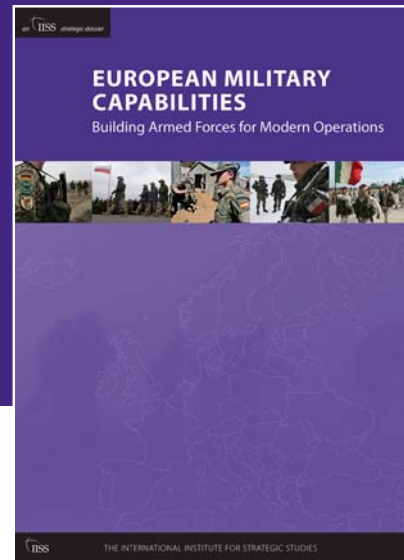


IISS Strategic Dossier

EUROPEAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Building Armed Forces for Modern Operations



Transcript of Press Statement

Wednesday 9 July 2008

The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London

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Director-General and
Chief Executive

Welcome to the launch of the latest Strategic Dossier from the IISS. This is the first in this series to examine conventional military capabilities, specifically those of European countries.

It is premised on the very obvious fact that European armed forces are increasingly involved in multinational deployments beyond their countries' borders – sometimes well beyond them. This means that they are being forced to reform their armed forces to reflect the needs of modern operations, which are very different from the much more static requirements of the Cold-War period. More broadly, following the 9/11 attacks and the emergence of new threats and conflicts, European governments have begun to adjust their thinking about what defence and security mean. The most recent example of this can be seen in the French *Livre Blanc* (White Paper) that was published just last month, and which is covered in this Dossier.

The Cold War lasted for about 45 years, and nearly 20 years later European governments are still struggling to change the force structures that became so deeply entrenched during that period. But it's not just the capabilities that need to change. So, too, do the ways in which we think about and assess capabilities. This is the 50th anniversary year of the IISS, and for 50 years we have published *The Military Balance*, which continues to be regarded as the most authoritative independent source of information on the military assets of each nation. We've been aware for some time, however, that the new uses to which European armed forces are put – a very wide range of tasks from humanitarian relief to full combat – demanded new ideas from the IISS about how to assess capabilities. It's important to know how many soldiers, ships and aircraft a country has, but it's also good to have an idea of the circumstances in which a government might use them,

and for what purposes, and what it is doing to achieve the capabilities that it needs. This was the thinking behind our establishment at the IISS of a European Capabilities Project more than three years ago. And it was for this reason that The Institute decided to produce a Strategic Dossier on this subject. Dr Bastian Giegerich, our Research Fellow for European Security and Alex Nicoll, Director of Editorial, are the joint editors and the principal writers of the dossier, and I'll ask Alex to give an account of the dossier's conclusions and recommendations.

Alexander Nicoll

Director of Editorial;
Editor of *Strategic Survey*;
Editor of *Strategic Comments*

Thank you John, and as you mentioned, there is growing demand for European governments to send armed forces on a very wide range of expeditionary missions. From the Balkans conflicts of the 1990s onwards, the number of European personnel deployed abroad has steadily risen. The requirement for more deployable forces is unlikely to be temporary: both NATO and the European Union are planning on the basis that in the future there will be an even greater number of limited but demanding operations.

In light of this, it seemed to us as we worked on this dossier that we must consider the capabilities of European countries' armed forces in light of their main modern purpose, which we see as being to take part in operations. Several European countries say explicitly that they no longer perceive direct threats to their sovereignty, and therefore they organise their armed forces to deal with a wide range of contingencies, both abroad and at home. Clearly, this perception does not apply to everybody, since some countries, especially in Eastern Europe, do still see possible territorial threats. But even they are all taking part in multinational operations abroad. The

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main thrust of defence reforms across Europe has been to make forces more deployable, more capable and more flexible – and to cost less.

As the number of operations has been rising since the 1990s, defence budgets have been reduced steadily and significantly. This means that armed forces have to do much more with much less. We would argue, however, that in spite of reduced resources, Europe's potential to influence international security issues through military power remains significant. The 27 members of the European Union spent €204 billion on defence in 2006, and they had almost 2 million people on active service in their armed forces. They have plenty of military assets upon which to draw for operations.

But of course, Europe is not one country. It's true that almost all operations are multinational, and the steady demand for multinational forces to deal with crises around the world will provide substantial common drivers for change. But it is very important to remember that all defence budgets are national, and all the important decisions are made by individual national governments, and this is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future. So it makes no sense to consider Europe's capabilities as a whole. You have to look at each country. And the key for each nation is to have military capabilities that match its distinct perception of modern needs and the role it wishes to play in the world. Each nation will continue to have a sovereign set of defence priorities. So if you're looking at European capabilities, it's a jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces are going to remain separate. Any European capacity for action, whether it is organised through NATO, the EU or a coalition of the willing, is based and will continue to be based on national building blocks.

If the main purpose of Europe's armed forces is to take part in operations, then European countries must have usable armed forces. The uses to which they are put will vary enormously, from providing humanitarian assistance to undertaking combat operations, as in Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, European countries require a very wide range of capabilities, some of which are still quite new. The driving need is to create forces with the right mix of skills, training, equipment, doctrine and support systems, as well as being able to deploy rapidly far afield and be sustained over extended periods of time. The ability to carry out functions that are not strictly military, such as overseeing reconstruction in Afghanistan, may determine success or failure just as much as the execution of military roles – although we must always remember that the potential for armed forces to influence a situation derives from their ability to bring lethal force to bear.

All of this leaves plenty of scope for debate about the correct size and equipment of each nation's armed forces, and

what precisely they should be trained to do. Some countries will be far more ambitious than others. At one extreme, large countries such as France and the United Kingdom can aspire to capabilities that individually give them strategic influence, as well as tactical and operational weight. At the other end of the spectrum, decisions on capabilities by smaller countries will be a function partly of the national threat perceived and partly of the degree of desire to play a role as a member – or aspiring member – of the EU or NATO. There are 41 countries covered in this dossier, and even though they tend to participate in the same or similar operations, they will always differ greatly in terms of capabilities and goals.

So what have we concluded? Before summarising our main recommendations, it's worth making a point about the dossier itself. As already mentioned, the question of how one should assess capabilities in the modern context has become a pressing issue. It was clear from the meetings we held as part of this project that we needed to go beyond traditional quantitative measures. One of our purposes was therefore to try to establish some useful yardsticks for analysis. These are to be found in the dossier's chapters. They include:

- defence reforms undertaken in each country and the levels of military ambition they set as targets in their defence policies;
- analysis of Europe's defence industry and technology base, since a key element of a nation's capability is its access to a supplier base and to technologies;
- nations' track records on deployments, their rapid-reaction commitments, and participation in multinational exercises; and
- the constitutional and legal processes each country has to go through before deploying armed force.

What you won't find in this dossier is a catalogue of capability gaps of the kind that NATO and the EU regularly compile. There seemed little point in replicating their efforts. Nor will you find a threat assessment, which as stated will differ from country to country.

What progress has been made? How close are Europe's military capabilities to meeting the demands of today and tomorrow? The evidence we present shows clearly that European countries are making advances in shaping their armed forces for multinational operations. Each country has given thought to the level and nature of activity that it is willing to undertake as part of efforts to shore up international security in the face of diverse and far-flung threats. All European countries have made, and continue to make, serious efforts to restructure their militaries to make them better fitted for modern tasks, albeit with reduced defence budgets. Countries

value for money, in the modern day it is really the only means of delivering large-scale capabilities. Without it, governments duplicate their efforts and spend money wastefully. If there were better coordination on equipment requirements, the industrial supplier base in Europe could structure itself more effectively. Because demand is fragmented, the supplier base is also fragmented – and there's ample evidence of this in tables we produce in the dossier.

Fifth, an important element of effectiveness in dealing with international threats is the ability to deploy military force rapidly – ideally to prevent a minor problem from becoming a larger, long-term crisis. Both NATO and the EU have developed new rapid-reaction capabilities in recent years. We believe it's important that these capacities are used for the purpose intended: as a capability for international crisis-management operations that is available at short notice and can be deployed for a limited period of time across the spectrum of tasks, including on high-intensity operations. There is a lot of demand for international deployments, and you cannot, as it were, wait for the perfect crisis for a deployment. If the NATO Response Force and EU battlegroups are not used, the pledges that countries have made to them – which we detail in this dossier – will be increasingly open to question. These forces promise to increase Europe's strategic influence – but only if they are demonstrated to be real.

Sixth, perhaps the most important determinant of a country's military capabilities is its willingness to use them. That requires political will, which of course cannot be precisely measured and can change. All countries have constitutional and legal processes that govern the use of armed forces, and these are spelled out in this dossier. This raises the sensitive issue of caveats – government restrictions on military activities – which have been very controversial especially in Afghanistan. There is no question that the cohesiveness and effectiveness of a multinational force can be undermined if risks and burdens are not shared equitably. But we also have to recognise that among sovereign states – particularly democracies – there will be differences of view about the diagnosis of, and solutions to, international problems. Sometimes, caveats may be the price that has to be paid in order to obtain commitments of forces. The ability to impose constraints provides governments with sovereign control over the forces they send into action. This control is necessary to achieve a domestic political consensus in support of a deployment. Even commanders from countries claiming to have no caveats must consider the possible domestic reactions to what they do. The best means to overcome this problem will be to develop, to the greatest extent possible, a common vision of challenges and solutions, and the building of greater mutual trust.

Finally, we feel it's very important that European countries should use more effectively the organisational tools they have available to them. The countries covered in this dossier are all members of the EU, NATO or NATO's Partnership for Peace programme. We take the view that in the modern age NATO and the defence arms of the EU are simply instruments through which countries, if they wish to, can pool their efforts. Viewing them in this way leaves behind the baggage of the Cold War and a more ideological view of NATO. It is simply up to political leaders to choose the most appropriate tool to undertake a particular mission. Both are available, and both are useful. NATO and the EU have 21 members in common. These states, whose taxpayers are burdened with the costs of dual membership, should act to align the two organisations' force development and mission-planning processes, and to ensure closer communication and discourage any rivalry.

How then should Europe move forward? Two countries stand out as strategic powers, capable of significant individual action. The policy orientations of the United Kingdom and France will, above all else, determine Europe's ability to have strong and coherent capabilities in the future. Just as they launched the EU into the defence realm with their 1998 St Malo accord, they have it within their power strongly to influence Europe's future choices. President Sarkozy of France has made it clear that he wishes to reinvigorate EU defence efforts. In the recent White Paper, France said it would encourage EU members to set more ambitious targets for intervention capabilities, along the lines of the original EU Headline Goals. Sarkozy believes a renewed impetus is necessary for Europe to be able to discharge its responsibilities for international peace and stability. He has indicated that he would like to return France to the NATO integrated command structure, and equally that he wants the EU to have an enhanced ability to plan and conduct autonomous operations. While the moves proposed by President Sarkozy have the potential to increase European capabilities, care needs to be taken to avoid wasteful duplication and to ensure the closest possible coordination between NATO and the EU. Progress will depend on how other countries – particularly the United Kingdom – respond to new French initiatives. It's notable that Britain has given a general welcome to Sarkozy's approach, and that the United States now argues that the world needs a stronger Europe, with a strong European Security and Defence Policy. Thus, the debate's ideological overtones seem to be diminishing.

With Franco-British impetus, European countries could develop capabilities that would enable Europe to play an effective role in addressing international crises, at good value to the taxpayer. Without it, progress towards this goal is likely to remain heavily qualified.