



TEPSA BRIEF

Libya: A wakeup call for CSDP?

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Summary

In the past couple of years, there has been recurrent talk of 'CSDP fatigue'. In the wake of the Libyan crisis, some even declared the death of the CSDP. Current developments indicate that the CSDP is not dead, although the Libyan crisis highlighted some of its existing flaws. These flaws include the lengthy and cumbersome planning process, the continued reticence of the Member States to use the EU's rapid reaction instruments, internal coordination problems and military capability gaps. The on-going lessons learnt processes should be seen as an opportunity to tackle some of these weaknesses and to circumvent existing obstacles. This brief proposes measures to:

- (1) increase the EU's capacity for comprehensive, timely, and rapid planning;
- (2) encourage a more proactive use of the EU's rapid reaction instruments;
- (3) learn the lessons for internal coordination; and
- (4) 'get real' about pooling and sharing military capabilities.

If the EU misses this opportunity, there is a real risk that the CSDP will go back to sleep.

1. Background

The fact that only one new CSDP operation had been launched since 2008 was seen as an indicator of what some policymakers and academics called 'CSDP fatigue'. Other indicators were the steady decrease in net European defence spending fuelled by the financial, economic, and debt crisis and the reluctance of the EU Member States to discuss the defence-related innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. In the wake of the Libyan crisis, 'CSDP fatigue' gave way to 'hibernation'. Some diplomats even declared the death of the CSDP. The reason for this change in tone was the combination of high expectations on the one hand and the EU's failure to 'deliver' on the other. As Libya was the first major security-related crisis after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty the expectations for a more active, more coherent, and more effective European foreign policy were at a peak. Nevertheless, the CSDP went 'missing in action'. The EU decided on operation EUFOR Libya, a military operation to support the delivery of humanitarian assistance. But the required call by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs never came. Operation EUFOR Libya was never deployed.

One year after the outbreak of the Libyan crisis, some diplomats and academics argue that it was actually a wake-up call for the CSDP. It triggered a renewed debate on lessons learnt within the EU's broader crisis management structures. This new impetus for learning lessons is reflected in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on CSDP of 1 December 2011, which strongly emphasised the need for progress in CSDP. The Council stressed the importance of learning lessons and developing best practices, singled out areas in need of improvement and set clear deadlines for progress reports.

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2. State of play

So which lessons can be identified from the Libyan crisis? And where does the EU stand in the learning process? While there are certainly many lessons the EU could draw from the Libyan crisis this brief focuses on four areas: planning, rapid reaction instruments, internal coordination, and capabilities.

Planning

The outbreak of violence in Libya in February 2011 came as a surprise and called for a quick and decisive European response. However, representatives from the EU Member States bemoaned the lengthy and cumbersome planning process leading up to EUFOR Libya, an operation that did not make it off the ground. One of the obstacles to rapid planning is that the EU cannot undertake advance planning for future contingencies. Unlike NATO, the EU does not have permanent planning structures. In the Libyan case, the practical implications of that could be seen: NATO had prepared four potential operational plans within two weeks after the outbreak of the crisis. Meanwhile, it took the EU over two months to reach the same planning stage.

At its meeting on 1 December 2011, the Council identified the need for a significant improvement in the EU's performance in planning and conducting civilian and military CSDP operations. Previously, such considerations were tightly linked to the debate on a permanent civil-military EU Headquarters. A corresponding proposal had been tabled by the French, German and Polish foreign ministers in April 2010 ('Weimar Initiative'). However, the initiative, later joined by Italy and Spain, was categorically rejected by the United Kingdom. Reflecting this political reality, the Council Conclusions of 1 December 2011 called for the "optimal use of the existing structures". It was agreed to enable the EU Military Staff and the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate to do more effective advanced planning with the aim to speed up decision-making at the political level. How this would be done in practice was not specified.

The Council also decided on a revision of the crisis management procedures dating from 2003. The aim of the revision is to streamline and shorten the planning process, to enhance synergies between civilian and military planning and to adapt them to the post-Lisbon institutional structure. Sounding rather technical, the revision of the crisis management procedures is actually politically very sensitive. The different stakeholders in the planning process are wary of losing influence. Shortening the planning process would entail skipping single steps in the process or making them shorter. Skipping steps like the military strategic advice leads to resistance in the EU military bodies that want to preserve their autonomous voice in the planning process. Smaller Member States with smaller planning teams fear that they would be side-lined in the planning process if single steps in the process were shortened. And if Member States feel that they are losing ownership of the planning process, they might be more reluctant to contribute resources and personnel at a later stage. Furthermore, the aim to increase synergies between the military and the EU's various civilian instruments might well introduce additional steps in the planning process rather than shorten it.

Rapid reaction instruments

In the course of the development of the CSDP, the EU has created civilian and military rapid reaction instruments. On the civilian side, the EU developed the Civilian Response Teams. These are multifunctional civilian crisis management 'packages' consisting of readily deployable experts from the Member States and the EU institutions. On the military side, the EU created so-called 'Battlegroups', units of around 1 500 troops, often based on contributions from a coalition Member States. The Battlegroups rotate on a bi-annual basis so that two are readily deployable (within five to ten days) at all times. The use of these rapid reaction instruments had been discussed on several occasions in the past. But these discussions tended to stall due to the political resistance of one or more Member States.



The Libyan crisis was another example where the EU did not make use of its rapid reaction instruments. In the framework of EUFOR Libya the deployment of Battlegroups was considered. However, this consideration met with reticence on the part of key contributors to the Battlegroups then on stand-by: Sweden and Finland were wary of blurring the lines between the military and humanitarian spheres; the Netherlands pointed to budgetary constraints; and Germany's contribution would have depended on a parliamentary vote. In the light of these constraints the deployment of a single coherent Battlegroup seemed unlikely. There were also considerations to mobilise the Civilian Response Teams to assess potential options for post-conflict Libya. In the end, only individual experts from this pool joined the EU's assessment teams.

In its conclusions of 1 December 2011, the Council underlined the importance of further developing the EU's rapid reaction instruments. It announced the enhanced use of the Civilian Response Teams and stressed the importance of facilitating the use of Battlegroups in CSDP operations. To this end, the Council encouraged further work on the Battlegroups and invited High Representative Catherine Ashton to present concrete results in the course of the first semester of 2012. However, the debate on the Battlegroups remains controversial. A key obstacle to the use of Battlegroups is the high cost of their deployment, especially for transport, carried by the Member States on stand-by. But the fact that the Battlegroups remain unused also leads to frustration among some Member States. In this context, politicians tend to cite the motto 'use it or lose it'. It seems paradoxical that the EU often faces long and difficult force generation processes even though it has readily deployable contingents on stand-by. The fact that no Battlegroup is on stand-by for the first semester of 2012 may be an indicator of this frustration.

Internal coordination

The Libyan crisis was a first test for post-Lisbon crisis management coordination. One of the new coordination instruments is the Crisis Platform. The Platform brings together the various crisis management bodies within the European External Action Service (EEAS) as well as relevant European Commission services. It was convened on a regular basis from March to October 2011 to ensure a coherent EU response to the Libyan crisis.

EEAS officials confirmed that the Platform was very useful in the Libyan crisis. It brought the relevant players from the EU's crisis management structures together and facilitated the design of a comprehensive crisis response. However, there were some problems regarding the delineation of competences and responsibilities between these different actors. There were questions regarding the scope of the leadership of the new Department for Crisis Response within the EEAS. Furthermore, there were coordination problems between the EEAS Department for Crisis Response and the Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection. In short, it was not yet clear how the old and new actors in EU crisis management should interact.

Capabilities

The Libyan crisis was yet another example for the gaping transatlantic capability rift. The Europeans, mainly France and the United Kingdom, were at the forefront of NATO's Libya intervention. However, they soon ran short of smart munitions. Other capability gaps included air-to-air refuelling, satellite observation, aircraft carriers, and surveillance and reconnaissance resources. Approximately 90 % of the military actions against the Libyan regime would not have been possible without the support of the US. These capability shortfalls are not surprising considering the steady decline in net European defence spending and the high levels of intra-European duplication. On 1 December 2011, the Council decided, the EU needs to "do better with less". The idea is to make up for the defence budget cuts and to avoid duplication by 'pooling and sharing' military capabilities. In November 2011, the Member States committed to concrete projects facilitated by the European Defence Agency. These initiatives cover some of the weaknesses uncovered by the Libyan crisis, such as air-to-air refuelling, satellite communications, and surveillance and reconnaissance.



However, the idea of pooling and sharing capabilities is not new and a certain reticence among the Member States persists. They fear a loss of independence and sovereignty. If capabilities are pooled or shared, the political consent of other Member States might be needed before using them. Furthermore, national militaries often see pooling and sharing as an excuse for further defence budget cuts. In any case, the current pooling and sharing initiatives are not sufficient to make up for the budgetary cuts in the medium to long-term.

3. Recommendations

One of the more general lessons from the Libyan crisis is that the EU lacks the capacities and the political unity to take on robust military crisis management. Libya indicates that the future of the CSDP lies in lower-intensity crisis management. The other general lesson of the Libyan crisis emphasised both by EU and NATO decision-makers is the importance of taking forward the so-called 'comprehensive approach' to crisis management combining military, political, and economic instruments. The EU claims that its ability to bring together its various civilian and military instruments constitutes its main added value in the international division of labour in crisis management. Against this backdrop and based on the above overview, four recommendations for the post-Libya lesson learning process can be made:

A. Increase the EU's capacity for comprehensive, timely, and rapid planning

In order to enhance the EU's capacity for advance planning within the existing structures, the EU could increase the number of permanent planning staff in the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate and the EU Military Staff. A moderate increase of both civilian and military planning staff would add substance to the comprehensive approach. It would increase the institutional memory and continuity at the level of strategic planning and enhance the EU's ability to provide a timely crisis response.

In reviewing the crisis management procedures, a careful balance will have to be struck between the speed and the inclusiveness of the planning process. In order to streamline and shorten the planning process, political compromises will have to be found. One option would be to compensate certain actors for a potential loss of influence by providing for more inclusiveness early on in the planning process. In the Libyan crisis, national military representatives complained the military was not involved in the early planning stages. Paradoxically, civilians tend to perceive the early planning stages as being dominated by the military. In order to overcome these dividing lines, the EU should encourage more joint assessment. An inclusive assessment of the situation and of the various options for engagement could set the stage for a more comprehensive and coherent crisis response.

B. Foster a more proactive use of the EU' rapid reaction instruments

The Civilian Response Teams draw on a pool of carefully pre-selected civilian experts. So far, this expertise was rarely used. The EU could draw on this pool of experts for advance planning in the civilian field. The trend moves increasingly towards civilian CSDP missions, combining different elements such as rule of law and Security Sector Reform. A higher degree of preparedness in these fields would facilitate rapid reaction and might foster political consensus.

A more proactive use of the Battlegroups could be facilitated by a moderate increase of the common costs – especially in the fields of transport and logistics. The on-going review of the Athena mechanism for the financing of military operations provides an opportunity in this regard. But even if the share of the common costs were to increase, the deployment of Battlegroups will remain politically controversial. As seen in the Libyan crisis, the Member States have diverging views and priorities when it comes to the use of force.

Another option would thus be to allow for more flexibility in the use of Battlegroups. This could entail using Battlegroups as a strategic reserve or using parts of them for specific tasks. Consideration could also be given to the specialisation of one of the Battlegroups in niche capabilities



or capabilities suited to low-intensity conflicts requiring a combined civil-military response. This would be in line with the Council's call for enhanced member state cooperation on niche capabilities and/or increased possibilities for the interaction of the Battlegroups with civilian actors.

C. Learn the lessons for coherent internal coordination

Smooth internal coordination is an important pre-condition for a coherent and effective implementation of the comprehensive approach. Therefore, lessons regarding internal coordination during the Libyan crisis should be compiled with those arising from other crises, as well as from the first crisis management exercise (CME 11) carried out under the EEAS. A systematic analysis of these lessons could lead to (1) a clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities; and (2) better coordination processes within the EEAS and with the relevant Commission services.

D. 'Get real' about pooling and sharing

The success of NATO's Libya intervention was dependent on US military backup. But in his farewell speech in June 2011, outgoing US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates left no doubts about the US's dwindling appetite to deal with crises in the EU's 'backyard'. Against this backdrop, the EU would do well to sharpen the edge of the comprehensive approach by filling some of its capability gaps. Pooling and sharing may be the new buzzwords in capability development, but as the Council noted on 1 December 2011, concrete progress in the implementation of pooling and sharing requires a "continuous political impetus and a change of mindset". The political impetus needs to come from above. The Heads of State should yield continuous political support to the pooling and sharing initiatives presented by the European Defence Agency in November 2011. Furthermore, they could define a common agenda for future pooling and sharing initiatives, while ensuring synergies and avoiding duplication with NATO initiatives. The NATO Chicago Summit in May 2012 would be a good opportunity to present this agenda.

As a change of mindsets might be slow in the making, these initiatives should be complemented by bilateral or intergovernmental pooling and sharing initiatives. The Nordic Defence Cooperation or the Franco-British defence pact indicate that the Member States are more likely to pool or share key capabilities if there is a common vision on the use of these capabilities.

4. Conclusion

The CSDP did not die a death over Libya. It even seems like there is a will to wake it up. At the Council meeting in December 2011, the Heads of State clearly expressed their determination to take the CSDP forward. They announced new CSDP missions in the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Libya and the Sahel region. They even agreed to activate one of the EU's unused tools, the Operations Centre, for the command of the new capacity-building mission in the Horn of Africa. It is the first time in the history of the CSDP that the command of a mission is entrusted neither to a national Headquarters nor to NATO's planning structures, but will be exercised from within the EU's crisis management structures.

However, the Libyan crisis highlighted some of the traditional weaknesses of the CSDP. It was exemplary of the EU's cumbersome and lengthy planning process; it revealed the sensitivities surrounding the use of the EU's rapid reaction instruments; it highlighted some of the existing capability gaps; and it gave rise to new internal coordination challenges. Some of the lessons that could be drawn from the Libyan crisis have previously been identified. But old obstacles to their implementation remain. The EU's crisis management bodies are currently in the process of compiling and analysing the lessons from Libya. This process should be taken as an opportunity to sharpen the comprehensive profile of the CSDP and to tackle some of these old obstacles. If this opportunity is missed, there is a real risk that the CSDP will go back to sleep.

