

Cooperation models in the realm of defence capabilities.
Challenges and opportunities

We like to state that the effectiveness and the efficiency of the Armed Forces and of the Military Capabilities is first and foremost governed by the quality and the motivation of the personnel.

And while this is undoubtedly true, it can not be denied that the nature and the size of those Forces and Capabilities is largely decided by budget and finance, with history and tradition as shaping considerations.

For the Nations coming out of the Second World War, with the Cold War pointing at the horizon and the Korean War just around the corner, it was obvious that National Armed Forces as omnivalent as possible and reasonable were to be maintained.

That way Belgium ended up with a three division Army Corps in Germany disposing of Armoured Infantry, Armour, Artillery (Field and Anti-Air), Reconnaissance, Combat Engineers, own Communications and the necessary Logistics, supposedly capable of holding its own on a some 60km wide front against the Soviet Army. An Air Force with Offensive, Defensive, Transport and Reconnaissance assets and a Navy with Mine Countermeasure- and Anti Submarine Ships. On top of this, having Central Africa in mind, there also was a deployable Paracommando Brigade.

This, in normal peacetime, more than one hundred thousand strong military instrument could be maintained because of (1) a conscription system and (2) an adequate budget supported by public opinion and political authorities.

The fall of the Berlin Wall 9/11/89, the end of the Warsaw Pact, and of the Soviet Union soon afterwards, had as consequences that the “peace dividend” was eagerly collected and that conscription was ended in 1994.

In 1960, for the first time in Belgium, the budget for Education equalled the budget for Defence, today the budget for Defence is 2,5 billion € that for Education is 15 billion € or six times more.

No conscripts, as “not expensive” personnel, and a budget that has decreased in real terms continuously since 1981, over the last more than thirty years: the idea of more or less omnivalent national Armed Forces has become unthinkable, impossible to acquire and maintain.

Today the defence effort of Belgium is close to one percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) resulting in the earlier mentioned 2,5 billion € budget for the Ministry of Defence (this does not include my retirement pay). As this effort and this budget is in competition with issues such as (1) Social Security (Family Allowance, Retirement and Unemployment Pay), with (2) National Health and with (3) Education and with no identifiable military threat to our territory I cannot see how this effort would increase in the foreseeable future.

For several years now NATO asks its member Nations to generate a defence effort of at least two percent of their GDP, but the evolution is in the other direction: more and more Nations are decreasing their defence effort and are approaching the one or less than one percent.

In the circumstances of today Belgium would need a Defence budget of at least six times the actual one, to acquire and maintain Armed Forces similar to those that existed in the sixties of last century. Looking at the statistics of the GDP, and applying the same approach and factors as far as defence effort is concerned we must conclude that in the European Union only Germany would have a budget of defence large enough to give itself armed forces of the size and the polyvalence of the Belgian Forces in the sixties, ... hardly deployable. (see annex: “GDP IMF estimate for 2011”)

WIKIPEDIA “GDP IMF estimate for 2011”

Place	Country	Nominal GDP (Mil \$)
	European Union	17.577.691
1	United States	15.094.025
2	China	7.298.147
3	Japan	5.869.471
4	Germany	3.577.031
5	France	2.776.324
6	Brazil	2.492.908
7	United Kingdom	2.417.570
8	Italy	2.198.730
9	Russia	1.850.401
11	India	1.676.143
12	Spain	1.493.869
17	Netherlands	840.433
21	Sweden	538.237
23	Belgium	513.396
24	Norway	483.650
32	Denmark	333.238

(In red the BRIC nations)

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that not one of the European Nations has the size or the will to acquire and maintain military forces capable to respond to the challenges of today; all need international cooperation.

The realization of a Military Capability can be seen in three phases:

- 1. the **development and the acquisition** of the equipment,
- 2. the **preparation**; in French “la mise en condition” and
- 3. the **employment**; in French “la mise en oeuvre”.

Development and acquisition.

As example for the first phase: Belgium built nationally in the seventies four antisubmarine frigates. That was possible because the (1)case was well presented, because (2) the budget of defence was not yet restricted to a fixed envelope and, above all, because (3) there were two capable Belgian shipyards that needed orders. Those shipyards do not exist anymore. It took ten years for that ASW capability to become fully operational. At that same time, similar but

larger ASW frigates, were built in the Netherlands; a possibility of a broader international cooperation was missed.

In the eighties France, the Netherlands and Belgium together developed and built thirty identical Tripartite Minehunters. The program started through the NATO “Conference of National Armament Directors” (CNAD), its NATO Naval Armament Group (NNAG) and its Information Exchange Group 3 (IEG3). The many Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME’s) involved in such a project allowed for a balanced distribution of the investment over the three Nations. It has to be recognized that the identical glass reinforced polyester hulls were made in three national shipyards; this part was not the most cost-efficient solution.

In 2005 the Belgian government decided to acquire two second-hand Multipurpose Frigates from the Royal Netherlands Navy. The intense Netherlands-Belgian navy cooperation in “preparation”, existing since 1995, was instrumental in this decision. Two years ago Belgium considered to decommission one of those frigates, also considerations from the Netherlands argued against such a decision, it was averted. Last year the Netherlands proposed to sell their remaining last two frigates of that type, also on request from Belgium that decision was not taken. Or how international cooperation in “preparation”, can influence national decisions in the equipment field.

There are many more examples of commonly acquired equipment such as the F16 fighter aircraft bought in the seventies by Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands and Belgium; it is hoped that for the replacement of those F16s a similar, if possible larger solution will be found. Also the Mutual Defence Aid Program equipment generously provided by the United States to its Allies resulted in common equipment. So, what has become a must for the future was not so uncommon in the past.

The development of three different types of European Fighter Aircraft for more or less the same mission, of three different types of European Main battle tanks, of six different types of European Aegis Class Warships, just affordable in the recent past, will be impossible in the future.

Until now, for this phase, we reasoned having existing capabilities in mind. But there is also the challenge of acquiring newly identified needed capabilities that are now lacking totally or partially: intelligence collection, observation/communication from space, ballistic missile defence, projection of airpower from the sea, air refuelling, and many others, that are difficult if not impossible to be achieved by a single European Nation. The NATO AWACS program is an example of how internationally can be acquired what is nationally impossible.

National “economic” and “employment” reasons, considerations of acceptable interdependency, perceived loss of sovereignty, or not, will complicate here the decision-making. It is difficult for governments to allow the closure of main construction plants to consolidate on a European level, yet it will have to happen. The solution seems to be to let the market do at European level what the market did, in many nations, at national level; therefore European free market rules should apply also for the security and defence industries.

As conclusion: for the development and for the acquisition of major weapon systems and of new expensive capabilities, European Nations will have to work together, they will have to accept that sovereignty, in the decisions to acquire and to use military force, is only going to be meaningful if exercised in and through the International

Organizations. Economic efficiency and cost-effectiveness in this, will have to overcome nationalism. Performing SME's will play a key role in the balancing act.

Preparation (la "mise en condition")

International cooperation in the realm of preparation is needed: (1) when the capabilities are complementary, (2) when space and or assets are nationally inadequately available, (3) for the training of the Personnel, the Forces and the Command Structure that will be called upon for international employment.

It is evident that if you want to act together you also have to train together. This training together allows for a better approach of the possible realities of the "Comprehensive" "Combined" "Joint" employment. During the Cold War a multitude of NATO exercises, "live" and "Command Post CPX" served this purpose be it that comprehensiveness was not yet invented.

But "exercises" of that nature are only the top of the iceberg.

In 1993 during the "Meeting of the Heads of the European Navies" in Lisbon, I told my Dutch colleague and friend that we were sending a Belgian Frigate in the German Naval Task Group to Roosevelt Roads for missile training, we were going to fire Exocets in a tactical missile defense exercise. He explained that he did not appreciate the event and that he needed the "sea days" of the Belgian frigates in the Dutch Naval Task Group; it must be noted that the Belgian Frigates needed the training assets of that Task Group even more. This was the beginning of an exchange of ideas that resulted, two years later, in a ministerial agreement ordering the activation of "Admiral Benelux ABNL" in peacetime. First: one Operational Command, also in normal peace time, for all the warships of both Nations; very soon only one set of operational weapon schools followed by a division of labor in the logistic support for those ships. There is an agreement on the configuration management of the ships that are in common and on the financial consequences of all of this, aiming at some kind of "juste retour". The intense cooperation between the two Navies is experienced by both parties as a "win – win" solution, enlargement with other Navies is, at this moment, unfortunately, not on the agenda.

The case presented above is a Navy example, but the same reasoning can be applied to Army and Air Force assets.

How many military pilot schools are needed in Europe? How many can Europe afford? Where are average weather conditions most suitable? Where is airspace available? The French and the Belgian Air Force now share one military pilot school, in France (weather and space) using French built Alpha Jet many acquired and modernized by Belgium.

How many field artillery schools are needed in Europe? Where is space available?

Where in Europe can a brigade size force with all its components realistically train? Where is a realistic opposing force available? Where, for a tactical evaluation, are sufficient umpires?

Conclusion: Unless the Nations of Europe work together in preparing their military forces, from instruction to realistic training, there is a fear that they will not be correctly ready for high intensity violence operations. The decades of NATO experience, its standardization agreements and its many tactical and other publications will help this cooperation in "preparation" enormously.

Employment (la “mise en œuvre)

European Military Armed Forces are being employed continuously over the last twenty two years. The Belgian Armed Forces participated in the war to free Kuwait; were involved in former Yugoslavia in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo; deployed to Africa in Somalia, Rwanda, Congo and the Indian Ocean, participated in the Libyan air campaign and are now present in Lebanon and Afghanistan. It is remarkable that this long period of intense employment coincides with the period of continuous budget reductions.

The political guidance and operational command authority of those operations varied from “National” (Congo) to “International”: the UN (Croatia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Lebanon), NATO (Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya), the EU (Bosnia, Indian Ocean) and the WEU: (Kuwait).

The quality of those guidance and command structures vary greatly.

Nationally the operations are of limited scope and more often than not deal with “non combatant evacuations” or military aid programs. National Political Authorities and National Command structures can deal with them without too much problems.

Also NATO, with its standing Military Command Structure and long tradition of training and exercising, is confident in taking responsibility for military operations.

The political decision making process is often slow as can be expected in a consensus Alliance with twenty eight member nations.

More and more we see NATO operations in which not all members participate to the same extend, complicating the debate.

The intelligence and information exchange in the Alliance is not what it should be, resulting in mistrust and slowing down the knowledge creation process.

NATO is not equipped to deal with comprehensive solutions and should avoid taking responsibility for other than military operations.

The UN has no permanent military structure other than the Department of Peace Keeping Operations in New York.

The Security Council with its permanent members and their veto right is not the most flexible instrument for political decision making.

There is no tradition of elaborate training in the UN. Very often ad-hoc solutions of force generation and operational command have to be invented for UN-operations.

It must be said that the UN has many other instruments of intervention, needed in the comprehensive approach of crises management.

A number of UN operations in the recent past were frustrating by total lack of progress or failed completely.

The European Union, like the United Nations, has a plethora of instruments of power for crises management in a comprehensive environment. If only it could act as one, especially first in matters of foreign affairs where missions are defined and accepted.

The Union has no own “Operational Military Command” therefore this authority is exercised either through the NATO Command structure or using National Operational Headquarters. Using the NATO structure can be problematic in some scenarios where, on their request, NATO and/or US involvement is not indicated. A National Headquarter each time has to be augmented for the task at hand and to allow for a correct representation of the

Nations providing the forces. These ad-hoc solutions do not guarantee optimal staff procedures and do not allow for training sufficiently in advance of deployment.

While it is recognized that, as in NATO, the EU Military Committee and the EU International Military Staff are the perfect partners in the dialogue with the Political and the Foreign Affairs Authorities the tool for the autonomous operational planning and for the operational command of the operations is missing. The West European Union was created in 1947 with the purpose to use military capabilities in defence. With the demise of the WEU last year, the EU is supposed to take over this responsibility and it should give itself the tools to do so.

Conclusion

(1)The reduced perception of necessity to invest in military capabilities because of the reduced threat on the national territories, (2) the increased cost of military capabilities because of the obligation to have them deployable and sustainable in peace time, (3) the obligation to invest in new expensive capabilities from intelligence collection and the use of space over air-refuelling to power projection, make it for the single European Nation impossible to acquire and maintain a meaningful set of military forces.

Only cooperation also in a European framework can remedy this shortcoming.

This European cooperation will have to address the acquisition as well as the preparation as the employment.

Cooperation in acquisition is first and foremost an economic issue, free market rules will have to shape the defence industry instrument with SME's as balancing actors.

While niche specialization is happening already, fusion of capabilities and structures will have to be the driving force of this European Capability development. Fusion leads to a greater interdependency rather than a perceived loss of sovereignty.

New capabilities should be addressed internationally from the start and intelligence collection is a day in day out necessity.

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