

Clusters: the Drivers of European Defence

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Abstract

The article examines three trends that have characterised the development of defence clusters: firstly, the defence budget cuts up till 2015 have been a driving factor for maintaining capabilities together with other countries. Secondly, more permanent formats have been created, aiming at more structural and longer-term cooperation. Thirdly, defence cooperation has been deepened, both in operational terms but also in maintenance, logistics and for the acquisition of the same equipment. The new EU defence initiatives, such as Permanent Structured Cooperation could offer a framework for defence clusters, but it is considered that European countries will be rather selective in using those instruments in the face of existing multinational cooperation formats. The success of these cooperative initiatives depend substantially from political trust and solidarity that shape how contributions translate into defence performance. It concludes that specialised clusters are not about creating a European Army, but rather about building European armies step-by-step, needed for a better transatlantic burden-sharing and to underpin Europe's responsibility to take care of its own security and defence.

Resumo

Clusters: os Vetores Dinamizadores da Defesa Europeia

O artigo examina o desenvolvimento destas modalidades de cooperação em três vertentes. Em primeiro à luz do impacto dos cortes orçamentais no quadro da defesa europeia até 2015. Em segundo, o desenvolvimento recente de novos formatos mais permanentes, destinados a uma cooperação mais estruturante e de longa duração. Em terceiro, no enquadramento dado pelo aprofundamento da cooperação no domínio da defesa no plano operacional, mas também da manutenção, da logística e da aquisição de equipamentos de defesa. Examina ainda a forma como a Cooperação Estruturada Permanente pode oferecer uma oportunidade para o desenvolvimento de clusters de defesa, pese embora o empenho seletivo dos países europeus, atendendo à existência de outros formatos de cooperação multinacional. O sucesso destas iniciativas cooperativas depende consideravelmente da presença de confiança política e solidariedade entre os Estados Membros, que permita a transformação de contributos em desenpenhos concretos no plano da defesa. Conclui que os clusters especializados refletem a realidade, não se destinando à criação de um exército europeu, mas antes à construção de exércitos europeus de uma forma gradual, necessários a uma partilha mais eficaz da responsabilidade transatlântica e que reflita a intenção europeia de assumir a direção da sua segurança e defesa.

Introduction

Defence is a complicated business. It involves a wide set of actors: politicians, policy makers, military staff, parliaments, research and technology institutions and industry – just to mention the most important ones. International defence cooperation is even more complex. Firstly, there are now at least three multinational organisations dealing with defence: NATO, the European Union and, for blue helmet operations, the United Nations. Their roles and tasks are different, but at the same time an overlap exists, in particular between the EU and NATO. For example, both organisations are involved in stability operations and capacity-building. For military operations at the high end of the spectrum often ad hoc coalitions of the willing are established. The most recent example is the anti-ISIS coalition under the leadership of the United States, carrying out the air campaign over Iraq and Syria. Secondly, nations cooperate quite extensively in smaller bilateral or subregional defence cooperation formats – also referred to as defence clusters. Originally, cooperation in such clusters was focused on operational matters: creating common headquarters, combining military education and training as well as bringing military units together in binational or multinational formations. In recent years, defence clusters have also become important vehicles for deepening cooperation through the integration of staff and units, through common defence planning and through the acquisition of the same equipment. The list of clusters and their activities has grown considerably.

This article is specifically dedicated to defence clusters. First, the author will look at recent developments. What is new in defence clusters; what makes them different compared to their predecessors? Next, the various types of cluster cooperation will be categorised and assessed, based on success and failure factors. Concrete examples will be listed to underscore these factors. In the following section the author will analyse how and why clusters develop in a specialised manner. The article ends with some conclusions.

Clusters: What's New?

There is nothing new in combined operations by the armed forces of various nations. In 1815 the Duke of Wellington led a coalition of forces consisting of British, Irish, Belgian, Dutch, Polish and Prussian soldiers – alongside military from Hannover, Brunswick and other entities. Both in World War I and World War II Allied Forces combined their efforts, bringing American, Canadian, British, French and the military of many other nations together under one overall command. In all those cases multinational formations were of a temporary nature. Normally, troops would return to their national territory after the fighting had ended in order to carry out their defence tasks in their home country. With the creation of NATO this century-old practice changed. Permanent structures were established for political

steering and control – the North Atlantic Council – and for commanding Allied forces: the NATO command structure. In the course of the Cold War ‘multinationalisation’ in education, training and exercises for NATO’s core Article 5 task of territorial defence became the norm. Even permanent multinational formations were created, such as the fully integrated AWACS fleet, the ACE Mobile Force and the standing naval groups to which Member States contribute on a rotating basis. The end of the Cold War brought a new task for NATO: non-Article 5 or out-of-area crisis management operations. The armed forces of NATO (and several non-NATO) countries started to operate together in real-life missions, in the Balkans in the 1990s and in Afghanistan and Iraq today. As defence was no longer ‘static’ – i.e. limited to defending NATO’s territory – ‘deployability’ over long distances became a priority. It resulted in the creation of a number of deployable forces headquarters (HQ), such as the 1st German-Netherlands Corps HQ, the Eurocorps HQ and several others – although political factors also often played a role in launching such initiatives. Real-life multinational operations in the air, at sea and on land also led to new permanent military formations. The Franco-German Brigade and the European Participating Air Forces (Belgium, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands) are early examples of post-Cold War defence clusters.

While NATO continued to adapt to the rapidly changing security environment – such as by the creation of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and, in 2014, its spearhead the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) – European nations also started to cooperate militarily in the European Union as of the turn of the century. Firstly, in EU crisis management operations, albeit they turned out to be relatively small in scale and not in the high end of the spectrum. Secondly, EU Battlegroups – small battalion-plus sized formations for crisis management – were created as stand-by forces. Although so far they have never been deployed in real-life operations, the EU Battlegroups became important vehicles for closer operational cooperation between various groups of European countries. Outside the EU four countries (Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands) established the European Air Transport Command (EATC) in 2010, the first example of the permanent transfer of command to a multinational European level. Three other nations (Italy, Luxembourg and Spain) have joined the EATC, which commands around 60 percent of all of Europe’s military air transport assets. Estimated savings for the contributing nations are around 15 percent. EATC has proven that permanent integration through a multinational command structure is perfectly possible. Its business model has optimised the cost-effective use of air transport, air-to-air refueling and the aeromedical evacuation capabilities of the participating countries.

In recent years, defence clusters have further expanded, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. New clusters have been created, e.g. the structural Franco-British security and defence cooperation under the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties. Others

have been 'upgraded' to a higher level of cooperation or used as a vehicle for integrating armed forces, such as of certain units of the German and Dutch land forces. Three factors have influenced or characterised the development of defence clusters in the last decade.

First, the defence budget cuts as a driving force: as a consequence of the economic-financial crisis European defence expenditure dropped by seven percent from 2007 to 2013¹. In some countries the percentage was much higher. Often investment programmes had to be delayed or cancelled. In many cases the planned acquisition numbers of new frigates, aircraft and armoured vehicles were corrected downwards. In other cases capabilities were completely lost. In 2010 the United Kingdom scrapped the acquisition programme of the Nimrod MRA4 maritime patrol aircraft. In the same year the Netherlands deactivated its last two tank battalions, while heavy artillery had already been reduced to eighteen modern self-propelled 155 mm howitzers (PH2000). Influenced by the same financial austerity, the acquisition budget for the replacement of the Dutch F16 fighter aircraft was fixed at €4.5 billion (the 2013 price level), which allowed for the procurement of 37 F35s (Joint Strike Fighters). To optimise the availability of fighter aircraft for international missions the Dutch authorities agreed with Belgium on common air policing and renegade flights over Benelux territory. As of January 2017 one of the two countries has two fighter aircraft available for air policing/renegade flights in Benelux airspace on a 24/7 basis. The period was initially four months, but was extended to eight months to coincide with the Belgian and Dutch contribution to the anti-ISIS air campaign. The common air policing/renegade agreement allows for such overseas deployment to be continued. Under the Lancaster House Treaties, France and the United Kingdom have reduced their nuclear weapons test facilities, making use of joint centres on both sides of the Channel. These are examples of maintaining capabilities through mutual dependencies.

Second, more permanent forms of cooperation: there are older examples of permanent defence cooperation formats, such as Benesam – the Belgian-Netherlands naval cooperation. It dates back to the 1950s, was given a boost in the 1990s and is characterised by integration elements². In 2013 the Defence Ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands signed a Benelux Declaration on defence cooperation. It formed the basis for more extensive cooperation in a wider struc-

1 EU Member States – minus Denmark – together spent €204 billion on defence in 2007. In 2013 the total amount had dropped to €190 billion. Nominally total European defence expenditure dropped by 7 percent. In real value (taking inflation into account) the percentage is 10 percent (EDA, 2016, 2017).

2 See the third factor that has influenced or characterised the development of defence clusters in the last decade.

ture, from the level of Defence Ministers to the military experts level and encompassing naval, air, land and supporting forces. The first concrete projects – ‘reaping low hanging fruit’ – were mainly in the education and training area. For example, it was agreed to keep one paratrooper school in Belgium, also used for training the Dutch military. Others, such as the Benelux air policing/renegeade arrangement, took more time – in particular because national legislation had to be adapted. The Lancaster House security and defence cooperation is also permanent. It encompasses operational elements – in particular the Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force – as well as binational technology investment, armaments procurement programmes and defence industrial cooperation. Although some projects were dropped over time, there are ongoing binational development and procurement programmes such as for missiles and future air combat systems, including an unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV). The Scandinavian countries work structurally together in the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF), although this format is perhaps too large to be effective. German-Netherlands defence cooperation was brought to a permanent level by the land forces of the two countries³, but by now has expanded to the air defence and naval areas.

Third, the deepening of defence cooperation: in line with the previous factors, countries are deepening their defence cooperation in clusters. Firstly, it applies to operational formats. In the past, integration below battalion level was considered to be something of a taboo. It simply could not work, due to different languages, organisation and culture – so the argument went. Germany and the Netherlands have broken this taboo by integrating a tank company with Dutch personnel into the German 414th Tank Battalion. By operating the same Leopard 2 tanks, by speaking German and by using the same doctrine and procedures, this binational tank battalion has proven in tests and exercises to comply fully with the required standards. The integration extends further upwards: the 414th Tank Battalion is under the command of the Netherlands 43th Mechanised Brigade, which is a subordinate unit of the 1st German Armoured Division. One could argue that such far-reaching integration is born out of necessity. Indeed, the format was designed in order to maintain knowledge and experience in operating tanks in the Dutch Army⁴. But the example also shows that there is more scope for such integration models, naturally assuming that preconditions apply as stated above. German-Dutch defence cooperation has also grown in the areas of air mobile forces, air defence and amphibious forces. There is a clear practical pay-off: both for NATO territorial defence as well as for deployed operations in countries like Afghanistan

3 Ibid.

4 See Swillens (2018).

and Mali the armed forces of the two countries operate together or rotate their units almost as if it were a purely national contribution.

Naturally, this has consequences for political decision-making: in both countries Parliaments are involved in this process. Thus, deeper operational defence cooperation can require the synchronisation of political decision-making processes. Integrating forces also opens up the potential for rationalising training and maintenance. The Dutch and Belgian Navies operate the same M-frigates and minehunters. There is only one school for training personnel to operate M-frigates (in Den Helder, the Netherlands) and one school for minehunter training (in Oostende, Belgium). The maintenance of all M-frigates takes place in the Netherlands while all minehunters are maintained in Belgium. Both countries have recently synchronised their procurement plans in order to purchase the same successor ships in the 2020s. Belgium leads the minehunter replacement programme and the Netherlands the acquisition programme for new frigates. As operating the same equipment is an absolute prerequisite for military integration, it is clear that defence technological and industrial interests have to be aligned too. This is visible in the Franco-German defence cooperation, such as the future tank/armoured vehicles programme – mirrored by defence industrial cooperation between Kraus Maffei Wegmann and Nexter – or the development of a future fighter aircraft (with Dassault and Airbus Defence being involved).

In the meantime a whole set of new defence cooperation initiatives has been launched in the EU. The Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) is meant to monitor Member States' defence efforts and to explore the potential for common programmes, in particular in R&T and procurement. In 2017, a pilot CARD exercise was conducted. The first fully-fledged CARD report will be produced in the autumn of 2018. Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was launched at the end of 2017. It is based on the EU Treaties and thus provides a juridical basis for defence cooperation among a group of 25 Member States. The PESCO countries have committed themselves to implementing a set of criteria (benchmarks or targets) on European defence cooperation such as spending norms and the obligation to participate in collaborative procurement programmes. Furthermore, groups of PESCO participating Member States have initiated projects with a variable composition. Some projects are operationally oriented; others focus on procurement. Finally, the European Commission is the new kid on the block with regard to defence cooperation. The Juncker Commission has embraced defence as a priority area. It has launched the European Defence Fund. It is already up and running with pilot activities for defence research and industrial cooperation. After 2020 the Commission aims to invest €13 billion in both areas in the context of the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Member States and defence industries can profit from the financial assistance from the EU budget, but obviously the Commission

will only grant the funds in the case of industrial development projects if these are multinational, involve a minimum of two Member States and companies located in at least three countries.

One could argue that the new EU instruments, in particular PESCO, offer a framework for defence clusters. For R&T and procurement programmes financial benefits are offered by the EDF, while CARD could be used as a tool for increasing synchronisation or even combining defence planning. The question is: are European countries inclined to transfer their binational or subregional cooperation to the EU level – which will be seen, justified or not, as losing control and increasing bureaucracy. Cooperation formats with the UK face an additional problem: Brexit makes it more difficult to cooperate on defence matters with London in the EU context. The likely outcome is a mixed bag. Some cooperation programmes might be introduced in PESCO and might attract EDF money. Others will remain outside the EU structures for political or other reasons.

Types of Clusters

Clusters exist in many formats or types. Firstly, a distinction can be made between operational clusters (military formations) and defence-equipment clusters (procurement clusters). The latter will not be extensively described and analysed in this article. However, it is important to note that collaborative procurement programmes are not only dependent on multinational military cooperation but also on technological and industrial work shares. The latter brings in a non-military element, which is driven by other interests than strictly those of the Defence Ministries and the armed forces. Past experience in multinational procurement programmes shows that national socio-economic interests – such as maintaining production lines, jobs and knowledge – have often been decisive factors of influence, leading to rising costs and delays in the programmes. The A400M transport aircraft with an estimated extra cost of €11 billion may serve as an example.

With regard to operational clusters at least five different types exist⁵:

- (1) Multinational deployable headquarters: HQ formations able to plan and conduct up to corps-sized operations with a permanently integrated multinational staff. Examples are: the 1st German-Netherlands Corps (located in Münster, Germany) with the representation of twelve nations; the Eurocorps (Strasbourg, France), with five participating nations; the Multinational Corps Northeast (Szczecin, Poland) established by three framework nations (Denmark, Germany, Poland). All three HQs have been deployed to Afghanistan to lead

5 This categorisation is based on Zandee, Drent and Hendriks (2016). The success and failure factors in this article also originate from this Clingendael Report.

NATO's ISAF operation. Integrated HQs also exist below the corps level, e.g. the Multinational Division North East HQ in Elblag, Poland.

- (2) Modular operational formations: permanent multinational formations with an integrated multinational staff, but participating countries maintaining the option to deploy their contribution nationally or with other partners. Examples are: the Franco-German Brigade; the Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF), the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF); the German Division *Schnelle Kräfte*/Dutch 11 Air Mobile Brigade; the multinational Special Forces Command of Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands.
- (3) Integrated operational formations: permanently integrated formations which can only be deployed when all partners participate. In other words: participating countries are dependent on each other. Examples are: most multinational deployable headquarters; NATO's AWACS fleet; the integrated German-Netherlands tank battalion⁶.
- (4) Permanent transfer of command: a multinational formation to which participating countries have transferred command on a permanent basis, thus losing (partly or completely) national command authority. Examples are: European Air Transport Command (EATC, Eindhoven – the Netherlands); the strategic airlift capability (Pápa Airbase, Hungary); NATO AWACS.
- (5) Role/task specialisation: countries (non-haves) being fully dependent on other countries to deliver capabilities to them. Examples are: Benesam education/training and maintenance of M-frigates (by the Netherlands) and minehunters (by Belgium); and as a form of one-sided dependency, Baltic air policing, carried out by fighter aircraft from other NATO countries on a rotating basis; the same air policing dependency exists for Albania, Macedonia and Slovenia.

As already shown by the given examples, various types of multinational operational cooperation can overlap. The Franco-German Brigade is a combination of a modular and integrated operational formation. In case the Brigade is deployed in its entirety it is then an integrated unit. But subunits can also be deployed under national command. EATC has an 'escape arrangement' for the participating countries, which have a permanently guaranteed revocability of the transfer of authority. Thus, EATC could more accurately be described as 'a conditioned permanent transfer of authority to a multinational level, without the loss of national sovereignty'. Benesam encompasses three types of cooperation: an integrated naval HQ (Admiral Benelux, Den Helder – the Netherlands) which also allows for national command chains; modularity of assets – the same ships which can operate closely

6 The Dutch could deploy their tanks outside the integrated battalion and the Germans could deploy the tank battalion without the Dutch tank company, but in both cases the full combat potential of the integrated tank battalion would not be used.

together but also separately; and role/task specialisation in education/training and maintenance.

Success and Failure Factors

What can be learned from the experience with multinational clusters? In other words, what are the success or failure factors? Although no agreed list exists, the available literature provides common ground for the following criteria:

- (1) **Trust, confidence and solidarity:** multinational defence cooperation is per definition more difficult than 'doing it alone'. No country is like any other and no national army, navy or air force is the same as those of the partner nations. The negative fall-out of these national differences can only be overcome when partners can rely on each other, when they trust their colleagues and are confident in the delivery of their contributions and in their performance. But it should be underlined that trust, confidence and solidarity grow over time and have to be supported by practical measures and arrangements. In bilateral formats this is easier than in larger multinational formations. Nevertheless, in the Eurocorps, EATC, SAC and other formations countries 'feel equal' as key posts in those organisations rotate amongst all of them. A feeling of 'shared responsibility' (and, therefore, solidarity) is also the result of all participating states delivering capabilities, for example in combined or integrated units. In EATC the built-in guaranteed revocability of the transfer of authority and the options for the delegation of authority contribute to building trust and confidence. Trust and confidence is also the basis of Benesam, but without the practical 'win-win' for both parties, the cooperation would not have gone this far.
- (2) **Sovereignty and autonomy:** the traditional view of the limits of multinational defence cooperation – when national sovereignty over military means is at stake – no longer holds true. Several cases, in particular EATC and Benesam, show that countries are prepared to transfer national sovereignty or, in other words, they become dependent on partner(s) for a military capability. But this does not come easily or naturally. In Benesam, post-Cold War defence cuts were a driving factor for reducing the on-shore footprint to maintain maximum capabilities at sea. The resulting mutual dependencies of Belgium and the Netherlands for training personnel and the maintenance of the M-frigates and minehunters respectively were thus acceptable. EATC participating states agreed to transfer command authority on condition that it could be revoked in the case of national need. In the case of Baltic air policing, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania simply could not afford to operate their own fighter aircraft, with the consequences that as 'have-nots' they would per definition become dependent on Allies. Deploying the integrated German-Netherlands tank battalion in a crisis management operation would still require sovereign national poli-

- tical decision-making, including in Parliaments, in both countries – which could be a stumbling block. For that reason modularity, allowing for the withdrawal of a country's contribution from a multinational formation, is the preferred option as it offers more flexibility for real-life deployment.
- (3) Similarity of strategic cultures: it seems that countries which do not necessarily share the same strategic culture are still able to operate together. France, an experienced interventionist, and Germany, reluctant to engage in operations at the high end of the spectrum, have deployed their common Franco-German Brigade on several occasions. Although some of these deployments – such as in the Kabul area – were certainly not in a benign environment, it is nevertheless doubtful if Germany would agree to a deployment in a real fighting scenario, such as for example the French Operation Serval in Mali in 2013. The usability of a common capability such as the Franco-German Brigade can still have its limits due to a lack of similar strategic cultures. The same can apply to other multinational formations, such as the combined German Division *Schnelle Kräfte*/Dutch 11 Air Mobile Brigade. Quite understandably, the United Kingdom with the JEF and France/UK with the CJEF have established formations with the participation of like-minded countries. President Macron's European Intervention Initiative should be seen in the same context.
 - (4) Geography and history: in general, neighbours work more easily together than distant friends, but geography and history have no absolute value as a success factor. It is true that bilateral cooperation models – Benesam, the Franco-German Brigade and the German-Netherlands land forces' integration – are proof of successful neighbouring country clusters. But in EATC or SAC several participants do not share borders. The same is true for multinational headquarters such as the Eurocorps. Apparently, if geography and history are obstructing multinational defence cooperation, this can be overcome in practice. However, for integrating combat or combat support units, geographical proximity and a long history of working together are certainly important success factors.
 - (5) Number of participants: mathematical logic would imply that multinational defence cooperation becomes more complicated as the number of participants grows. In reality, the picture is more nuanced. Certainly when it comes to complex and multi-functional capabilities – such as in a combat brigade or a tank battalion – bi-nationality is the preferred option. But for 'enabling' capabilities, such as air transport or air-to-air refuelling commanded by EATC, a higher number of participating nations does not create insurmountable problems. The same applies to SAC. In other words, the type of cooperation seems to be the decisive factor for the number of participants as a success factor, not the number itself.

- (6) Countries and forces of similar size and quality: this factor applies in particular to bilateral defence cooperation (as in wider groups there is often a mix of several bigger and smaller countries). Benesam and the Franco-German Brigade are cooperation formats of similarly sized countries (small-small, big-big). But in naval terms Benesam is not a case of two equals: the Netherlands Navy is larger and has a wider set of capabilities than the Belgian Navy. Benesam works well, despite the uneven fleets of both countries, apparently because other factors are more important (crucial among which are the efficiency gains for both countries). The German-Netherlands land forces cooperation shows that even for deeper defence cooperation the combination of a large and a small nation can work perfectly well, but only if the larger nation treats the smaller nation as its 'equal' partner.
- (7) Top-down and bottom-up: the usual statement is that defence cooperation will not work without top-down political steering. This will be even more the case when cooperation entails a loss of sovereignty. Benesam was brought to a higher level of cooperation after a ministerial agreement in the 1990s. EATC would not have started without the involvement of Ministers of Defence. But it is equally true that bottom-up support is required to make defence cooperation a success. The direct involvement of practitioners in Benesam to explore and develop deeper forms of cooperation is important for its success. Comparable combinations of top-down steering and bottom-up support can also be found in other cases; it is nothing less than bringing politics and practice together which is needed in order to be successful, not only in launching but also in sustaining defence cooperation over time.
- (8) Mind-set, defence culture and organisation: clearly, these elements are closely related to the factors 'trust, confidence and solidarity' and to 'geography and history'. But even between neighbouring countries mind-sets, defence culture and organisation can demonstrate significant varieties. In Benesam, in the Franco-German Brigade and in the German-Netherlands land forces cooperation these differences have not created major problems and neither does this seem to be the case in the Eurocorps or EATC. One should not forget that such military formations develop their own mind-set, culture and organisation over time – 'esprit de corps' becomes an important factor in itself.
- (9) Defence planning alignment: only the Benesam case study underscores the importance of this factor. The prolongation of the existing success – in particular the task specialisation in training and the maintenance of minehunters (Belgium) and M-frigates (the Netherlands) is completely dependent on both countries procuring the same replacement ships which has now been planned in close coordination. This is a new growth area for clusters as the cooperation progresses into forms of integration. The deepest forms of defence cooperation

- with mutual dependencies – will change the priority in defence planning from ‘national first’ to ‘with partner(s) first’.
- (10) Standardisation and interoperability: all examples show that common concepts and doctrine offer huge potential for increasing the usability of operational clusters. The same applies to education, training and exercises, even when subunits and combat support units are national formations. Once more, standardisation and interoperability can easily be realised when operating the same equipment. To a large extent, the success of the European participating Air Forces is the result of the four countries operating the same F16 fighter aircraft.
- (11) Realism, clarity and the seriousness of intentions: the Eurocorps and the Franco-German Brigade have sometimes been labelled as ‘symbolic’ or ‘window-dressing’. The realistic approach of the participating nations – tailor it to what it should do – and the clarity and seriousness of the intended cooperation have resulted in two very usable cooperation models as shown by their track record of deployments. On the other hand, raising high and unrealistic expectations should be avoided. Political announcements on establishing a European Army have turned out to be empty shells.
- (12) Involvement of Parliaments: naturally, for operational deployment this factor only comes into play when a contributing country to a defence cooperation model is dependent on parliamentary approval – as is the case in Germany for crisis management operations. The Bundestag has not blocked deployments of the Franco-German Brigade, but this in itself does not prove the irrelevance of this factor. It is unlikely that the German Federal Government will bring a proposal for deployment to the Bundestag when it is known in advance that a supporting majority in Parliament will be lacking. In that sense the role of Parliament is important because of its pre-decision-making effect.

Many other lessons can be learned from existing defence cooperation models. Some success factors – like trust, the top-down/bottom-up combination, the same mind-set and realism – apply to all of them. The importance of other factors may vary, depending on the characteristics of the model. Clearly, the importance of these key factors is higher for models with mutual dependencies or role/task specialisation, such as training and maintenance in Benesam. Success factors in some cases turn out to be failure factors in others. ‘The less, the better’ – i.e., referring to the number of participants – is true for the most complex combat capabilities, but is certainly not a golden rule for deeper defence cooperation in enablers, as the EATC case shows. The same applies to a factor like the size of the countries or their armed forces.

Towards Specialised Clusters

The EU and NATO have grown in membership over the past decades, while at the same time the security environment has drastically changed. Europe is confronted by different security challenges to its East – a neonationalist Russia – and to its South where spill-over effects from the instability and turmoil in Africa and the Middle East are the dominant threats: migration, terrorism and transnational crime. Even in the digital age geography still matters. In Eastern Europe territorial defence against Russia's military threats is the primary concern. It is reflected in the defence policies of the Allied countries in the region and in their defence budget allocation. The Baltic States and Poland will soon live up to the NATO two percent GDP defence expenditure target. These countries invest mainly in the modernisation of their land forces. Spain and Italy belong to the lowest performers in terms of the GDP percentage allocated to defence. Their navies are given priority as they provide key capabilities to protect the maritime borders in the Mediterranean. Western and Northern European countries have less outspoken priorities and often contribute to NATO's forward presence as well as to operations in the South.

Another line of division between European countries is the willingness to participate in high-end interventions. France has intervened several times in Africa to stop advancing terrorist groups and to prevent states from collapsing. Only a handful of European partners have supported France militarily during these interventions and, if this were the case, mainly with enabling capabilities such as transport aircraft. More European partners have contributed to follow-on UN or EU missions. With the European Intervention Initiative (E2I) France is aiming to create a 'club' of countries with comparable strategic interests, with the willingness to intervene and with capabilities at the high-end of the spectrum. Clearly, E2I would not get off the ground in the EU because of the unanimity rule. Apparently, so far France also wants to keep E2I outside PESCO. The UK has created the JEF as an expeditionary oriented formation which has become a selection tool for the contributions of European partners that are willing 'to go in first'. The CJEF with France fulfils the same purpose. Germany remains a difficult case. Since the early 1990s successive governments in Berlin have succeeded in creating more political and public support for German participation in crisis management operations. Yet, this took place under various sets of caveats and restrictions on the use of force. In German society there is still limited support for participation in high-end intervention-type operations. For that reason the German political and military establishment is now rather content with the focus on NATO's Article 5 task of territorial defence. This has been the uncontested part of the German military build-up after the Second World War. The same applies today. Finally, there is a group of European countries – Austria and Ireland are outstanding examples – that are not willing or able to contribute to any high-end operation. However, they do con-

tribute to stabilisation and capacity-building missions in more benign security circumstances.

This variety among European countries in their defence policy and defence posture orientation could perhaps also be applied to cluster selection. For example, expeditionary-oriented nations, willing to contribute to high-end operations, should hook up with the military formations of France and the UK. With the JEF this is already the case. Countries whose main focus is on territorial defence and with a priority for strengthening their land forces could group around Germany (and Poland). Finally, those European nations which participate mainly in stabilisation-type missions could group around a core provided by Italy. Naturally, such 'specialised clusters' should not be developed in isolation from each other. EU and NATO overall coordination is required in order to ensure that the collective requirements are met for the type of operations they should be able to conduct. Furthermore, specialised clusters could reinforce each other: quickly deployable 'first in' capabilities will be needed for NATO's Article 5 for which the NRF and its spearhead have been designed; on the other hand, heavy territorial defence forces can also be used in crisis management operations as a back-up to stabilisation activities once the initial intervention has come to an end. One might argue that such specialisation is neither desirable – as it might split rather than unite the defence efforts of European countries – nor obtainable as it sets too high demands for defence cooperation between sovereign states. However, specialised clusters are already a reality. The JEF and the Franco-British CJEF are proof of this development. Germany is implementing the so-called Bühler Plan – mentioned after the Planning Director in the German Armed Forces Staff – which is focusing Berlin's defence planning up to 2030 on the strengthening of a three Division strong, heavy armoured core of the land forces. Other nations can contribute with their specific capabilities in what is called the German Framework Nation Concept. It is incorporated in the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP). Several other countries continue to underline the importance of their national contributions to stabilisation and capacity-building missions. In other words: specialised clusters already exist; framing them all in an EU and NATO context is preferable to allowing them to develop without any coordination⁷.

Conclusions

European defence is not just the business of the European Union and NATO. In fact, most far-reaching defence cooperation takes place in smaller bilateral or subregional clusters. Some of them have a longer history, but many of them were created in recent times. It reflects a political trend to deepen military cooperation with good

⁷ See Dick Zandee (2017).

neighbours instead of distant friends, but in many cases declining defence budgets also increased the pressure to maintain capabilities through close coordination with partner countries and even by integrating capabilities. The result is a complex pattern of defence clusters across Europe. The larger operational formations also reflect national strategic cultures, defence policies and military priorities. In broad terms: France and the United Kingdom provide the core for high-end intervention capabilities, Germany (and Poland) for heavy armoured follow-on land forces and Italy for border protection and stabilisation missions. Other countries hook up with the UK-led Joint Intervention Force or with the German Framework Nation Concept as they like.

These defence clusters – initiated and developed outside the EU or NATO context – provide the real core of European defence cooperation. There is no European Army; there are in fact several European armies. Instead of pursuing the unobtainable – a common European capacity for all kinds of military operations – the obtainable should be welcomed. European countries have started to specialise – one country more than the other – which is reflected in the various operational clusters. If the EU and NATO can build a well-coordinated and consistent overall framework around these clusters, Europe might be on its way to getting the military capabilities which are needed for a better transatlantic burden-sharing as well as to underpin the responsibility to take care of its own security and defence.

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