

Keeping France in the CSDP

Budget constraints in France are necessitating difficult choices. EU military missions could be among the first casualties. Keeping key states like France committed to the CSDP should be a top priority for the EU.

by Lisa Watanabe

At the upcoming EU Council Meeting in June 2015, the leaders of EU member states will discuss defence. This is good news. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has been at a near standstill of late and needs new impetus to keep states on-board in a time of budget austerity. This is no more the case than with one of the CSDP's driving forces and core contributors – France. While its armed forces appear to be faring well, France's military activism is being carried out within very tight budgetary constraints. An increasingly stretched military, coupled with an enduring French commitment to strategic autonomy, is likely to have a negative impact on French contributions to EU military missions. This would strike a serious blow to the CSDP. The prospect is all the more worrying, since French enthusiasm for the CSDP has been waning in recent years. In order to prevent France from drifting further from the CSDP, EU leaders must above all take measures to improve the CSDP's rapid deployment and force generation capacities, and to improve pooling and sharing within the EU framework.

France Feels the Pinch

Only two months into his term, President François Hollande requested on 13 July 2012 a new white paper on defence

and national strategy. The 2013 White Paper is only the fourth to be published in the republic. Earlier white papers responded to significant changes in the international security environment, notably heightened tensions during the Cold War (1972), the end of the Cold War (1994), and the rise of global terrorism (2008). While the latest white paper seeks to respond to the Arab uprisings, instability in

KEY POINTS

- ▮ Fiscal austerity in France could negatively impact French contributions to CSDP missions.
- ▮ To keep France engaged in the CSDP, the EU should appeal to French interest in improving capabilities development, rapid deployment and force generation.
- ▮ Capability development projects need budgetary protection, while coordination between the European Defence Agency and sub-regional defence cooperation clusters should be enhanced.
- ▮ The EU needs a solidarity fund to better distribute the financial burden of deploying EU Battlegroups.
- ▮ Permanent Structured Cooperation on military matters could be capitalized on to accelerate the deployment process.

the Sahel, and an expected US 'pivot' to Asia, its logic is largely the same as its predecessor. The only real difference is that it expresses more clearly that France is essentially a *regional* power that will be especially active on Europe's southern periphery, notably in Africa.

The overwhelming rationale behind the 2013 White Paper appears to be rather the pressing need to reduce public spending. Reductions in personnel, begun under Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency, are set to continue. In line with the paper's fiscal aims, 23,500 jobs were slated for elimination between 2014 and 2019. This is in addition to the 10,175 job losses that were already planned for 2014–15 by previous reform measures, but not yet executed.¹ However, following the attacks in Paris in mid-January 2015, it has been announced that the planned 34,000 job cuts for the period 2014–19 will be scaled back by over 7,500.²

In addition to reductions in personnel, France's operational aims have been scaled down. In 2008, the aim was to be able to deploy 30,000 ground troops and 70 combat aircraft within six months in major, high-intensity external operations. Now, France will maintain 5,000 troops on high alert and available immediately from which a 2,300-strong force for shorter missions of up to seven days can be formed. For missions of longer duration, similar to *Opération Serval* in Mali (2013), it will maintain 7,000 ground troops, with approximately 12 combat aircraft, one frigate, one attack submarine, one transport and command ship, and Special Forces. In addition, for major combat missions, a force built around two reinforced brigades of 15,000 ground troops, approximately 45 combat aircraft, an aircraft carrier, two transport and command ships, and Special Forces are to be available.³

Even with these reductions and savings from job cuts, new investments in intelligence and cyberdefence, as well as the continued upgrading of conventional and nuclear forces, will have to be carried out within tight budgetary margins. The Military Planning Act for 2014–2019 allocates €190 billion to defence. The budget will be frozen at 2013 levels (€31.4 billion a year) until 2016, with the expectation that it will rise in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Of the €190 billion, €183.9 billion has been allocated through available budgetary credits. The remaining €6.1 billion must be found through extra budgetary provisions, such as savings, export offsets and the sale of assets.

A considerable part of the budget, €102.7 billion, will go to upgrading and maintenance of equipment.⁴ Yet, despite this prioritization, the government is still obliged to revise planned deliveries of key hardware. The armed forces will retain 200 Leclerc tanks instead of the 250 that



A French soldier walks across an airstrip tarmac at a Malian air base in Gao, March 9, 2013. Reuters / Joe Penney

were expected earlier. The air force will have 225 rather than the planned 300 Rafale and Mirage combat aircraft. The number of tactical transport planes will be reduced to 50 from 70. The navy will have 16 new frigates, two fewer than envisaged in the 2008 White Paper.⁵

EU Missions in the Balance

Among the first casualties of these reductions are likely to be EU missions. France has already been reducing its troop contributions to EU operations. Paris decreased its contribution to Operation Atlanta – the EU Naval Force off the coast of Somalia – by around 75% between 2012 and 2014. In Mali, France is set to reduce its troop contribution to EUTM – the EU Training Mission – from 55 to 11 in the summer of 2015. In the Central African Republic (CAR), the EU launched EUFOR RCA in April 2014 to assist 6,000 African Union peacekeepers and 2,000 French troops in stabilizing the country. EU member states decided in November of last year to extend the mandate of the mission by three months, only to learn that France would halve its own deployment in the country. Since then, Paris has announced that France will reduce troop numbers further to 800 by the end of the year in order to strengthen *Opération Barkhane* in the Sahel.⁶

The French government legitimizes such reductions on the basis of its strategic autonomy. To be sure, there has always been a tension between strategic autonomy – the idea that national independence rests on the ability to take autonomous decisions and the ability to act alone – and the desire to strengthen the CSDP. Yet, what is noticeable in the 2013 White Paper, which emphasizes France's ongoing commitment to the CSDP, is a more pronounced pragmatism with regard to the EU's security and

defence policy. The danger is that budgetary constraints could mean that strategic autonomy will increasingly trump France's appetite for CSDP missions.

This appears all the more likely given that the EU does not serve as a power multiplier, as the political elite in Paris once hoped it would. France's interventions in Libya (2011), in Mali (2013), in the CAR (2014) and in Iraq against the so-called 'Islamic State' (2014), have taken place under a national rather than EU flag. In part, this is a product and reflection of the EU's own weaknesses in the areas of crisis management – its humanitarian assistance operation, EUFOR Libya, was never deployed, for example, and its responses to the crises in Mali and CAR were slow and modest at best. Frustration in Paris with the EU's lack of decisive action in the face of crises in Europe's southern neighbourhood have understandably been mounting.

Yet, choosing to increasingly act alone could backfire. The fact is that budgetary pressures necessitate pooling and sharing in the area of capabilities. Frustration with the lack of progress on institutional initiatives has seen France view the importance of the CSDP more and more in terms of capabilities development and force generation. Yet, France has also tended to keep its options open, pragmatically turning to Britain in relation to armaments cooperation since concluding the Lancaster House Treaties in 2010. However, France cannot afford to disregard capabilities development within the EU framework altogether. If the UK leaves the EU, France may find itself in need of support from other EU member states in order to advance its aims in the area of capabilities development and force generation. Increased marginalization in the field of secu-

urity and defence would certainly not be in France's long-term interest.

Keeping France On-board

The EU would also suffer if France's enthusiasm for the CSDP were to wane further. The EU needs French troop contributions and military capacities in order to ensure mission effectiveness and to launch even modest missions. Indeed, the French case is a sharp reminder that national shortfalls could have serious consequences for EU strategic ambitions, if not addressed. Historically, France has been a major contributor to CSDP missions in terms of troop numbers. It has also acted as the framework nation and provided force commanders for a majority of EU missions. Keeping France engaged will require at the very least concrete measures aimed at keeping the momentum for capabilities development going, as well as those designed to improve rapid reaction and force generation.

A number of things could be done. When EU leaders gather to discuss defence in June, member states need to further commit to making credible progress on capabilities development. A positive outcome of the last EU Council on defence in December 2013 was the development of a policy framework that aims to reconcile top-down guidance with bottom up approaches to capabilities development, and to provide a coherent basis for defence cooperation. This should improve coordination between the European Defence Agency (EDA) and sub-regional defence cooperation clusters that would allow the EU to capitalize on its coordinating capacities and prevent member states like France from drifting away from capabilities development within an EU framework. Protecting projects and initiatives from budget cuts would also help to incentivize member states to engage in armaments cooperation.

EU member states also need to agree on measures to improve rapid deployment and force generation. In principle EU Battlegroups, which were declared operational in 2007, should facilitate rapid reaction to crises. Yet, they have never been used, largely due to inadequate cost-sharing between troop contributing states and a lack of coordination between EU and national level decision making, planning, and command structures. How to make Battlegroups more flexible and deployable will be discussed in June. A solidarity fund to cover operational costs would be one way of sharing the financial burden of deploying Battlegroups and easing that of member states which are willing to deploy an EU Battlegroup. Permanent Structured Cooperation on military matters could also provide the basis for likeminded states to

FURTHER READING

CSDP on the Brink: The Importance of Bringing France and the United Kingdom Back In

Ronja Kempin and Nikolai von Ordarza (SWP Comment, 13, 2011)

A German perspective on what should be done to prevent the CSDP from sliding into crisis.

French Hard Power: Living on the Strategic Edge

Dorothee Foucaux (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, No.1, 2014)

A concise overview of how France is trying to reconcile its strategic objectives with the military capabilities available under current budgetary conditions.

The Lisbon Treaty, CSDP and the EU as a Security Actor

Jolyon Howorth in Mario Telò and Frederik Ponjeart (eds.), The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action? (Ashgate, 2013)

An assessment of the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the CSDP.

cooperate more closely and harmonize their national planning in order to speed up the deployment process, and even to voluntarily give preclearance to deploy.

In short, EU leaders have a chance to act pre-emptively to save EU military missions and the Union's broader strategic objectives from fiscal austerity in member states. The opportunity to do so should be taken before it is too late.

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3. See "Défense et la Sécurité nationale – le Livre blanc", Présidence de la République; Ministère de la Défense, Paris, 2008; "Livre blanc: Défense et sécurité nationale – 2013", Commission du livre blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale, Paris, 2013.
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5. "Défense et la Sécurité nationale – le Livre blanc"; "Livre blanc: Défense et sécurité nationale – 2013", *Op. cit.*
6. "Agenda Défense 2015 – Les priorités stratégiques de la Défense pour l'année 2015", *Op cit.*

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