

Military cooperation as an integral part of prevention and stabilisation



Andreas Wenger

More than a year since the start of the war in Iraq, the widely diverging views concerning ways in which the uncertainties of a globalised environment can be overcome are proving to be a major obstacle to defining a sustainable political solution for post-war Iraq and stable political and social structures in the Middle East, as well as for combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. During the debate on Iraq, one of the main areas in which international opinions widely differed concerned the question of the future role of armed forces within the scope of a comprehensive prevention and stabilisation strategy.

As a result of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, asymmetrical challenges such as terrorist groups armed with weapons of mass destruction became a structuring factor in international relations.

Against this backdrop, the USA was no longer prepared to pursue a wait-and-see policy with respect to the Iraq problem, and began to push ever more vehemently for the use of force in order to bring down the regime in place.

While European leaders did not dispute the fact that Iraq needed to be disarmed – including by force if necessary – they warned against shifting the focus of the international strategy to combat terrorism towards military aspects. In the future, the debate concerning the limits and potentials of military cooperation in a context of asymmetrical threats will continue to be conducted in the following four main areas: principles of international law; strategic objectives; comprehensive and complementary use of resources; structuring of military transformation processes.

Legitimate use of force as a response to asymmetrical threats

The events of 11 September 2001 triggered an intensive debate on the rules and organisations that legitimise the threat and use of force by way of exception to the general prohibition. Asymmetrical threats from non-State actors place governments in a difficult position, since the principles of international law focus on the regulation of the use of force by the State.

Against this background, as a directly involved country and as the global superpower the USA appeared to adopt a doctrine of unilateral pre-emption, which was widely rejected as a basis for joint military action.

Although the USA's new security strategy discussed the option of pre-emptive action exclusively in the context of the question of how to deal with the threats from internationally organised terrorist groups and rogue nations such as Iraq and North Korea, its demand that the concept of "immediate threat" should be adapted to these new risks meant that the distinction between pre-emptive and preventive warfare had become less clearly defined.

The intervention in Afghanistan with the backing of the UN made it clear that it was not so much the right of a country to defend itself against non-State actors that was disputed, but primarily the discussion of the option of pre-emptive action against State actors. The presentation of the new security strategy in the context of the debate on Iraq gave rise to widespread concerns of a political nature and with respect to the principles of international law. The war against Iraq did not take the form of pre-emptive measures against an impending threat against the USA.

In the meantime the USA is endeavouring to qualify the importance of the option of pre-emptive action within the scope of its security strategy in favour of the central role to be played as before by the UN, NATO and other alliances. On the other hand, in view of new types of threats the necessity of interpreting the pre-emptive use of force as an integral part of a comprehensive concept of "defence" is gaining increasing international acceptance. The EU and NATO need a strategy that includes the option of taking preventive measures.

However, this means that the political will has to exist to discuss the conditions – immediacy and plausibility of the threat, appropriateness of measures – to be attached to the pre-emptive use of military force within a multilateral framework. In view of the fundamental transformation of international politics in an era of asymmetrical threats, a cautious adaptation of the international regulations governing the legitimate use of force is now unavoidable. ▶

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► **Strategic framework: spread of threat in terms of content and geographical distribution**

The sharp differences of opinion within the international community concerning the issue of war and peace in Iraq also reflected opposing views regarding the cause and effects of asymmetrical threats and risks.

The concept of “effective multilateralism” as a European response to the American tendency towards unilateralism calls for the definition of a joint strategic framework, especially with respect to the objectives and geographical reach of multinational forces deployed in response to armed conflicts. The global military commitment of the USA and countries of Europe may be likened to a patchwork that mainly reflects national crisis decisions and which lacks a recognisable coherent security strategy, precisely in the Near and Middle East.

In the meantime the USA and countries of Europe have come closer together in terms of their threat assessments. With the onset of asymmetrical threats, the risk spectrum in the North Atlantic region has significantly broadened in terms of both content and geographical distribution. As far as content is concerned, security strategies and resources are now being focused on the threats that arise from global terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the spread of organised crime resulting from the collapse of States.

The main challenge for States is therefore coming from non-State networks which are benefiting from the porous borders resulting from the ongoing globalisation process, and are instrumentalising weak governments for their own purposes.

Geographically speaking the focus spreads from ethnic conflicts in the Balkans to Asia via Central Asia and the Caucasus, and culminates in the Middle East, the world’s most volatile political region.

Social and economic problems, together with fundamental weaknesses in political structures, are combining with phenomena such as failed States, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Islamic terrorism and authoritarian regimes to form an explosive mixture.

The extent to which it is possible to influence structural problems in the Arab world from the outside is very limited. In view of the fact that the West will have to live with extremist responses to the ongoing modernisation process in the Arab world for many years to come, it is important that it joins forces in defining and implementing its political initiatives for this region. ►

Military cross-border operations in major disasters

The provision of aid by the Swiss armed forces in the event of disasters abroad has become the rule rather than the exception. Unfortunately there has not been a lack of such occasions. The system is now well oiled, and the conditions for intervention have been clearly defined. As the highest legal instrument, the Federal Constitution stipulates that all Swiss military activities that take place outside of Swiss sovereign territory must be carried out on a voluntary basis, while the clauses of the Ordinance dated 24 October 2001 governing the provision of aid in the event of disasters abroad specify the framework for such activities. The Swiss army does not act in its own right or as an official military formation, but rather military personnel voluntarily assist the emergency and rescue services of the country concerned.

Cross-border aid

However, there is another form of provision of cross-border military aid, though it is little known since it has never actually been utilised to date: military aid in the event of a disaster in Switzerland’s border regions. The provisions governing this type of intervention differ considerably from those outlined above. The term “border regions” refers to administrative or political subdivisions in our neighbouring countries – French departments, German and Austrian provinces (Länder), Italian provinces and the Principality of Liechtenstein – that border directly on Switzerland. In other words, this takes the form of aid immediately across the border. One of the special characteristics of this form of cross-border aid is that it may concern military detachments rather than volunteers.

Here the practical and legal aspects are defined in international treaties that Switzerland has ratified with each of its neighbouring countries. It goes without saying that any such interventions would have to be made in response to a request from the country concerned, and that the latter has to expressly consent to the presence of Swiss troops. This type of commitment would of course have to be based on the principle of subsidiarity. It should also be noted here that, in such cases, the training of the deployed Swiss troops would have to be suitable for dealing with the task in hand, and the personnel would not be allowed to carry arms.

Although no such interventions have been called for to date, this does not mean that Switzerland is entirely lacking in practical experience. Several years ago the need to develop cooperation at the regional level and carry out the necessary training programmes began to grow increasingly apparent. While cross-border cooperation is standard practice for fire and rescue services (the disaster in the Mont Blanc tunnel is a good example here), it should not be overlooked that this does not apply when it comes to providing reinforcement for them in the form of heavy military equipment and personnel, and even less so if the latter come from another country! ►



Lemman, joint military exercise between France and Switzerland (Photo DDPS)



Operation Alba, Kosovo 1999 (Photo DDPS)

The complexity and dynamics of the new risks require a strategy which combines civilian and military instruments both as complementary measures and for preventive purposes at an earlier stage of a crisis.

Civilian measures on their own are unable to act as a deterrent, while military measures can only contribute towards conflict regulation and the support of social and political transformation processes if they are combined with civilian instruments. It will only be possible to utilise the full strengths of NATO and the EU within the scope of a coherent overall strategy. And it is only on this basis that it will be possible to strengthen the partnership between the USA and the countries of Europe as a framework for cooperation among equals with similar values and interests. Over the past year or so, the USA has discovered that there is no sense in winning wars if it is not possible to find acceptable and sustainable political solutions after military action has been successfully concluded. The fact that global terrorism has become a real threat has to be taken just as seriously as the realisation that we cannot combat this threat first and foremost through military measures.

► **Broad range of measures: civilian and military actions complement one another**

In the expanded Europe – and especially in the east, the Balkans and the Mediterranean region – security through integration, stabilisation and association will continue to form the basis for peace and stability. As a result of the process of enlargement, Europe is now moving into considerably less stable regions. This means that Europe and its transatlantic partners will also have to come to terms with risks that have their origin in countries further afield than their own immediate neighbours.

Both the USA and Europe will therefore have to make efforts to define a strategy that combines all aspects of prevention, crisis management, stabilisation and reconstruction.

► **Joint exercises between France and Switzerland**

Switzerland and France therefore decided to hold two joint military exercises (LEMAN 1 AND LEMAN 2), which were by far the most important of their kind to date. LEMAN 1 was carried out in 1997 and took the form of practical deployment of a battalion of Swiss rescue troops in the French department of Haute-Savoie, while LEMAN 2 (which was carried out in 1999) was a reciprocal exercise, i.e. it involved combined Swiss and French exercises on Swiss territory. Both exercises pursued the same objective, namely to regulate the potential deployment of military personnel and equipment to support civilian efforts in a disaster area on the other side of the border. This meant that the Swiss and French staffs and units were required to work together and examine the various methods and procedures. Operational cooperation was called for in all areas and at all levels. In both cases, the defined scenario called for the establishment of common operational structures, close coordination of the activities of the detachments concerned in searching for, and rescuing, victims, the provision of first aid, the evacuation of victims by air (and thus the necessity of also securing airspace), as well as the provision of logistical support.

LEMAN 1 and 2 were groundbreaking exercises that yielded some important findings concerning methods of intervention and cooperation on the ground in the area of disaster aid. They gave potential partners an opportunity to work closely together, to jointly find suitable solutions to problems relating to interoperability, and underscored the need to adapt the leadership structures and procedures within the Swiss army to international standards. They yielded valuable findings

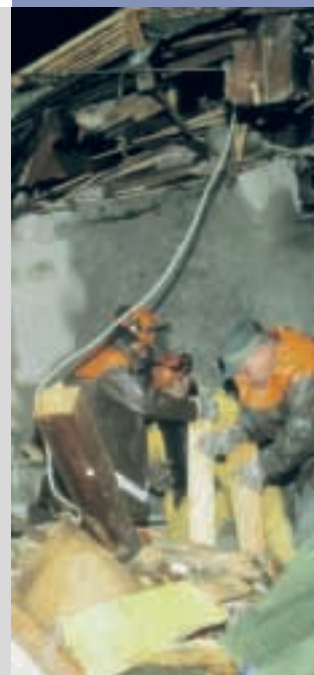
concerning the compatibility of intervention methods and materials. But these two exercises also yielded other significant benefits in that they promoted cooperation between the two countries at other levels. For example, the contacts that were established between the military partners persisted well beyond the bounds of the two exercises, as is admirably demonstrated by the smoothness and efficiency of the international military cooperation to support security measures for the G8 Summit in Evian in 2003.

This once again confirms that large-scale engagements are largely influenced by existing structures and preparations, their success depends entirely on the people involved and their ability to cooperate on the ground. This is especially valuable in the area of disaster aid, in circumstances in which some of the existing structures may no longer be functioning.

Switzerland's security policy is defined as "security through cooperation". Here the army plays a multiple role, and its potential in terms of intervention in the event of a major disaster on the other side of the border is a significant component. This should be acknowledged and continually developed.

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Gondo, October 2000 (Photo DDPS)



- ▶ In some cases (e.g. Afghanistan) it is undoubtedly necessary to resort to military intervention in order to combat terrorism, but this should not occur at the expense of international cooperation (as was the case in Iraq), which is a prerequisite for overcoming the political, economic and social causes of terrorism. The governments of Europe have realised that they need to review the role of military measures within the scope of a proactive and sustainable prevention and stabilisation strategy. However, before they can consider using military measures as a last resort, it is essential that they urgently push ahead with the transformation of their armed forces in favour of smaller, lighter and more mobile units.

Structuring military transformation processes through security institutions

In order to initiate a military transformation process, it is first necessary to acknowledge at the political level that the range of duties to be performed by modern-day armed forces has broadened in line with the expansion of the risk spectrum. Here the decisive trends concern a shift of priority from territorial defence in the direction of response to crises, and turning the armed forces into more professional organisations. Since the new threats are coming from far afield, it is becoming increasingly difficult to limit the task of defence to geographical boundaries. International stabilisation operations within the scope of conflict prevention, crisis transformation and internal anti-terrorist campaigns are increasingly becoming an integral part of structure-determining tasks for modern-day armed forces.

In view of the new risks, the capacity to take military action will be secured to an increasing extent through involvement in multinational cooperation. The transformation process encompasses technical and organisational innovation, and for both financial and armament-related reasons it will only be possible to accomplish this process within an international framework. The structuring of military transformation processes has therefore become a major task for European security institutions. Alongside a policy of force integration, the aim of which is to preserve efficiency and maintain impact potentials as well as political coherence following the recent enlargement, there is an increasing move towards a policy of force transformation. The main priorities here are Europe's ability to cooperate with the USA, multinational cooperation, joint procurement and sharing of responsibilities. In future, weight and influence will to an increasing extent be measured in terms of available military capacities, both in security institutions and within the scope of military stabilisation campaigns.

Broad European and transatlantic security dialogue

More than a year after the start of the war in Iraq, it has become clear that it is not possible to combat asymmetrical threats arising from global terrorism and authoritarian governments either without international cooperation or through the unilateral use of force. It is equally clear that it will only be possible to overcome conflicts at the multilateral level effectively through a policy of resolute action against the risks of the 21st century.

There is therefore an urgent need for an intensive debate on the transformation of military cooperation within the scope of a comprehensive prevention and stabilisation strategy, focusing on the provisions of international law, strategic objectives, interaction with civilian resources and the structure of military transformation processes – at the European, transatlantic and global levels. ■



Earthquake in Algeria, 2003
(Photo DDPS)

Useful link:

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