



Cardiff: Birthplace of a new Transatlantic Narrative?

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Cardiff has the potential to turn into a “great meeting”, if the focus is on forging a new and attractive narrative to underpin a solid transatlantic security relationship, in which NATO finds its place. But Europeans must become serious on defence – and not only because the US asks for it. Otherwise, the EU and for sure the European States will become strategic bystanders and even objects of great power competition. That would be a real game-changer. That is why, in Cardiff, “we” ought to be ambitious enough to deal with the real issues, including the relationship between NATO and the CSDP.

BADLY NEEDED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC, EXISTENTIAL FOR NATO

Defence matters. It is said by all Heads of State and Government across the Atlantic and it implies that solid transatlantic security relations matter too, for NATO and the CSDP alike. The upcoming NATO summit matters in particular, because there are increasing signs that transatlantic partners are at risk of drifting apart. “NATO: what’s in it for us? Now and in the future?”. With the Ukrainian crisis, such

questions are becoming more uncomfortable than ever. At the same time there is still the intense belief across the Atlantic in shared values, interests and global strategic security objectives.

“Cardiff” has the potential to turn into a “great meeting”, if, and only if, Heads of State and Government will be able to provide guidance to develop a new and attractive narrative to underpin a solid transatlantic security relationship, in which NATO finds its place. The alternative is muddling through by launching once more a series (of already announced) buzzwords – that will not help allies from further drifting apart.

HARMEL

It is stating the obvious that once more East-West relations have entered a quite different geopolitical era. This time, it is a particularly dangerous one, characterized by a major shift of power. Time has come to draw some hard lessons from recent events and trends, the way “we”, as Allies, have done before.

In the late sixties, with the Harmel-report, the Alliance was given a renewed and attractive narrative that inspired all NATO countries’

policies on East-West relations. The so-called “Harmel Doctrine” advocated a threefold approach: to maintain a *strong defence*, combined with a series of *bilateral contacts* between East and West European countries, and in so doing to forge a “*détente*” that ultimately created the diplomatic conditions to come to a global “European arrangement”. At the time “East-West relations” were focused on (limited to) the European continent. And it worked. No longer so these days.

It is prudent to state that the fundamentals of the transatlantic security strategy have remained intact. Maintaining a strong defence still is very much advisable. Territorial defence still matters. The “European arrangement” and the post-Cold War status quo on the European continent seems to belong to the past. Moreover, it is no longer only about Europe, and most if not all of the paradigms of crisis management have drastically changed. That is why “we” ought to be ambitious enough to deal with the real issues in Cardiff, including the relationship between NATO and the CSDP, which are after all the underlying policy instruments of our security partnership. It is of the essence no longer to duck this issue because of the “well-known reasons”, while all of the parameters of the sensitive issue of asymmetric memberships have recently changed drastically. There are new opportunities and even some solutions within reach. To pave the way for success, we must forge, upfront, a common understanding on the global geopolitical realities we are all presently facing.

CURRENT EVENTS: GAME-CHANGERS OR SYMPTOMS?

It may indeed be too soon to fully understand the real significance of the French revolution. It probably was a game-changer. This is to signal that we must be prudent to immediately qualify each and every crisis as a game-changer. The crises in Moldova, Georgia, and recently in Ukraine are either leftovers of the

Cold War – ante Harmel – or, they do symptomize a return of Russia to a classic nineteenth century geopolitics, looking for buffer states. We should act accordingly. However, this stands in shrill contrast to the “postmodernist” concept of how to develop international relations. Favoured by many Europeans, it reflects a reality within the EU, but not really anywhere else. The Arab spring and recent conflicts ranging from North Africa over Syria up to Iraq are probably symptoms of a fundamental revolution that is to stay with us for decades, and the final outcome of which is unpredictable. As to China, it is not that reckless to state that this country has changed the game in a relative short timeframe.

SEEN FROM WASHINGTON, IT IS ABOUT INTERESTS

Looking to Russia from Washington, you first see the Bering Sea, the northern part of Asia and then, on the European side of the Urals, there is Moscow. From this viewpoint Russia is a middle-sized country to be measured by its potential to cause disruption in a large area that indeed includes Eastern Europe, but in the first place Asia. The measures taken by the US after the annexation of the Crimea to “reassure” European allies on NATO commitments may well have been inspired by the need to “assure” its Asian partners in the first place. Perhaps the real issue for Washington was to avoid that through collateral damage the Ukrainian crisis would turn into a game-changer in the Asian region.

This is not to say that Europe is no longer “the principal partner” of the US when it comes to global security, on the contrary. But again, in crisis management and in particular when it comes to who is to take the lead in military interventions, the US is clearly asking Europeans to “rebalance” if not to “pivot” by taking up more responsibility.

In the past, whenever a security crisis emerged, the President of the US traditionally called on

“the US and Allies” to take action, suggesting the US take the lead and the Allies follow. That has changed, already under the Bush administration. At the start of the Obama administration it was about the “US and European countries”, suggesting some kind of burden-sharing. Later that changed to “the US and Europe”, carefully avoiding the pitfall of mentioning “the EU and its Member States”. More recently, with the crisis in Ukraine, it was all about “the US and the EU”. The message is clear. Crisis management has to be conducted in a comprehensive way. The US will remain involved and will for instance react to any expansionist ambitions of Russia, but it will not allow itself to get distracted from its main geostrategic concerns in Asia. Globally speaking, the US continues to look towards Europe as its principal partner. But you only have a real partner if, when faced with a crisis, the outcome matters equally to the partner if not even more so.

NATO’s article 5 matters profoundly to all. However on crisis management the US is expecting from Europeans that they achieve a certain autonomy in launching and sustaining significant operations, hence it is looking to Europe as an entity and urges individual countries to act together. Washington also expects that for the EU, security in its neighbourhood and even beyond, including Africa, matters – and that the EU acts accordingly.

EUROPE: WAKE UP CALLS AND LESSONS LEARNED

No single European country, not even a smaller avant-garde group of European countries, has the capabilities to conduct a military operation of the magnitude we needed to resolve the crisis in Yugoslavia. That was clearly put forward at Saint-Malo, and the required action was taken by introducing the ESDP in the framework of the Union and adopting the Headline Goal as the European level of ambition (by an EU counting at the

time 15 Member States, today 28 and collectively still maintaining more men and women in military uniform than the US).

Notwithstanding internal political differences, the war in Iraq generated some hard lessons as well, which laid the ground for turning the ESDP into the CSDP and inspired Javier Solana to draw up the European Security Strategy (ESS). Gradually more and more military operations were launched. Modest indeed, however not without risk. The military objectives set have always been reached.

A third wakeup call was not ignored either. Right after the NATO Summit in Chicago, and well aware of the views in Washington (for instance on Asia), President Herman Van Rompuy developed his plan to put “Defence” on the agenda of the European Council. Based on all of these lessons learned, a roadmap has been developed. The NATO summit in Cardiff will take place in between two European Council meetings that have defence on the agenda.

And then there was Ukraine. Bizarre to notice how in the immediate aftermath some European experts made a U-turn by declaring the CSDP virtually dead while advocating to simply turn to NATO as the only and ultimate solution for all security issues involving military action. This kind of wishful thinking points in the first place to a lack of consensus among Europeans on the real issue: a European security strategy.

Within the EU, Member States are too often inclined to “agree to disagree”, in particular on strategic issues including defence and security. The net result is that whenever a particular military crisis management operation is finally launched by the Union, it always boils down to “so few who have to do so much in the name of so many”. Not tenable for the Union, and not for any solid transatlantic relationship either.

More important is to recognise that the suggestion to transfer all responsibility for military matters to NATO creates the image that on the European side no further action is needed. For sure not within the EU; perhaps even a drawdown of the CSDP could be considered. For NATO, probably a marginal upgrade would suffice. The underlying conviction of this sort of reasoning is that when push comes to shove the US will always turn up and via NATO support Europeans with the Cavalry, the Planes and the Ships. Up to Europeans to provide lip service and some tactical military contributions. This may sound attractive. But let us have look at the mirror image. The EU is world champion in international trade and has a population twice that of the US. Logically therefore the 28 Member States of the EU have henceforth to assume the bulk of the military spending of all Allies. Moreover Europeans receive the message from Washington that for small civil-military operations – the size of a Battle Group – Americans can stand on their own feet, but for all other military operations it would be up to the European Allies to take responsibility. Difficult to believe that this concept could be an easy sell for European politicians to their public opinion back home.

Back to reality. As to public opinion in Europe, polls clearly show that there is great support for the CFSP and for the CSDP in particular. Much more support in effect than is voiced by their respective political leaders, even in countries that traditionally are sceptical towards European defence. For public opinion, Ukraine was a wakeup call to proceed in this matter.

In retrospect, the conclusions of last December's European Council remain valid and swift implementation is now of the essence. In the first place the High Representative is "to assess the impact of changes in the global environment, and to report (...) on the challenges and opportunities arising for the Union", which is EU-speak for a developing a common security strategy.

A TRANSATLANTIC DIVISION NOT OF LABOUR BUT OF RESPONSIBILITY

It is common wisdom that the specificities of a given crisis determine which organisation, which coalition or any combination thereof is best placed to take the lead to resolve it by no less than a comprehensive approach. There is a growing insight that in the future Europeans, within the framework of the Union, will be called upon to take more responsibility, not least in their neighbourhood and even beyond. This implies, as mentioned by the High Representative Catherine Ashton in her report in the run up to the December 2013 European Council, that Europe must have "strategic autonomy". So it is not about one organisation cooking the meal and the other doing the dishes, which is more a formula for a divorce. And taking the lead implies proper command structures as well.

NO DUPLICATION, DUAL-USE INSTEAD

And of course, in this respect all unnecessary duplication is to be avoided. Fortunately the EU already has the required structures at the strategic-political level and at the political-military level as well. As to the Operation HQ, the Union has a series of national and even an EU one in its inventory, a series that could perhaps be reduced, preferably to one (as NATO has done years ago).

However some crucial Force HQ are lacking within the Union, while on the European continent they do exist. They are financed and manned by NATO countries. In practical terms avoiding duplication between the CSDP and NATO is but possible by introducing the concept of "dual use" of assets and capabilities relevant to crisis management operations while at the same time respecting mutual autonomy. In crisis management as it stands today, with the emphasis on preventive action and rapid response, the "Berlin Plus arrangements" are but history.

It is advisable to foster new arrangements

ensuring automatic and immediate transfer of assets and capabilities between NATO and the EU from the moment the political decision is taken to launch a military crisis management operation by one of the two organisations. For NATO this would principally apply to some FHQs to be inserted into the EU chain of command. In order to respect the sovereignty of countries that are not a full member of the EU or NATO, they would be given the option to withdraw their personnel from participating. The commander is to ensure that his HQ remains fully operational at all times and in all scenarios, and has to adapt the permanent staffing of the HQ accordingly. For the EU this would apply to some specific military and civilian assets and capabilities, for which similar dispositions on operational readiness would have to be taken.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cardiff has the potential of turning into a “great meeting” if the real issues are dealt with. Suppose henceforth all CSDP-NATO meetings would have an official character, would this make any difference, or would the differences become more apparent? The only way out is to develop once more an attractive narrative.

Some building blocks of a new narrative on transatlantic security can be recommended. A threefold approach is in order:

- 1) *NATO to maintain a strong defence:*
As put forward by the Harmel report, this remains the cornerstone of NATO, together with its Article 5. This is not to say that NATO has to pivot back to Russia exclusively, far from it.

- 2) *Enhanced bilateral contacts between the US and the EU leading to a genuine US-EU Strategic Partnership:* To insert more strategy into the US - EU Strategic Partnership, in particular on security and defence issues. In this respect it is up to the EU and its Member States to implement swiftly the decisions taken by the December 2013 European Council, in particular on upgrading the European Security Strategy into a full-fledged strategy.

The EU has to become serious on defence. Not only since otherwise the US will not be inclined to take the EU seriously. Not only because the US asks for it. But because the EU and for sure the European States will become strategic bystanders and even objects of great power competition – that would be a real game-changer.

- 3) *Introduce the concept of “dual-use” into the relationship between NATO and CSDP:* The Berlin Plus arrangements are to be transformed into a mechanism guaranteeing immediate transfer of assets and capabilities relevant to crisis management operations once a political decision is taken to launch such an operation by either NATO or the EU.

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