[6]

The Petersberg Tasks, although not yet adopted by the European Union at that time, were the first expression of Europe's new strategic environment. It is noteworthy that these tasks included a strong element of civilian crisis management, and that actual combat was just one element among others. All the same, from now the reorganisation of defence emerged on the European agenda, with an added emphasis on force projection and the management of far-off crises.[7] This reorganisation, However, turned out to be a slow business.

The Amsterdam Treaty of 1996 marked the beginning of a conscious development of the European Union's crisis management capabilities. Among the most significant achievements of the Treaty was that, thanks to an initiative by two new member states with a background of neutrality, Sweden and Finland, the Petersberg Tasks were incorporated into it and thus into the EU agenda.[8]

The Emergence of the European Security and Defence Policy

During this process of building a Common Foreign and Security Policy a spectrum of opinions on European defence had emerged within the EU. It ran from countries such as the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands, which had been consistently keen on maintaining Nato, and thus U.S., involvement in Europe, to France and Belgium, which had been most interested in building an autonomous EU capacity. Those members which had been traditionally neutral (Austria, Finland, Sweden and Ireland) had in turn been less ambitious about building anything resembling a European Army.[9]

Leaving this spectrum of opinions aside, European defence issues had traditionally been dominated by two member countries, France and Great Britain. Thus it was no surprise that the launching of an independent European security and defence policy was based on a declaration made by these

two nations at St. Malo, in December 1998. Much more surprising for many was the fact they were able to find a common understanding over the future of European defence in their declaration. Therefore, the St. Malo Declaration can in many senses be interpreted as a small revolution in the European security setting.

The background to the declaration lay to a large extent in the minds of the British decision-makers. By 1998, the Blair government had grown increasingly frustrated over Europe's operational powerlessness, despite its economic size, which was considerably greater than that of the US, and concluded that if the imbalance between the Europeans and Americans continued the foundations of the Atlantic partnership would in the long term be jeopardised. It was estimated by the British that the only way to solve this problem and to safeguard the future of the Atlantic Alliance would be to somehow develop European defence capabilities .[10]

On the other hand, France had traditionally been perhaps the strongest advocate of the EU as a security policy actor and had seen it as a way of being better able to safeguard French interests. The EU had traditionally been regarded by France as a necessary counterbalance to the perceived US global dominance.

Now, at St. Malo, however, the French were willing to reach a compromise by confessing to the legitimacy of the Atlantic partnership, which was a necessary prerequisite for any European defence arrangement as far as the British were concerned. The frustrating experiences in the Balkans also played a significant role in this case, as the recent experience of joint military operations in that area helped the two countries to create an atmosphere of deepening mutual cooperation.

Thus, a historic compromise was reached between two major European military actors, combining the European capacity for autonomous military action desired by the French with the conformity with the European countries' obligations to the Atlantic Alliance required by the British. As the St. Malo Declaration puts it:

> …The European Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.
>
> … In strengthening the solidarity between the member states of the European Union, in order that Europe can make its voice heard in world affairs, while acting in conformity with our respective obligations in Nato, we are contributing to the vitality of a modernised Atlantic Alliance which is the foundation of the collective defence of its members."[11]

The logic behind this entente was clear, and so was its importance. It was and remains a generally known fact that Britain and France were the two most influential EU countries in terms of security and defence issues. Consequently, when these two countries reached agreement on the need for an autonomous European security and defence policy and presented their common position to the other EU countries, a rapid Europeanisation of the St. Malo Agreement followed throughout 1999, very much helped by the renewed European experiences of concern and powerlessness during the Kosovo conflict the same year.[12] In this way, the bilateral initiative became a European reality and changed the European defence identity into a European defence policy, the ESDP.[13]

Along with the Kosovo experience, a number of institutional steps were taken at the June 1999 European Council in Cologne to make a European defence policy possible in practical terms. Among them was the cre-

ation of a new central body in the CFSP and ESDP, the Political and Security Committee (PSC), consisting of ambassadors of the member states. Its purpose is to deal with all aspects of CFSP and ESDP in order to manage developing crises, carry out planning work and advise the European Council. The role of the PSC would become particularly important in the event of any deployment of military forces from the Union, as it would then assume political control of the day-to-day direction of military operations.[14]

Another new organ was the Union's most senior military body, the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), composed of the chiefs of defence staff of the member countries or their representatives, the task of which was to give advice and recommendations to the PSC. The European Union Military Staff (EUMS) in turn was established to provide expertise for the PSC, in particular in the conducting of a military crisis management operation. Even though not equipped sufficiently to serve as the headquarters of a crisis management operation, it was to be responsible for early warning facilities, situation evaluations and the strategic planning of Petersberg missions. It was regarded as constituting a source of technical expertise for the Union on all aspects of security and defence, and as acting as an interface between the political and military authorities within the Union.[15]

The institutional birth of the EU Battlegroup concept: Three prerequisites

The Helsinki Headline Goal process

In December 1999, just one year after St. Malo, the EU Helsinki Summit set out the ESDP process Headline Goal objectives. The aim was to place forces at the Union's disposal that would be capable of carrying out all the Petersberg missions, including the most demanding ones, in operations up to the army corps level, i.e. 50 000 to 60 000 troops at 60 days' notice. Member states undertook, by 2003, to deploy forces

> Militarily self-sustaining with the necessary command, control and intelligence capabilities, logistics, other combat support services and additionally air and naval elements, as appropriate. Member states should be able to deploy in full at this level within 60 days, and within this to provide smaller rapid response elements available and deployable at a very high level of readiness. They must be able to sustain such a deployment for at least one year.[16]

Efforts to build European forces in this quantity nevertheless soon ran into political, administrative and legal troubles in various member countries. Moreover, only a few EU countries had any capability for transferring troops to distant areas in any quantity.[17]

The next stage was to make up the shortfalls. The gap between what was required to meet the Headline Goal and the forces actually committed by member states was identified in the Helsinki Process Catalogue (HPC) of June 2001, which served as a basis for discussions at the Union's Conference on EU Capability Improvement in November 2001, at which the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP) was launched. This Action Plan dealt mostly with procurement and structural or doctrinal initiatives, and therefore did not contribute directly to enhancing Europe's crisis management capability.

Another complicating factor was that many EU countries had earmarked the same troops for several pools and registers, i.e.

besides being listed in the Helsinki Force Catalogue, the same units were often also listed for use by Nato and the UN (in its High Readiness Brigade SHIRBRIG).[18] One practical consequence of this situation was that no new capability really emerged with the Helsinki Headline Goal process, implying that the rapid, coordinated reaction required by the politicians would be an overwhelming task.[19]

Even though the Headline Goal was declared operational, with certain limitations, at the Laeken European Council in December 2001, there was still a strong sense of a lacking European capability. In the face of this situation, which would most likely have required a serious longterm undertaking, the political current seemed to start to favour more limited projects that would be achievable in the near future term.[20] The EU Battlegroups turned out to become the chief item among these undertakings.

European Security Strategy

Thus, the heightened consciousness among European decision-makers and the political developments described above notwithstanding, the EU lacked a comprehensive toolbox to the security issues surrounding it, and its security policy aims were more or less unclear.[21] On the other hand, there was a need for a roadmap which would give a signal that the EU wished to be a credible security policy actor. The European Security Strategy was created to meet these shortcomings.

There was a clear sense of urgency behind the EU Security Strategy, caused by an increased awareness of the insecurity in the contemporary world, in particular the threat of international terrorism due to the 9/11 incident and to worries about the way in which the U.S. would respond to that threat and the Union's own expansion.

The reaction of the U.S. government after the September 11 terrorist attack brought to the surface a difference of perception between American and European security thinking that had perhaps already existed behind the scenes for some time. In this view, as reflected in the U.S. National Security Strategy of 2002, the Americans were seen as having a higher propensity for resorting to unilateral military action once they estimated that their security was threatened. This seemed to imply that the Americans had distanced themselves from the multilateral approach deemed so important in Europe.[22]

As time passed and the EU expanded during the late 1990s, and in anticipation of its major enlargement in 2004, the broader European security context also changed. The borders of the union were gradually moving closer to "security hotspots," so that a secure environment on the other side of the Mediterranean, in North Africa, almost automatically became a matter of paramount importance, as was also the termination of the ongoing conflicts in the Balkans. Apart from these two, there were other obvious potential mission areas for the EU to be seen in the Southern Caucasus and the Middle-East.

Although this was not officially stated anywhere, Africa was regarded as the main operational area for the European Security Strategy, and thus for the Battlegroups, too. This emphasis was of course natural in the sense that the Mediterranean Sea rather brings Africa and Europe together than separates them, a bond felt especially strong by such member states as Spain and Italy. The African emphasis in EU crisis management efforts also fitted into the division of labour between the security organisations, since Nato and the United States tended to

be more interested in the Middle East and the CIS area.

On the other hand, it could also be argued that Britain and France had a particular interest in Africa. Both of them happened to be former major colonial powers in Africa with considerable African populations in their area. Britain and France also had substantial military resources and experience, especially regarding African countries. As a matter of fact, most of the remaining EU countries had a very limited amount of military power or know-how to add to these two countries' capabilities regarding Africa. But politically, the other EU countries were in a position to make a big difference. International attention becomes essentially more positive if military operations are executed by the European Union rather than by these former colonial powers themselves. The fact that most of the manpower and expertise in a single operation came from the former great powers becomes less visible when it can be announced that the EU, as a whole or in part, was involved.[23]

From the viewpoint of small EU member states such as Sweden or Finland, the big picture of the ESDP and Battlegroup development contained mixed elements. On the one hand, the whole process was in their interests in many respects. By themselves they would not have been able to tackle the numerous issues and problems that in any case affect their living conditions, and joining forces was practically the only way to pursue the "effective multilateralism" which they were so dependent upon. On the other hand, the process remained a telling example of the relative position of small states in international affairs, including those of the EU, in that the concept was negotiated and agreed upon between just a few influential states that may not have been particularly well informed about or interested in the individual aspirations of small nations, whose role then easily becomes one of adapting to the requirements and concepts decided upon elsewhere.

The Security Strategy, which was first proposed by the High Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana, at the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003 and endorsed in Brussels in December of the same year, stated very clearly that the EU needed to be a more active international player, more unified and more able to take action.

The security strategy identified a number of risks and threats that needed to be addressed. The key threats were terrorism, WMD proliferation, regional conflicts, state collapse and organised crime.[24] The EU response as envisioned in the strategy was based on three pillars: first, response to the global threats of terrorism, WMD proliferation and organised crime by recognising that the first line of defence now lies abroad; second, building security on the borders of Europe by consolidating stabilisation in the Balkans and extending economic and political cooperation to neighbours in the south and east and remaining engaged in and committed to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is a strategic priority; and finally, upholding and developing international law, strengthening the United Nations Charter and building an international order based on effective multilateralism.[25]

The strategy also communicated the necessity for developing capabilities more systematically through cooperation between the member states, as well as a need for more flexible and mobile forces able to handle the new threats. It gave a clear signal that EU capabilities and those of the member states needed better coordination. With its insistence on more flexible and mobile ability for handling new security threats, the European

Security Strategy serves as another direct prerequisite for the Battlegroup concept.

Operation Artemis – the Battlegroup concept introduced

The beginning of the war in Iraq in the spring of 2003 caused a visible division among the EU countries over whether to support the U.S. policy there or not. These divisions notwithstanding, which were perhaps given too much attention in the public eye, serious considerations about what the EU could do were going on in many member countries.

Despite severe disagreement over the crisis in Iraq, efforts to improve the ESDP institutional settings and operational developments had continued and in fact intensified among the EU member states.[26] Simultaneously, political pressures towards some sort of rapid progress in the ESDP increased, and there was no objection to this being something concrete and high-profile. It was at this point that the predecessor of the EU Battlegroup concept came into the picture.

The concrete development that was to produce the EU Battlegroup concept had its origins in the European military operation Artemis that sought to tackle the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the summer of 2003. Launched in June of that year, it was the first autonomous European crisis management operation. Although agreement on the availability of Nato resources for EU operations had been reached just a few months earlier, Artemis was managed outside the "Berlin Plus" agreement and beyond the continent of Europe. The decision to proceed with the operation was originally made by the French, and it was meant to be a French operation, but by the summer of 2003 it had become an EU operation.

Basically, the story of Artemis was simple. The operation took place at the request of the United Nations and consisted of the deployment of an Interim Emergency Multinational Force in Bunia in the Ituri region. The aim of the mission was to contribute to the stabilisation of security conditions in Bunia and to the improvement of the humanitarian situation, and to ensure the protection of the airport, displaced persons and the civilian population. EU forces numbering around 1800 troops from several EU nations, but mostly from France acting as framework nation, stayed in the area until 1 September and were replaced by troops under the auspices of the UN. Artemis was thus a very limited operation in terms of time, space and resources.[27]

The completion of Artemis was greeted with satisfaction in the EU. While the achievements in terms of regional security turned out to be relatively temporary, the operation had demonstrated that the EU decision-making and military planning organs were able to execute and finish a purely EU operation in a case of urgent need. It was also possible to interpret Artemis as a showcase of successful multilateral crisis management versus the simultaneous unilateral U.S. involvement in Iraq.

Building on the success of Operation Artemis, the dynamic security duo of France and the United Kingdom, this time along with Germany, presented the "battle group" concept in February 2004 with a view to improving the EU's capacity for rapid reaction. Two months later EU defence ministers approved the trilateral proposal, transforming it into a European initiative. According to this concept, battle groups, or "tactical groups", of approximately 1500 troops, including the appropriate support elements, were to be formed ready for deployment within 15 days. They should be capable of

high-intensity operations, either as standalone forces or as initial-entry forces for operations on a larger scale. Another feature of these groups was that they were designed to be either national or multinational, composed of troops from one or more member countries. In line with the European Security Strategy, these forces were designed specifically, but not exclusively, for use in response to requests from the UN.[28]

Possible scenarios for these Battlegroups included support missions for the delivery of humanitarian aid, evacuation operations, conflict prevention, stabilisation operations and the separation of hostile parties. As the concept was based on small force packages, it significantly increased the flexibility and deployability of the Union's armed forces, and as such constitutes an important step towards Headline Goal 2010.[29]

After full operational capability

Congo, Lebanon, Darfur: unsuited cases or missed opportunities?

The period since Operation Artemis has seen an impressive growth of European Union crisis management activities with over 20 launched EU civil and military operations in the Balkans, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.[30]

Simultaneously, the ESDP structures have been strengthened in several ways with the introduction of such institutional structures as the European Defence Agency (EDA). As a part of that development, the EUBGs reached their Full Operational Capability (FOC) in January 2007. From that point onwards, the EU has had a capacity to undertake two concurrent single Battlegroup-sized response operations, including the ability to launch both operations almost simultaneously.[31]

However, while a number of both civilian and military crisis management operations have been conducted by the EU since 2003, thus far the Battlegroups have not been utilized in any one of them. As a consequence, critical tones and occasional signs of frustration have been expressed because of the inactivity of this rather costly standby instrument.

There is no doubt that potential crises have existed. Conflicts, such as the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006, or the continuously unstable situations in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Darfur have all provided potential testing grounds to the BGs and for the EU to show decisive leadership envisioned in the European Security Strategy and the Headline Goal documents. A closer scrutiny of these cases and to the related pan-European discussion may provide ideas to explain this apparent discrepancy between the ambition and the outcome with the EU Battlegroups.

Lebanon 2006

On 12 July 2006 Israel invaded Lebanese territory after a cross-border raid by the Hezbollah organisation. After a few weeks of intense fighting, a UNbrokered cease-fire came into effect on 14 August. Consequently, a rapid troop deployment by the international community in Southern Lebanon was called for, both in Europe and elsewhere. At that point, the idea of utilizing an EU Battlegroup in the area came to the fore, especially as a potential initial entry force of limited duration, supporting the larger UN crisis management operation.[32]

While France was initially somewhat hesitant about the idea (even though she eventually committed 2 000 troops to UNIFIL II mission) and while Germany

took a rather cautious approach towards engaging her military in the Middle East, the most enthusiastic member state seems to have been Italy, which saw the occasion as a window of opportunity to take the lead in bolstering European efforts to revive the Middle East peace process and more broadly to inject momentum into the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP).[33]

However, even though the EU member states did provide the backbone of the emerging UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon with almost 7 000 troops, it turned out that the EU members were not able to yield the necessary decision within the narrow EUBG "window of opportunity" timeframe of a few critical days and weeks in August, 2006. The opportunity, if such a thing existed in the first place, evaporated far too quickly for the Europe-wide political decision-making.[34]

The Democratic Republic of Congo 2006 – 2008

The scene of Operation Artemis, the Democratic Republic of Congo, which continued to struggle with severe instability was to attract the EU's attention on several occasions. In 2006, for example, the EU launched a military operation there in support of the UN mission MONUC to secure and oversee the election process (Operation EUFOR RD Congo). The military operation, which was conducted in full agreement with the authorities of the DRC and in close coordination with them and MONUC, was concluded on November 30, 2006.[35] Although this autonomous EU-led operation was conducted within the framework of the ESDP, it did not involve an EUBG either. This was partly because Germany, which was the framework nation of the Battlegroup at that time in a standby status and simultaneously a target of Europe-wide pressure to show leadership, indicated strong reservations, for instance by publicly announcing that it would provide no more than one-third of the troops required for the EUFOR.[36] Another factor contributing to EUGB inactivity was that the mission was regarded as a planned one rather than one of crisis response.[37]

Late in 2008 the DRC again became a focus of international attention as tens of thousands of refugees took to the roads in the North Kivu area, despite a ceasefire announced by the rebels on 29 October 2008. There, renegade General Laurent Nkunda and his band of Tutsi fighters fought against Hutu rebels, while the DRC army, backed by the UN, tried unsuccessfully to force the peace.

For the EU, the developments raised the issue of whether it should intervene, especially after pressure from Belgium and a request from the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, asking the EU to provide a rapid reaction force to the scene.

In the face of the emerging humanitarian disaster, one option would have been to deploy the then standby-ready Franco-German Battlegroup, or the other standby unit, the British Battlegroup. However, while France showed interest in the operation, the UK and Germany, along with Spain and Italy, which were scheduled to provide the following standby Battlegroup within a couple of months, were all hesitant about sending a rapid reaction force to the area. The most persistent stance was taken by the UK government, whose Foreign Minister David Miliband argued that additional troops should be sent through the UN instead of the EU.[38] The main reason for this decision was most likely that the UK's overstretched defence priorities at that time lie elsewhere – above all in Iraq and Afghanistan to the extent that another

potentially long commitment was deemed to be out of the question. Through this, any move to send a Battlegroup to Congo was blocked.

Darfur

A third recent potential testing ground for the EUBGs has been the conflict in the Darfur region, in the western part of Sudan, where a brutal civil war has been waged by the government against the regional rebel groups. In fact, from the very early stages of EUBG planning, Darfur had been raised as a potential area of operations , stirring memories of the horrors that the international community saw in the Great Lakes region in the previous decade.[39]

In the years 2007 and 2008, the ongoing drama in Darfur sparked some interventionist proposals, for instance in the Nordic countries. The main argument in this discussion was that while the Khartoum government was unlikely to be deterred or coerced by economic sanctions and diplomatic efforts alone, the Battlegroups perhaps could, acting alone or in conjunction with Nato or other forces, apply the needed pressure or buy time for other initiatives to come into play.[40]

However, the not-so-permissive international environment turned out to become the main or at least the most visible obstacle for an EUBG operation. Since, owing to Russian and Chinese opposition, any intervention to Sudan would have had to be initiated without a firm UN mandate, a number of member states started to look for other options than military measures. As one of the countries that would likely be asked to bear a significant part of the burden, France signalled that it would not support coercive measures, marking the end to any serious talks about employing the Battlegroups to Darfur.[41]

Thus, opposing considerations notwithstanding, the EU has so far ruled out employing the EUBGs to Darfur.[42] Instead, the outcome has been the EUFOR Tchad/RCA operation which was approved by a UN peace-enforcement (not peacekeeping) mandate: to provide refugee security and logistics in eastern Chad and in the north-eastern Central African Republic – in the vicinity, but clearly outside the border of the war-torn Darfur.[43] The EU also stepped up its financial support for the African Union Monitoring Mission (AMIS) in place in Darfur. Like the previous EU military missions, here too the EU operation took the form of a tailored force rather than a rapid reaction force.

An instrument in search of a toolbox

During their first years of existence, the Battlegroups have been subject to big expectations and political ambitions. While some have praised their achievements, others have raised critical voices and seen the outcome as a disappointment. Are we then talking about a temporary phase within the larger evolution of the ESDP?

Many of the problematic issues facing the Battlegroups today were conscious risks that their planners were aware of. It was known that issues of political will in member states and questions of decision-making would entail great challenges. Neither was it a surprise that the EUBGs would not be particularly well-suited to act as stand-alone units, or that they instead would better serve their roles as a part of a more comprehensive EU crisis management machinery.

However, criticism becomes more understandable in the light of the otherwise impressive development of the European

Security and Defence Policy. The ESDP has entered into a new operational phase where the focus is moving from treaties establishing various institutional arrangements to ways of implementing them. The frustration may be explained by this increased level of EU politico-military ambition: it seems that expectations have proceeded even further than deeds.[44]

So what is the EUBG balance sheet after six years of conceptual existence and a few years of Full Operational Capability?

On the asset side, the Battlegroup concept undoubtedly has simply by its existence promoted military integration in Europe. Until present times, member states have not just been keen to provide troops for the EUBG standby roster, but the concept has gained additional following as two non-EU Nato-countries, Norway and Turkey, participate in a group each. In addition, as further evidence of the role of the Battlegroups as a motor of the EU defence integration, the Lisbon Treaty's idea of Permanent Structured Cooperation mechanism, allowing a number of participating member states an opportunity to proceed faster in military capability development without the other members being involved, is in practice a codification of the principles already applied with the Battlegoup concept.[45]

In a similar vein the Battlegroups have also served other important integrative functions: the most important among these has been their role as an instrument of military transformation in member-states, although the EUBGs do not officially carry such goals or programmes. Moreover, some of the EUBG concept's inherent qualities, such as the troop certification process, prepare and enhance the capability of the EU member states to undertake expeditionary operations. These qualities are highlighted especially in small-state multinational Battlegroups – the Nordic Battlegroup being one of the exemplifying cases. These effects may have been smaller in single-nation units, which, on the other hand, may also have had a lesser need for such a transformation catalyst, owing to the fact that they tend to be operated by the most militarily capable member states. Indeed, the rapid development of the Battlegroup concept can be seen as a way to induce in particular small European militaries to accelerate their modernisation programmes and to ensure that national contingents can work together effectively.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that there are plans to extend the concept to air and naval forces, although not to the extent of having a single standing force on readiness, but, rather, scattered forces which could be rapidly assembled when so decided. If realized, these additional components would significantly enhance the capabilities of the Battlegroups.[46]

Turning to the liabilities and to the possibly underlying reasons why the Battlegroups have so far not been utilized, the EUBG shortcomings can be discussed on three levels; first, by focusing on the Battlegroup's conceptual limitations, secondly, on ESDP-related problems and finally on the more general issues dealing with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Starting from the Battlegroup-specific conceptual problematique, it can be argued that conditions seldom align perfectly to facilitate the engagement of fixed standby forces such as the EU Battlegroups.[47] Instead, the three cases above suggest that evolving conflict situations tend to favour coalitions between nations that share political and military inclinations. Arrangements based on coalitions allow the fact that political will for intervention is distributed unevenly among member states. The EUBGs

with their pre-fixed structures are not a particularly flexible tool in that respect.[48]

Perhaps the so far lacking utilization of the EUBGs can, especially in the face of over 20 other more or less successful EU crisis management operations, also be seen as a reminder of the fact that short small-scale interventions may be required less often than longer-duration stabilisation operations in contemporary crisis management. The latter will require a variety of support units – from helicopter squadrons to logisticians to intelligence or security advisory teams – at lower levels of readiness to deploy perhaps, but able to spend a longer period of time in theatre before handing over to a relieving unit.[49] This, as has been discussed, has been the area in which the ESDP has still not achieved very much. The similar problems with the Nato's high readiness capability underline this mismatch between supply and demand in contemporary crisis management.

Moving to the sphere of the EDSP, even though the failure to engage EU Battlegroups in operations so far should not be seen as a failure for the ESDP, the above cases of Lebanon, Congo and Darfur do suggest a certain aura of underachievement. Common – and somewhat unsettling – to the cases discussed above has been the fact that the EU has failed to intervene with its Battlegroups in crises that once seemed ideally suited to them: all have potentially included missions that the EU has set to itself, such as various humanitarian tasks, tasks of peacekeeping and peace-enforcement or post-conflict stabilisation with Lebanon and the DRC also having a clear positive signal from the United Nations.

In a more general sense, it seems that the EU's inability to act has been due to member states' lack of political will and the lacking vision of an end-state. In the above cases involving potential Battlegroup intervention, the EU has not had a cohesive vision of what its missions should accomplish, or where and how the accomplishment should take place. This of course requires that relevant political issues have to be settled as to how, where and when the EU's military capacity should be put to use, rendering the issue a wider problem of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. After all, the ESDP should be considered as the Common Foreign and Security Policy's operational arm.

A stubborn politico-technical bottleneck issue has been the decision-making process: winning timely political support at national level for an EU mission would have been and remains essential for any Battlegroup operation. This in turn demands not just explicit and consensus-building objectives but also some well-oiled political machinery in national capitals. Curiously, even though the ESDP missions seek to respond to global or transnational phenomena, decisionmaking at the point of choosing the mission has remained strictly and stubbornly national.[50] The fact that some countries' constitutional arrangements imply that their governments need formal parliamentary approval for military deployments, while others merely require parliamentary notification has not made things easier, even though some progress has been made in this field.[51]

Overall, finding suitable crises for the EU Battlegroups – crises that would meet the criteria of limited scale, short duration, and, preferably, excellent prospects of rapid success – has proved to be difficult. This bears witness to their many conceptual and political limitations. However, there are chances that some of the EU rapid reaction shortcomings will be remedied in the near future, for instance by the Lisbon Treaty and the December 2008 European Coun-

cil recommendations in Paris.[52] Yet, while there is a more or less common understanding of the various conceptual and technical problems involved in the Battlegroups, the challenges are apt to become more daunting once one approaches the higher levels of policy coordination in the European Union. Indeed, it seems that the core issues may turn out to be the most demanding issues for the future of the EU Battlegroups: i.e., how to find a unified European vision on its foreign and security policy and its crisis management goals and what use the EU instruments are for. Undoubtedly, this fundamental question of the finalité of the European security policy remains the most challenging issue – not just for the EU Battlegroups but for the future of the ESDP and CFSP in general.

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Notes

1. Its first military crisis management operation was operation CONCORDIA in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in March-December 2003.
2. These considerations, of course, do not apply to the neutral European states or to those committed to the Warsaw Pact.
3. *European Defence. A Proposal for a White Paper.* Report of an independent Task Force. Institute for Security Studies, European Union, Paris, May 2004, p.37.
4. See article J.4 of the Maastricht Treaty.
5. Op cit, note 3, p.6.
6. For the text of the Petersberg Declaration, see *http://www.weu.int/documents/920619peten.pdf*
7. Op cit, note 3, p.41.
8. The considerable role of Sweden and Finland in the Amsterdam Treaty, and thus also in the birth of the EU Battlegroups, is somewhat ironic, because the Battlegroups can be seen as an unintended consequence of their policy. Once the two countries were in the EU since 1995, their scepticism towards any European defence arrangement was directed at the Maastricht Treaty and its formulation of the notion of an eventual common defence. Thus, in April 1996, the foreign ministers of Sweden, Lena Hjelm-Wallén, and Finland, Tarja Halonen, published an article in the morning papers *Dagens Nyheter* and *Helsingin Sanomat* in which they suggested that the EU should enhance its role and capabilities within the area of conflict management. This was the beginning of a Swedish-Finnish initiative that led to the incorporation of the Petersberg tasks into the Amsterdam Treaty. This 'demilitarisation' of the EU's security dimension was perceived both in Finland and in Sweden as a major diplomatic success, since it meant that development towards collective defence had been avoided and that participation in the European security dimension was compatible with a non-alignment policy. *Dagens Nyheter* 21.4.1996, *Helsingin Sanomat* 21.4.1996.
9. A separate case is that of Denmark, which does not participate in elaborating or implementing EU policies with defence implications.
10. For further discussion on the UK considerations on ESDP development, see Matlary, J.H.: "The EU Made Me Do It" in Engelbrekt, Kjell and Hallenberg, Jan (eds.): *The European Union and Strategy: An Emerging Actor*. Contemporary Security Studies, Routledge, 2008 p. 31-32.
11. St. Malo Declaration, 4 December 1998. *http://www.iss-eu.org/chaillot/chai47e.html#3* It was also stated in the declaration that "In order for the European Union to take decisions and approve military action where the Alliance as a whole is not engaged, the Union must be given appropriate structures and a capacity for analysis of situations, sources of intelligence, and a capability for relevant strategic planning, without unnecessary duplication, taking account of the existing assets of the WEU and the evolution of its relations with the EU".
12. Rieker, Pernille: *From Territorial Defence to Comprehensive Security? European integration and the changing Norwegian and Swedish security identities.* Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Working Paper Nr. 626, (2002) p.23.
13. It is instructive in this regard that the Battlegroups were wholly developed by France and the UK before Germany was invited as a third partner. Op cit, note10, p. 31.
14. *International Crisis Group, EU Crisis Response Capability Revisited*. Europe Report No 160 – 17 January 2005, Brussels. p.19.
15. Op cit, note 3, p.48.
16. European Council, Helsinki, 10-11 December 1999, Presidency Conclusions.
17. Germany, for example, had severe legal constraints regarding the participation of its military in foreign operations.
18. At the same time, the Nordic countries established a register and built up their capabilities for assembling a multinational Nordic crisis management brigade within the framework of NORDCAPS.
19. Since then it turned out that the Helsinki Headline Goal was not achievable as planned by 2003. In October 2003, the EU foreign and defence ministers accepted that the Union could have the capacity to carry out the Petersberg tasks in all circumstances by 2010.
20. Biscop, Sven: *Permanent Structured Cooperation and the Future of ESDP: Transformation and Integration,* paper presented at the 3rd

seminar in the EUISS-coordinated series on the European Security Strategy: Strengthening ESDP: The EU's Approach to International Securrity Helsinki September 2008, p 14.
21. Although this was understandable considering the speed with which the ESDP had developed.
22. On the U.S. National Security Strategy 2002, see *http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/USnss2002.pdf*
23. Bailes, Alyson:"The Motives for Overseas Missions: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" in Eskola, S: (ed.) *Crisis Management in Crisis?* National Defence University, Department of Strategic and Defence Studies, Series 2, no.40, 2008, p. 75.
24. Solana, Javier: "A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy". Document adopted at the European Council, Brussels, 12 December 2003.
25. Op cit, note 3, p.11.
26. An important development was that after difficult negotiations, EU-Nato relations, which had to some extent been open to speculation, were established with the "Berlin Plus" agreement in December 2002, in which it was agreed that the EU could use Nato planning support or Nato capabilities and assets for the execution of any operations. The agreement was a major practical step towards autonomous EU operations, since the EU did not have any such capabilities. On the other hand, it also caused a political problem in the sense that Nato did not extend this agreement to countries which were not Nato members or involved in the PfP Process with a security agreement with Nato. Consequently, Cyprus and Malta are currently left out of the Berlin Plus arrangement.
27. Op cit, note 3, p.63-64.
28. Ibid, p.59.
29. The development of the Battlegroup concept should also be assessed in the light of the development of the Nato Response Force (NRF) at the Nato Prague Summit in 2002 and the adoption of its Initial Operational Readiness in October 2003. While there have been some similarities and differencies between the two concepts, it should be noted that most European states contribute to both with a single set of forces. See Granholm, Niklas and Jonsson, Pål: *EU-Battlegroups in Context. Underlying Dynamics, Military and Political Challeges*. FOI - Swedish Defence Research Agency, Defence Analysis Base Data Report, March 2006, p. 12-13.
30. Its first military crisis management operation was operation CONCORDIA in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in March-December 2003.
31. Declaration on European Military Capabilities, Military Capability Commitment Conference, Brussels, 22 November 2004, Annex A.
32. Lindström, Gustav: "Enter the EU Battlegroups". Institute for Security Studies, *Chaillot Paper No* 97, February 2007, p. 58-59.
33. Italy contributed the largest contingent with 2 450 troops. Her increased involvement following the 2006 war seems to have reflected the eagerness of Romano Prodi's centre-left government (elected in April 2006) to cooperate with other EU members to reinforce a European foreign policy and depart from the "Atlanticism" of the Berlusconi era.
The Guardian, Saturday 26 August 2006.
34. Obviously, it should be noted that the Battlegroup concept was in those days still only partially activated.
35. Council of the European Union, *http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=1091&lang=en*.
36. Op cit, note 10, p. 33-34.
37. Eventually, 21 EU member states contributed to the operation, as well as one non-EU nation (Turkey).
38. Rikard, Jowziak, Split EU may decide soon on Congo mission. *http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2008/12/split-eu-may-decide-soon-on-congo-mission/63337.aspx*.
39. See for instance "Value of EU 'Battlegroup' plan stressed by Annan". *Irish Times* Friday 15th October 2004.
In fact, looking at the 2003 ESS, Darfur would seem exactly the sort of question that the ESDP was created to handle. The situation fell within the narrow confines of where the EU states have agreed that the use of force can be necessary. Further, the crisis would not clearly benefit the national interest of any single EU state, which eliminated any claim that any single state was using the CFSP to further its own national interest. Toje, Asle: "The Consensus – Expectations Gap: Explaining Europe's Inefficient Foreign Policy" *Security Dialogue* vol. 39, no. 1, February 2008, p. 135.

40. See, for instance, Burgess, Mark: "Darfur and the EU's Responsibility to Protect," *Defense News,* June 25, 2007.
41. Op cit note 39 (Toje), p. 136.
42. Elsewhere, Sweden and Norway have considered dispatching forces to assist the AU/UN force in Darfur and Norway's defence minister has suggested deploying the NBG there.
43. Officially, the EUFOR Tchad/RCA has the following objectives: To contribute to protecting civilians in danger, particularly refugees and displaced persons, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel by helping to improve security in the area of operations, to contribute to protecting UN personnel, facilities, installations and equipment and to ensuring the security and freedom of movement of its staff and UN and associated personnel. *http://consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=1366&lang=en* last accessed 21 October 2008.
44. Simultaneous global developments, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept have increased the pressure from their part. R2P insists that every state has a responsibility to protect its people. When a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population from serious harm, or is complicit in inflicting that harm, this responsibility passes to the international community.
45. See Article 42(6), on the Lisbon Treaty's Provisions on the common security and defence policy. *http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st06/st06655.en08.pdf*
46. The issue of lacking EUBG naval, amphibious and air power components has been discussed, for instance, in Op cit, note 29 (Granholm and Jonsson), p. 27-29. A related EUBG disadvantage has been the unresolved question of BG reserve forces. Whilst it is generally agreed that the Battlegroups need a strategic reserve, another standing Battlegroup can only be of benefit if it is not concurrently deployed. Should that not be available, providing the necessary reserve would most likely be the responsibility of the respective Framework Nation.
47. Op cit, note 32 p. 59.
48. A related development has been the increased EU cooperation with the African Union through the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, in which the EU supports enhanced African capacities in crisis management, including regional stand-by forces.
49. Witney, Nick: *Re-energising Europe's Security and Defence Policy.* The European Council on Foreign Relations, 5th Floor Cambridge House, 100 Cambridge Grove, London W6 0LE, 2008, p. 44.
50. A related problem in need of improvement are the so far lacking procedures for rapid financing, which, however, might be solved by the Lisbon Treaty's proposed options for the start-up funds for rapid EU action.
51. Op cit, note 23, p. 85.
52. According to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 11 and 12 December, 2008, Europe should be capable of planning and conducting simultaneously:
    - Two major stabilisation and reconstruction operations, with a suitable civilian component, supported by a maximum of 10 000 men for at least two years;
    -Two rapid response operations of limited duration using inter alia the EU's battle groups;
    -An emergency operation for the evacuation of European nationals (in less than ten days), bearing in mind the primary role of each Member State as regards its nationals and making use of the consular Lead State concept;
    – a maritime or air surveillance/interdiction mission;
    – a civilian-military humanitarian assistance operation lasting up to 90 days; -around a dozen ESDP civilian missions (inter alia police, rule of law, civil administration, civil protection, security sector reform and observation missions) of varying formats, inter alia in a rapid reaction situation, including a major mission (possibly up to 3 000 experts), which could last several years See Brussels European Council, 11 and 12 December 2008, Presidency Conclusions 17271/1/08, REV 1, Annex 2.
    http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/104.692.pdf