



ANALYSIS

COMMAND AND CONTROL FOR THE CSDP A PERMANENT OPERATION HEADQUARTERS FOR THE EU?

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Allied Command Operations (ACO) located in Mons, Belgium, at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE).³ The US has seven unified combatant commands, each responsible for a geographic region, operating at the military-strategic level: Africa Command,

A permanent military-strategic headquarters is a common element in the planning and conduct of contemporary military operations

Central Command, European Command, Indo-Pacific Command, Northern Command, Southern Command, and Space Command.⁴ European states also have permanent headquarters at this level, primarily for planning and conducting national operations, for example: France's Centre de Planification et de Conduite des Opérations, Germany's Armed Forces Operational Command (Einsatzführungskommando der Bundeswehr), the Italian Joint Force Headquarters, and the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters.

The EU Member States have also long agreed on the EU's need for a headquarters at this level to plan and conduct any CSDP military operation. This was clearly established in the earliest documents defining the military structures an effective CSDP would require.

INTRODUCTION

The question of whether the EU needs a permanent military-strategic headquarters, located in the command chain between the political-strategic level and the force or theatre headquarters, has been hotly contested since the beginnings of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in 1999.¹ While precise functions and command relationships may vary, a headquarters at this level – in EU terminology an Operation Headquarters (OHQ), headed by an Operation Commander – is a common element in the planning and conduct of contemporary military operations.² NATO has such a headquarters:

Although there have been various calls over the years to establish a standing EU OHQ, the Member States have not agreed to do so

The so-called 'Toolbox Paper' presented to the meeting of EU Defence Ministers in Sintra, Portugal in February 2000 plainly stated that "[t]he Operation Commander would need a Military Strategic Operation HQ to plan the mounting and conduct of a joint operation."⁵ But what has proved contentious is the issue of permanence. Although there have been various calls over the years to establish a standing EU OHQ, the Member States have not

¹ CSDP was known as the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) from its launch at the European Council in Cologne (June 1999) until the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.

² The EU's terminology is not ideal. Command and control structures are usually organised into three levels – the strategic, the operational and the tactical – that broadly correspond to three levels of war (also strategic, operational, and tactical) recognised by modern military theory. The correspondence and dividing lines may be somewhat blurred, but broadly the strategic level defines and implements national (or multinational) policy at the highest level and includes both political and military actors (sometimes known as the political-strategic and military-strategic levels). The operational level is concerned with the employment of military force across an entire theatre of operations, while the tactical level deals with individual engagements or the employment of military components. 'OHQ', as used by the EU, does not refer to an operational-level command, but to a military-strategic-level command. The EU has variously designated its headquarters at the operational level as 'Force Headquarters', 'Mission Headquarters' or 'Mission Force Headquarters'.

³ 'ACO' and 'SHAPE' are frequently used interchangeably.

⁴ The US also has four functional unified combatant commands: Cyber Command, Special Operations Command, Strategic Command, and Transportation Command.

⁵ "Military Bodies in the European Union and the Planning and Conduct of EU-led Military Operations," reproduced in Maartje Rutten (comp.), *"From St Malo to Nice: European Defence Core Documents"*, Chaillot Paper 47 (May 2001), Western European Union Institute for Security Studies, 99.

agreed to do so. Instead, for CSDP operations, the EU has used either an OHQ from one of its Member States or NATO's ACO, made available to the Union under an agreement known as 'Berlin Plus'. For some smaller CSDP operations, the deployed force headquarters has operated as its own OHQ. For the proponents of a more prominent and active EU role in defence, the lack of a permanent OHQ is a deeply unsatisfactory situation, while for the sceptics, an EU OHQ has come to epitomise what they see as a fundamental flaw of EU defence efforts – the building of duplicative and symbolic structures that do little to improve the EU's real capacity for military action.

France, a notably forward-leaning Member State on European defence, holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022. The EU is expected to adopt its new Strategic Compass – the Member States' common strategic vision for EU security and defence for the next 5-10 years – in the same period.⁶ The French Presidency and Commission have also announced that they will convene a European Summit on Defence. Meanwhile, one of the EU's flagship defence efforts – Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) – will see its five-year anniversary in December 2022. Against the broader background of a US shift in strategic priorities towards Asia, and the perceived humiliation of Europe as a defence actor not only at the hands

European defence will undoubtedly be the subject of some attention in the coming months

of Donald Trump, but also at those of Joe Biden over the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the creation of the AUKUS pact, and Vladimir Putin who apparently sees no reason for the EU to have any say in discussions regarding Europe's security arrangements, European defence will undoubtedly be the subject of some attention in the coming months. The fresh calls already made for the establishment of European forces are likely to be followed by fresh calls for the

⁶ EU, European External Action Service, "[Questions and answers: a background for the Strategic Compass](#)," 15 November 2021.

building of an EU OHQ.⁷ Indeed, the EU Military Committee is currently debating options for further developing CSDP command and control structures.⁸

This analysis examines the EU's ability to plan and conduct military and civilian-military operations, with a particular focus on whether a permanent OHQ is needed.

Many Member States, including the Baltic states, recognise the importance of enhancing Europe's military capabilities, but are less supportive of the concept of autonomy

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. HISTORY

Since its launch in 1999, the CSDP has embodied two broad aims – to develop the capacity for autonomous EU military action and to bolster Europe's military capabilities, both for use in an EU context and, for those Member States who are also NATO Allies, to strengthen the Alliance.⁹ Many Member States, including the Baltic states, recognise the importance of enhancing Europe's military capabilities, but are less supportive of the concept of autonomy.¹⁰ The UK, after a brief flirtation with EU defence between 1998 and 2001, rapidly reverted to being one of the most sceptical Member States and, by virtue of its size and, perhaps more so the credibility of its own military was, until Brexit, an influential voice. Citing a fear of alienating the US and undermining NATO, the UK frequently

⁷ "EU says Afghanistan shows need for rapid-reaction force," Reuters, 30 August 2021; Daniel Boffey, "[Von der Leyen: EU must acquire 'political will' to build own military](#)," The Guardian, 15 September 2021.

⁸ EU, European Council, Council of the EU, "[Video conference of the European Union Military Committee \(EUMC\), EU Chiefs of Defence, 5 November 2020](#)," 16 November 2020.

⁹ The UK-French St Malo Declaration, arguably the founding document of the CSDP, includes both aims, stating that "the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action" and "Europe needs strengthened armed forces". "British-French summit, St Malo, 3-4 December 1998," reproduced in Maartje Rutten (comp.), "[From St Malo to Nice: European Defence Core Documents](#)," Chaillot Paper 47 (May 2001), Western European Union Institute for Security Studies, 8-9.

¹⁰ Ulrike Franke and Tara Varma, "[Independence play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy](#)," European Council on Foreign Relations, 18 July 2019.

obstructed efforts to develop a more integrated and coherent EU defence.¹¹

In practical terms, the UK and its allies have stood against the building of centralised structures for EU defence, for example constraining the budget of the European Defence Agency and, in particular, blocking the creation of an OHQ.¹² Even in the brief honeymoon period after the St Malo declaration, the UK-French drafted Toolbox Paper, which set out the key principles for operationalising the CSDP, was adamant that the proposed EU Military Staff (EUMS) would “not itself act as an operational HQ.”¹³ The same paper also defined command and control arrangements for EU-led operations, and sought to resolve the contradiction between the recognition of the need for what it called “a Military Strategic Operation HQ” and the fact that it would not have one. It proposed that aside from the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and EUMS that would exist permanently in the EU, “other planning capabilities, command structures and other military assets would be drawn from NATO or from national or multinational sources” and noted further that “DSACEUR [Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe] and SHAPE have already been identified as the primary, if not the only candidates for Operation Commander and Military Strategic Operation HQ.”¹⁴

In spite of the clear preference for drawing on NATO commanders and command structures this arrangement has only been used twice

The EU’s expectation that it would be able to draw on NATO resources was based on an undertaking given by NATO leaders at their 1999 summit, formalised in 2003 as part of a package collectively known as the ‘Berlin Plus’

agreement.¹⁵ In spite of the clear preference for drawing on NATO commanders and command structures expressed in the Toolbox Paper, this arrangement has only been used twice in the fourteen CSDP military operations that have been launched so far – for operation Concordia in the then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Table 1). In both cases, the EU took over responsibilities from a previous NATO operation (respectively, Allied Harmony and the Stabilisation Force).¹⁶

The capacity of the CSDP institutions in Brussels to plan and command military operations has gradually been enhanced, albeit on a limited scale

Despite the objections of the UK and others, the capacity of the CSDP institutions in Brussels to plan and command military operations has gradually been enhanced, albeit on a limited scale. In 2004, the General Affairs and External Relations Council agreed the EU Battlegroups concept, which created a rota of rapid response formations for CSDP operations. In line with the more serious military intent implied by the battlegroups, the Member States agreed, as part of the Headline Goal 2010, to create a civil-military cell within the EUMS, under a military officer, to integrate civilian and military planning efforts and support any OHQ designated for a CSDP operation.¹⁷ The cell was also tasked with developing the capacity to establish an operations centre for individual operations should the need arise. An EU Operations Centre for military and civilian CSDP operations in the Horn of Africa (including, on the military side, Operation Atalanta and EUTM Somalia)

¹¹ Jamie Shea, “European Defence After Brexit: A Plus or a Minus?” *European View*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2020), 89.

¹² David Brunnstrom, “Britain blocks move for permanent EU security HQ,” Reuters, 18 July 2011; Robin Emmott and Sabine Siebold, “Britain’s fear of European army muddles EU defence plan,” Reuters, 27 September 2016; “EDF commander opposes growth in EU military headquarters,” ERR, 17 November 2020.

¹³ “Military Bodies in the European Union,” 96.

¹⁴ “Military Bodies in the European Union,” 99.

¹⁵ “... we therefore stand ready to define and adopt the necessary arrangements for ready access by the European Union to the collective assets and capabilities of the Alliance, for operations in which the Alliance as a whole is not engaged militarily as an Alliance.” NATO, “Washington Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. on 24th April 1999,” Press Release NAC-S(99)64, 24 April 1999, para 10.

¹⁶ As a tangential outcome of Brexit, DSACEUR, a British position in the NATO command structure, was replaced as Operation Commander for Operation Althea by the Vice Chief of Staff at ACO, a French position.

¹⁷ Luis Simon, “Command and control? Planning for EU military operations,” EUISS Occasional Paper no. 81 (January 2010), 21.

Operation	Dates	Location	Peak Personnel	OHQ
EUFOR Concordia	Mar 2003– Dec 2003	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	400	ACO (through Berlin Plus)
EUFOR Artemis	Jun 2003– Sep 2003	Democratic Republic of the Congo	1 807	Centre de Planification et de Conduite des Opérations (France)
EUFOR BiH (Althea)	Dec 2004– present	Bosnia and Herzegovina	7 000	ACO (through Berlin Plus)
EUFOR RD Congo	Jun 2006– Nov 2006	Democratic Republic of the Congo	2 259	Einsatzführungskommando der Bundeswehr (Germany)
EUFOR Tchad/RCA	Jan 2008– Mar 2009	Chad / Central African Republic	3 700	Centre de Planification et de Conduite des Opérations (France)
EU NAVFOR Somalia (Atalanta)	Nov 2008– present	Off Somalia	1 943	Permanent Joint Headquarters (UK) Naval Station Rota (Spain)
EUTM Somalia	Apr 2010– present	Somalia	128	Mission HQ in Somalia Military Planning and Conduct Capability
EUTM Mali	Feb 2013– present	Mali	640	Mission HQ in Mali Military Planning and Conduct Capability
EUFOR RCA	Feb 2014– Mar 2015	Central African Republic	700	Hellenic European Union Operational Headquarters (Greece)
EUMAM RCA	Mar 2015– Mar 2016	Central African Republic	60	Mission HQ in Central African Republic
EU NAVFOR Med (Sophia)	Jun 2015– Mar 2020	South Central Mediterranean	1 666	Joint Force Headquarters (Italy)
EUTM RCA	Jul 2016– present	Central African Republic	170	Mission HQ in Central African Republic Military Planning and Conduct Capability
EU NAVFOR Med (Irinì)	Mar 2020– present	Mediterranean	–	Joint Force Headquarters (Italy)
EUTM Mozambique	Oct 2021– present	Mozambique	140	Military Planning and Conduct Capability

Table 1. CSDP Military Operations and Missions¹⁸

Sources: EUISS;¹⁹ the author, based on documents in EUR-Lex

was duly activated in 2012. Its mandate was later extended several times, eventually to December 2016, and also enlarged to include CSDP operations in the Sahel (including EUTM Mali).²⁰ The final extension decision anticipated that after 2016, the tasks of the Operations Centre would be absorbed by as yet unnamed permanent CSDP structures.²¹ Meanwhile,

in 2007 in response to concerns over delays in planning for EUFOR RD Congo and other operations, an advance planning function, the Military Assessment on Planning branch, was created in the EUMS.²²

The permanent CSDP structure anticipated by the Council materialised as the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), created in June 2017.²³ The MPCC is intended to be able to plan and conduct one operation of the size of an EU Battlegroup as well as five ‘non-executive’ military missions (i.e., non-combat operations in non-EU countries). To carry out these tasks, it was expected, by the end of 2021, to have a permanent strength of 60 seconded military and civilian officers,

¹⁸ EUFOR – EU Force, EUNAVFOR – EU Naval Force, EUTM - EU Training Mission, EUMAM – EU Military Advisory Mission.

¹⁹ Daniel Fiott, “As you were? The EU as an evolving military actor,” in *The CSDP in 2020*, ed. Daniel Fiott (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2020), 113.

²⁰ EU, Council of the EU, “Council Decision 2012/173/CFSP of 23 March 2012 on the activation of the EU Operations Centre for the Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operation in the Horn of Africa”; EU, Council of the EU, “Council Decision 2014/860/CFSP of 1 December 2014 amending and extending Decision 2012/173/CFSP on the activation of the EU Operations Centre for the Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operation in the Horn of Africa”.

²¹ EU, Council of the EU, “Council Decision 2014/860/CFSP of 1 December 2014 amending and extending Decision 2012/173/CFSP on the activation of the EU Operations Centre for the Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operation in the Horn of Africa.”

²² Simon, “Command and control?”, 23-4.

²³ EU, Council of the EU, “[Security and defence: Council reviews progress and agrees to improve support for military missions](#),” press release, 6 March 2017.

with a further 94 augmentee positions to be activated as needed should it command an executive operation.²⁴

The MPCC is intended to be able to plan and conduct one operation of the size of an EU Battlegroup as well as five ‘non-executive’ military missions

The MPCC currently plans and conducts all CSDP non-executive military missions – the EUTMs in Somalia, Mali, the Central African Republic, and Mozambique. For Somalia, Mali, and the Central African Republic, these functions had previously been assigned to the commander in the field and his headquarters. For this, the EU had used the term Mission Commander and Mission Headquarters and assigned the Mission Commander to be both EU Operation Commander and EU Force Commander. Perhaps reflecting the sensitivities that continue to surround EU military command and control, the Director of the MPCC is formally tasked with exercising the responsibilities of “operational commander” for the EUTMs only in the narrow sense of responsibilities related to the Athena common funding mechanism and is otherwise designated as “mission commander”.²⁵ While the MPCC is not an OHQ in either name, size, or location in the EU command structure, it is certainly a step in that direction.²⁶

The EU’s command and control arrangements for CSDP military operations comprise a mix of permanent structures at the (political-) strategic level and ad hoc structures below this

1.2. EU AND NATO COMMAND AND CONTROL

The EU’s command and control arrangements for CSDP military operations comprise a mix of permanent structures at the (political-) strategic level and ad hoc structures below this.²⁷ The permanent structures include the Council, the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the

EUMC, and the EUMS. The PSC, composed of ambassadorial-level representatives of the Member States, exercises overall political control and strategic direction of operations on behalf of the Council, which is ultimately responsible for all operations.²⁸ The PSC is supported in its work by the military advice and recommendations of the EUMC, which comprises the Chiefs of Defence of the Member States or, on a day-to-day basis, their permanent military representatives to the EU. For most Member States that are also NATO Allies, the permanent military representative to the EU is dual-hatted as the permanent military representative to NATO. The work of the EUMC is, in turn, supported by the EUMS, which provides military expertise and military planning at the political-strategic level. The EUMS is a directorate-general of the EU’s diplomatic service – the European External Action Service (EEAS) – and thus also reports to and advises the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (who may, at the decision of the Council have responsibilities for implementing aspects of CSDP operations under the direction of the PSC). The MPCC is a directorate of the EUMS, reporting directly to the Director General EUMS, who is also the Director MPCC.²⁹

The EU’s strategic-level structures have close analogues in NATO.³⁰ In NATO, political control and strategic direction is exercised by the North Atlantic Council (NAC), which

²⁴ “The Military Planning and Conduct Capability,” #EUDefence Factsheet, November 2018, 2; Brooks Tigner, “EU’s operational headquarters looks set, finally, to declare FOC by end of 2021,” Janes, 14 July 2021.

²⁵ EU, Council of the EU, “Council Decision (EU) 2017/971 of 8 June 2017 determining the planning and conduct arrangements for EU non-executive military CSDP missions and amending Decisions 2010/96/CFSP on a European Union military mission to contribute to the training of Somali security forces, 2013/34/CFSP on a European Union military mission to contribute to the training of the Malian armed forces (EUTM Mali) and (CFSP) 2016/610 on a European Union CSDP military training mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM RCA)”.

²⁶ The name, MPCC, reflects its civilian analogue, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability, established already in 2007. But it is likely that it was easier to secure agreement to ‘MPCC’ than any name containing the words ‘operation’ or ‘headquarters’.

²⁷ EU, European External Action Service, “EU Concept for Military Command and Control - Rev 8,” EUMC 44, 23 April 2019.

²⁸ Denmark, which opts out of the CSDP, is not represented in CSDP bodies.

²⁹ Thus, when the MPCC acts as the EU’s OHQ, the EUMS is providing both advice at the political-strategic level and command and control at the military-strategic level.

³⁰ NATO, “NATO Organization,” 20 August 2020.

can meet in formats ranging from permanent representatives to heads of state and government. The NAC is supported by the NATO Military Committee, also comprising the Allies' Chiefs of Defence or their permanent military representatives, which is in turn supported by the International Military Staff.³¹ Work at NATO headquarters is also supported by a civilian International Staff that reports to the Secretary General.

NATO's structures are large and robust as they are designed first and foremost to command and control large-scale, multidomain and multinational collective defence operations, perhaps involving nuclear elements

At the same time, there are differences between the EU and NATO structures. NATO's structures are large and robust as they are designed first and foremost to command and control large-scale, multidomain and multinational collective defence operations, perhaps involving nuclear elements. But the two organisations also take very different approaches to comprehensive crisis management.³²

While NATO recognises the need for crisis management to combine political, civilian and military instruments, the Alliance itself is primarily a military actor and must work with other organisations to deliver a comprehensive approach. The EU, however, has always stressed the range of instruments it can itself deploy coherently to resolve crises and thus its inherently comprehensive approach to crisis management. In the EU, crisis management is rarely conceived of as a solely or primarily military activity; indeed, of the nineteen CSDP missions and operations ongoing at the end of 2021, seven were classified as military, and twelve as civilian.³³ In practice, this means that the EU's military bodies must closely coordinate with their civilian counterparts in the CSDP structures. These include: the Committee for

³¹ Approximately 500 strong, compared with approximately 200 in the EUMS.

³² NATO, "A 'comprehensive approach' to crises," 1 June 2021; EU, Council of the EU, "Council conclusions on the EU's comprehensive approach," Brussels, 12 May 2014.

³³ EU, European External Action Service, "[Military and civilian missions and operations](#)."

Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management, which advises the PSC on civilian aspects of crisis management in parallel with the EUMC's military inputs; the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), which is responsible for the planning and conduct of civilian CSDP operations; and other directorates of the EEAS.

For CSDP operations, command and control arrangements below the political-strategic level are decided on a case-by-case basis. The military-strategic-level headquarters may, as described above, be the MPCC (for non-executive operations or, if augmented, for battlegroup-sized executive operations), ACO under Berlin Plus, or a national headquarters made available to the EU.³⁴ At the operational level, the EU will designate a Force Commander and Force Headquarters that will deploy to the theatre of operations and, depending on the scale and nature of the operation, also assume command over tactical-level component commands and forces.

For CSDP operations, command and control arrangements below the political-strategic level are decided on a case-by-case basis

NATO, by contrast has, in ACO, a permanent military-strategic-level command, which is both physically and organisationally separate from NATO headquarters. The NATO command structure also includes three permanent operational-level headquarters (Joint Force Command Brunssum, Joint Force Command Naples and Joint Force Command Norfolk) and three permanent tactical-level component commands (Allied Land Command, Allied Maritime Command, and Allied Air Command).

³⁴ Headquarters in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Greece have been declared available. The UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters is no longer available after Brexit.

2. A PERMANENT EU OHQ?

The arguments for and against establishing a permanent EU OHQ have been rehearsed many times.³⁵ The cases for and against are summarised briefly here.

2.1. THE CASE FOR

The arguments in favour of OHQ can broadly be divided into two categories: those concerning practical advantages such as availability, effectiveness, efficiency, and capacity; and those concerning less tangible aspects such as identity and cohesion.

The practical benefits of a permanent OHQ are mostly the other side of the coin that is the shortcomings of the present arrangements

2.1.1. PRACTICAL BENEFITS

The practical benefits of a permanent OHQ are mostly the other side of the coin that is the shortcomings of the present arrangements. A permanent OHQ would be immediately available to the EU for CSDP operations, while the present command options require, case-by-case, a process either to identify and (later to augment) a suitable national HQ, the augmentation of the MPCC, or a negotiation with NATO over the precise conditions upon which ACO would be made available. These processes take up valuable time in crisis management situations and are not consistent with, for example, the readiness requirements that have been established for

A permanent OHQ would provide the EU with capacity that is not currently easily available to it

the EU Battlegroups.³⁶ Furthermore, the ad hoc chains of command they entail (the chosen OHQ will be augmented by staff officers from troop contributing nations) are less effective and entail greater risk than a permanent structure as personnel and headquarters may not be accustomed to working together.

There is some evidence that drawing on national HQs has led to problems such as planning delays, bureaucratic conflict, and frictions related to the creation of a multinational HQ around a national core, while the use of ACO for operation Althea resulted in coordination problems between the strategic and operational levels.³⁷ An additional shortcoming of the present arrangements is that the MPCC, expected to be able to command and control smaller executive mission, is located inside the EUMS, which is itself part of the EEAS, blurring unity of command, one of the long-established principles of war.³⁸

A permanent OHQ would also provide the EU with capacity that is not currently easily available to it, for example in maintaining situational awareness of potential conflict areas, generating military-operational advice for planners at the political strategic level, and carrying out contingency planning. Without

these capacities, the EU has limited ability to prepare for crisis management operations in advance and operations may thus be riskier (for

³⁵ For example: Nik Hynek, "EU crisis management after the Lisbon Treaty: civil–military coordination and the future of the EU OHQ", *European Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (March 2011), 95–97.; Maurice de Langlois and Andreas Capstick, "The Role of the Military in the EU's External Action: Implementing the Comprehensive Approach," *Laboratoires de l'Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire (IRSEM)* no. 23 (2014), 33; Luis Simon, "The Spanish Presidency and CSDP: Time to Get Serious about the Union's Military Planning and Conduct Capability," *Real Instituto Elcano*, ARI 33/2010 (February 2010), 7–8; Luke Coffey, "EU Defense Integration: Undermining NATO, Transatlantic Relations, and Europe's Security," *Heritage Foundation Background Paper* No. 2806 (June 2013), 10; "Britain blocks proposal for permanent EU security HQ," *Reuters*, 18 July 2011.

³⁶ To begin operations in theatre within 10 days of a Council decision to launch an operation. EU, European External Action Service, "EU Battlegroups," factsheet, April 2013, 2.

³⁷ For example: Bjoern H. Seibert, "Operation EUFOR TCHAD/RCA and the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy," *US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute Monograph*, October 2010, 50–52.; Helmut Fritsch, "EUFOR RD Congo: A Misunderstood Operation?" *Centre for International Relations, Queen's University, Martello Papers* No. 33 (2008), 71–72; Ivana Boštjančič Pulko, Meliha Muherina and Nina Pejič, "Analysing the Effectiveness of EUFOR Althea Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans*, Vol 8, No. 2 (15), October 2016, 98.

³⁸ For example: "At the military strategic, operational and tactical levels of command, a fundamental tenet of C2 is unity of command, which provides the necessary cohesion for the planning and execution of operations; this is a significant part of a principle of operations – unity of effort." NATO, "AJP-3. Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations," Edition C Version 1, February 2019, 1–35.

the sceptics, this may be seen as an advantage since it may inhibit the Union from launching overly ambitious operations, or even from launching operations at all).

Another set of practical considerations arises from the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis management. A permanent EU OHQ can be designed and tailored to implement this civil-military approach by including personnel from a range of disciplines in a way that a national military-strategic-level headquarters, or ACO, cannot. It can thus support advance preparations for the EU's unique approach to crisis management, serve as a component of the institutional memory of the comprehensive approach, and contribute to the building of a civil-military strategic culture. If located in Brussels, it would encourage better communication and understanding between the political-strategic and military-strategic components of the command structure, as well as allowing OHQ staff officers to better coordinate with other EU institutions.³⁹ Furthermore, assuming that the OHQ would mean the discarding of the MPCC, national and NATO command chain options, and perhaps the partial or complete integration of the MPCC and the CPCC, the political-strategic level would have a single point of command to deal with for all CSDP military and military-civilian operations, simplifying procedures and fostering common strategic culture.

Finally, using ACO as an OHQ through the Berlin Plus agreement brings additional complications. The availability of NATO assets is not guaranteed, as Berlin Plus presumes that NATO assets would be available to the EU only if NATO itself had no prior requirement for them. In any event, disagreement among the Member States about the character of the EU's defence identity, and the reluctance of some Allies to permit NATO support to the EU, may mean that ACO is no longer a realistic option for EU-led operations.

³⁹ Tervuren, on the outskirts of Brussels, has been suggested as a location for a permanent EU OHQ. The proposal was first made in 2003: "Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium on European Defence," in Antonio Missiroli (comp.), "From Copenhagen to Brussels: European Defence Core Documents Volume IV," Chaillot Paper 67 (December 2003), European Union Institute for Security Studies, 76.

2.1.2. LESS TANGIBLE ASPECTS

A second set of arguments concerns aspects such as cohesion and identity. A permanent OHQ would increase the visibility and the credibility of the EU as a crisis management actor. Operations conducted by national OHQs or ACO are strongly associated with the framework nation or NATO, making it hard for the EU to be taken seriously as, or even be seen as, a global player.

A permanent OHQ would increase the visibility and the credibility of the EU as a crisis management actor

A permanent OHQ would also, through proportionate staffing by the Member States, ensure fairer burden sharing. The responsibility for current CSDP operations falls disproportionately on the framework nation. Similarly, a permanent structure would make it easier to include all Member States, including the smaller ones. Both these factors should increase cohesion among the Member States.

2.2. THE CASE AGAINST

Many of the arguments against a permanent EU OHQ echo a formulation first publicised in 1998, shortly after the UK-French St Malo Summit, by then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Albright made clear that the US wanted Europe to do more for its own defence and to have modern, capable armed forces, but argued that for European defence arrangements to be compatible with transatlantic security arrangements they should avoid decoupling (from NATO), duplication (of defence resources), or discrimination (against non-EU NATO Allies) (the 'three Ds').⁴⁰ In remarks to the North Atlantic Council the following day, Albright advocated the further development of a European Security and Defence Identity within the Alliance, but made no mention of the EU.⁴¹

⁴⁰ "Madeleine K. Albright, US Secretary of State, 'The Right Balance Will Secure NATO's Future', Financial Times, 7 December 1998," in Maartje Rutten (comp.), "From St Malo to Nice: European Defence Core Documents," Chaillot Paper 47 (May 2001), Western European Union Institute for Security Studies, 11.

⁴¹ Madeleine K. Albright, "Statement to the North Atlantic Council, Brussels, Belgium, December 8, 1998."

Critics of a permanent EU OHQ have argued that it would both duplicate capability that exists in NATO and nationally and, by diverting resources and attention away from NATO and cutting the US out of (some) European security decisions, undermine transatlantic relations.

Critics of a permanent EU OHQ have argued that it would both duplicate capability that exists in NATO and undermine transatlantic relations

The idea of an EU OHQ has in the past certainly been the subject of some tension between the US and its European Allies, notably during the low period of transatlantic relations that followed the 2003 invasion of Iraq.⁴² Today, the decoupling argument is more frequently heard in connection with the broader concept of European strategic autonomy.

A second line of argument is that the creation of a permanent OHQ would be another example of the tendency in EU defence to focus on concepts and institutions while sidestepping the burning need for Europe to enhance its military capabilities. It is thus seen as a costly distraction, or a piece of empty symbology, indicating the Member States' lack of seriousness about defence.

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A related argument is that the history of European defence efforts shows that Member States are much readier to make decisions than they are to implement them. The headline goal, for example, has never come close to being met, and while the EU claims that its Battlegroups concept has been fully operational since 2007, it is also compelled to acknowledge that no battlegroup has ever deployed to a real operation.⁴³ As regards a permanent military-strategic headquarters, the Member States

⁴² Ian Black, "Nato bid to defuse EU defence row," The Guardian, 21 October 2003.

⁴³ EU, European External Action Service, "EU Battlegroups," 1.

have so far proven reluctant to fill even the very few staff positions in the MPCC.⁴⁴ The need to fill staff positions is especially an issue for smaller Member States such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For them the human and financial cost is disproportionately larger but must be weighed against the prospect of having limited influence should they decline to participate.

Finally, some commentators argue that the current arrangements, especially Berlin Plus, do work even if they are not perfect, and should be used more extensively. In addition to the practical benefits in command and control, Berlin Plus is argued to be of great value in enhancing EU-NATO cooperation and allowing the EU to grow its defence dimension in a less risky fashion.⁴⁵

3. SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

The arguments in favour of and against a permanent EU OHQ are not new and have apparently done little to persuade either side to change its viewpoint. This is perhaps unsurprising – the arguments against have mostly been based on broad political fears, while those in favour have been more technical. The two sides have based their arguments on fundamentally different premises and have largely talked past each other.

Nonetheless, there have been changes inside and outside the Union that might be expected to bring new perspectives from which to view the issue. In particular, the EU's level of military ambition has grown over the years.

Meanwhile, the strategic environment has shifted. The rise of China and the uncertainties of the Trump presidency have both fuelled a longstanding demand that Europe should do more for itself.

⁴⁴ Katarina Engberg, "A European Defence Union by 2025? Work in progress," Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, Policy Review, January 2021, 28.

⁴⁵ Nicholas Williams, "NATO-EU Cooperation: Don't Forget Berlin Plus!" European Leadership Network, 26 March 2018; Olivier Rittmann, "Operation Althea and the virtues of the Berlin Plus Agreement," NATO Defense College Policy Brief No. 02 (January 2021), 4.

After the brief period of enthusiasm that followed its launch, the CSDP was largely stagnant for a decade and a half. Although occasional initiatives brought incremental advances, and while the EU continued to conduct military and civilian CSDP missions with some success, its ambitions remained on the low side. With the publication of the Global Strategy, the EU began to see itself as a more serious defence actor. It talked about

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conducting military operations of larger scale or more complexity, such as those envisaged by the Council in the context of implementing the EU's Global Strategy, or those implied by the tentative ambition of the Member States participating in PESCO to "arrive at a coherent full spectrum force package."⁴⁶ More recently, High Representative, Josep Borrell, has proposed that the EU should be able to deploy an 'initial entry force' of around 5 000 personnel (around three times the size of a battlegroup).⁴⁷ In its rhetoric since the launch of the Global Strategy, the EU has stressed its role as a military crisis manager more than it has its role as a civilian crisis manager, in doing so underusing and possibly weakening some of the foreign policy instruments it had successfully applied previously.⁴⁸ Potentially game-changing initiatives, notably PESCO and the European Defence Fund, have been introduced to help bring substance to this higher level of military ambition.

The Global Strategy was a response to a changing world. It pointed to the violation of the security order to Europe's east and

instability to its south, slow economic growth in Africa, security tensions in Asia, and climate change to justify its claims that Europe needs to be stronger and more autonomous in its decisions and actions in security and defence.⁴⁹ It also argued that "credible European defence is essential also for the sake of a healthy transatlantic partnership with the United States."⁵⁰

It has been clear for decades that the US wants Europe to stop talking and to start doing more in defence. The urgency has grown with the US's increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific and its expectation that, if Europe does

not take a more active role in this region, it will at least take a greater share of the security burden in its own. The US certainly wants Europe to be able to act. It is less clear, however, that it wants Europe to be able to decide – for example, visiting Europe in November 2021, State Department Counselor Derek Chollet stressed the Biden Administration's support for Europeans developing their own, stronger military capabilities, adding that if they were finally ready to get serious, Washington would be more than happy to provide guidance about the types of capabilities to start building up.⁵¹ It is unlikely that a permanent EU OHQ would be on Washington's shopping list.

The US certainly wants Europe to be able to act. It is less clear, however, that it wants Europe to be able to decide

While Washington and Brussels may not see fully eye-to-eye on European defence, the current administration, despite some early missteps in its dealing with its European allies, is undoubtedly committed to European security. There is a strong transatlantic relationship to build understanding upon.⁵² The same cannot be said for the Trump presidency, during which NATO, for the first time, faced

⁴⁶ EU, Council of the EU, "[Council Conclusions on implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of Security and Defence](#)," CFSP 906, 14 November 2016 (the 'Annex to the Annex' of this document lists types of CSDP military operation derived from the EU level of ambition that include joint crisis management operations in areas of high security risk, joint stabilisation operations, and military rapid response); EU, Council of the EU, "[Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 establishing permanent structured cooperation \(PESCO\) and determining the list of participating Member States](#)," Annex I Principles of PESCO.

⁴⁷ "EU says Afghanistan shows need for rapid-reaction force."

⁴⁸ Kristi Raik, "[Not Yet Fit for the World: Piecemeal Buildup of EU Military, Cyber and Intelligence Assets](#)," Joint Research Papers no. 4, November 2021, 30.

⁴⁹ "[Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy](#)," 13, 19.

⁵⁰ "Shared Vision, Common Action," 20.

⁵¹ David M. Herszenhorn, "[Biden's team wants EU allies to get real on 'strategic autonomy'](#)," Politico, 19 November 2021.

⁵² Lauren Speranza, "[American Leadership in NATO: A Rocky Return but a Firm Future](#)," ICDS Commentary, 1 December 2021.

threats to its existence from the inside.⁵³ The very real prospect of a second presidency for Trump, or one of his entourage, provides a strong argument for Europe to be more self-reliant in defence not only for reasons of responsibility, but also to hedge against a future US withdrawal.⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS

The need for a military-strategic-level headquarters for EU-led operations is not disputed. This need was established in the earliest documents defining the (then) European Security and Defence Policy and has been met, ad hoc, for each of the executive CSDP operations the EU has conducted.⁵⁵ What is disputed is whether the EU needs a permanent OHQ – a standing and standalone structure in the command chain staffed by representatives of the Member States.

Furthermore, it is unclear whether the EU's growing level of military ambition and Europe's growing need to do more for itself change the picture. Regarding military ambition, the EU's current arrangements fall short. The MPCC is designed to command and control nothing larger than a battlegroup and, so far, has experience in conducting only non-executive missions. Its location inside the EUMS, itself part of the EEAS, blurs unity of command. Operations using ACO under Berlin Plus have entailed a level of operational risk and, in any case, Berlin Plus is difficult – if not unviable – in the current political circumstances. Using national headquarters, the more common route adopted for CSDP, also entails operational risks, and political risks in terms of EU cohesion and identity.

Regarding the need for Europe to do more for itself, ICDS researchers have previously advocated that European states should pursue

greater autonomy, both for fairer burden sharing and as a hedge against possible US disengagement.⁵⁶ For this, the EU is not the only format through which Europeans might act militarily, but it is the most likely. It is however, widely acknowledged that the EU needs more military capability if it is to take on a greater role. A holistic view of military capability would include not only combat and support units, but also the capacity to command and control military forces – it would be irresponsible to deploy military personnel to substantial crisis management operations without the most effective planning, command and control structures. Here again, the MPCC is unsuitable, and options built around national headquarters carry operational and political risks.

The requirement for a permanent EU OHQ cannot be an isolated question but needs to be considered as part of the broader issue of what kind of defence actor the Member States want the EU to be. It depends on whether they are ready to invest in the EU as a serious and independent defence actor; and, if so, how much risk they are prepared to accept in crisis management operations. So far, despite their agreements in the Council, there is little consensus among the Member States on the first question. The track record is poor. The Member States have been unwilling or unable to meet earlier, less ambitious targets for European defence, and have accepted only limited responsibilities for the EU in crisis management. They have not been ready to invest in defence in the EU, the EU has failed to meet all but the minimum expectations placed upon it as a defence actor, and the Member States have felt themselves justified in not investing further in the EU as a defence actor – a vicious circle of European defence.

If, however, the Member States are genuinely ready to give substance to their stated European defence ambitions – to build capability and to take greater responsibility for their own security by acting alone when necessary – the case for a permanent OHQ appears strong. The EU cannot afford the political costs of embarking on larger and more complex military operations and failing. Against this measure, building a permanent OHQ would be

⁵³ Julian E. Barnes and Helene Cooper, "[Trump Discussed Pulling U.S. From NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns Over Russia](#)," *The New York Times*, 14 January 2019;.

⁵⁴ Michael Crowley, "[Allies and Former U.S. Officials Fear Trump Could Seek NATO Exit in a Second Term](#)," *The New York Times*, 3 September 2020; Pauli Järvenpää, Claudia Major and Sven Sakkov, [European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword](#) (Tallinn: ICDS, 2019), 24.

⁵⁵ The four non-executive missions also today have an OHQ in the MPCC. Before the MPCC was created, the situation was somewhat blurred with the deployed mission HQ acting as its own OHQ.

⁵⁶ Järvenpää, Major and Sakkov, *European Strategic Autonomy*, 24.

a low price to pay to ensure that the EU is able to be a competent and effective manager of military forces. An EU OHQ could be small and tailored to the EU's military-civilian approach to crisis management. It ought to be possible to demonstrate to a US ready to listen that it would neither be duplicative, nor a threat to transatlantic relations. The case would be considerably stronger if the 22 Member States who are also NATO Allies were able to demonstrate that they were also meeting their obligations to the NATO command structure and NATO force structure – they should be

able to demonstrate a commitment to defence across the board, not just to defence in the EU.

But at the same time, a project to build such a headquarters cannot fail. If the EU builds an OHQ, it must be used when CSDP operations are needed, meaning in turn that the Member States must be more ready to use the CSDP. A permanent OHQ cannot be launched with great ceremony then quietly put to one side. It can only succeed if it goes hand-in-hand with a renewed and demonstrated willingness of the Member States to act.

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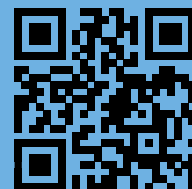
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