NATO/CSDP: Competitors or Partners? Overview of the Relations between These Two Security Actors

Academic Essay

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Abstract: This essay provides an overview of the relations between NATO and CSDP from the creation of ESDP (CSDP since 2009) to the current challenges faced by both actors. If the cooperation began with suspicion and with slowness because of the time taken to define their respective tasks and the way they will cooperate, it seems that the new external threats undergone by these security actors allowed them to find common ground. Eventually, the irregularity of their relationship will be analysed to understand why alternative actors emerged to ensure their own security.

Keywords: NATO/EU/Competitors/Partners/Security

Introduction

When evoking the connection between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Security and Defence Policy, one can immediately think about the famous comparison made by American historian Robert Kagan: "Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus" (Kagan, 2003: 3). But there is no denying that if it would be totally true and

so if both organisations had very distinct roles and approaches regarding the way to conduct security operations, there would not be so much literature about the relationship between NATO and CSDP.

In fact, taking a look at the websites of these institutions and how they describe themselves, we can perceive an ambiguity regarding their missions which seem to overlap. Indeed, NATO established in 1949 – [whose] "essential purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means" (NATO website, 2017) – and ESDP (now CSDP) established in 1999 – which "enables the Union to take a leading role in peace-keeping operations, conflict prevention and in the strengthening of the international security" (CSDP website, 2017) – seem to have common goals even if they do not necessarily have the same strategies to achieve them (Flockhart, 2011).

Moreover, their relationship is even more complicated by their respective membership: "each body consists of 28 different members, with 22 of those members belonging to both organisations" (Ricci, 2014). Thus, it implies some additional concerns to take into account, things like how to deal with European members who are not in NATO structure and vice versa, how to build partnerships while taking in account the allies and enemies of everyone?

This essay will analyse the relationship between NATO and CSDP overtime: Do they have to be regarded like competitors fighting for the main role of security actor or rather like partners who want to achieve the same goals even if they do so through different paths? Does their relationship as it is today provide enough efficiency? How can it be improved?

First it will be seen that despite the usual difference made between NATO and CSDP as coming from Mars and Venus (Kagan) or as Tarzan and Jane (Flockhart), both organisations have actually the same goals so the creation of ESDP has generated some suspicions from the American side in its beginnings, pushing NATO to assert its predominance as the main security actor. However, this situation of mistrust did not last a long time as new threats came out and pushed both organisations to come together from Afghanistan to Libya's interventions. Eventually, it will be understood that despite the improvement of the relationship between NATO and CSDP during hard times, there is still a feeling of mistrust coming from time to time, especially from the American side, and the confusion of roles and means to achieve it provokes a general lack of efficiency regarding the challenges faced today so alternative actors start to rise.

Confused beginnings between suspicion and search for clear definitions: NATO and EU as potential competitors

Paradoxically enough, once the United States and European states have reached their goal through the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the transatlantic link weakened as if the lack of external threats pushed both sides to have more time to think about their differences than about their similarities. Indeed, "after the collapse of Soviet Union […] since American and Europeans have different moods, psychologies and material resources, the post-Cold War era has witnessed (and will witness) a profound rift in the alliance between Americans and Europeans"(Gurcan, 2013: 106). In this context, it not surprising that the United States have perceived the creation of the European Security and Defence Policy as a potential attempt from the Europeans to establish a rival organisation to NATO.

First, to understand the concerns coming from the American side it is necessary to understand that contrary to what have been suggested several times, NATO and ESDP have not fundamentally different goals with NATO assuming a strictly hard power whereas ESDP would take care of everything related to soft power because both aim at acting on these two areas:

> "NATO is seen as a defence alliance or military power', suggesting that the EU has a soft and feminine 'Jane role' whereas NATO has a hard and masculine 'Tarzan role'. Although this role division between the two European organisations may at first sight seem compelling, and certainly in line with Robert Kagan's characterization as Europe being from Venus and America from Mars (Kagan, 2003), in reality both organisations have always been engaged simultaneously in 'soft' norm promotion and have shared a concern for 'hard' security issues" (Flockhart,2011: 263).

Thus, noticing the fact that both organisations aim at achieving the same goals, it can be easily understood that the creation of ESDP could have been perceived as an attempt to balance – as Robert Art and Barry Posen argue- more than an attempt to share the burden because the same goals could have been achieved through a unique structure that is NATO. Consequently, to be sure that the new European defence structure will respect the already

existing commitments between NATO and European States, a solution has been found through the NATO Summit held in Berlin in 1996:

> "Known as the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept, it was based on the idea of «divisible, but not divided» forces: some structures and units belonging to NATO, but staffed by European personnel were to be earmarked for use by the EU to respond to crisis' which did not concern NATO. This created a two-tier system in which NATO had the first option to respond to a crisis" (Ricci, 2014).

In this way, NATO assured its predominance and the position of the United States towards ESDP was even more clearly expressed through an interview given in 1998 by the former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to the Financial Times where she stated the theory of the "three D's":

> "First, we want to avoid decoupling: NATO is the expression of the indispensable transatlantic link. It should remain an organization of sovereign allies, where European decision-making is not unhooked from broader alliance decision-making. Second, we want to avoid duplication: defence resources are too scarce for allies to conduct force planning, operate command structures, and make procurement decisions twice (once at NATO and once more at the EU). And third, we want to avoid any discrimination against NATO members who are not EU members." (Gurcan, 2013: 120)

But if both organisations have common goals do they have the same strategy to achieve them?

If one could expect to find similarities between the Americans and Europeans in terms of security concerns thanks to their common position in conflicts in the past, a lot of differences in terms of approaching conflicts can be found between the two actors. The first difference is their *raison d' être:*

> "NATO arose and persisted for forty years because of a single, massive, systemic and existential military threat not just to Western Europe but also to 'the West' in general which required an overwhelming military response. ESDP arose because of the re-emergence across the European space (and beyond) of a

range of destabilizing risks and threats that required, above all, political management [...] because of the gradual disengagement of the US from the European theatre, no longer seen as strategically central, in favour of a major concentration on other parts of the globe (Asia, Middle East)" (Howorth, 2009: 195).

Their institutional approach is also different as underlined by Flockhart who uses expressions held by Ikenberry in 2001: "NATO has from the very beginning largely been located within the containment order framework, whilst the EU has been located within the institutional order framework" (Flockhart, 2011: 266). In other words and still according to this author, whereas the United States through NATO is in a logic opposing itself as the "free world" to all other concrete threats such as the Soviet Union, the European Union through ESDP regarded itself through the diversity of ideas of all its members and without naming a particular enemy (Flockhart, 2011).

New threats as opportunities to find a common ground: NATO and EU becoming real partners

If the end of the Cold War weakened the transatlantic link and the creation of ESDP has been accepted by United States but integrated in NATO's pattern through a kind of dependence to this former organisation, the return of external threats helped both organisations to get closer to address these issues with one voice and this especially because ESDP in its beginnings was not ready yet to face the security challenges on its own.

Indeed, the rapid emergence of new threats prevented ESDP from developing all its capabilities properly and especially its hard power but it provided economic and political support. Consequently, we can think that it is when NATO takes responsibility for hard power and ESDP for soft power that the relationships between the two organizations seem calm. "At the initial phase of the Afghanistan War, economically, the EU took the lead on the humanitarian mission, becoming the second largest donor to the humanitarian aid and economic development in Afghanistan after the US" (Gurcan, 2013: 126). In Iraq also (2003), the Europeans – more because of political motives than because of means - showed reluctance to involve militarily. During the conflict between Russia and Georgia (2008), ESDP proved its

"normative power": "For Florent Parmentier, similarly, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War conflict proved to be a useful case in order to realize the functioning of the EU as a normative power in times of crisis"(Gurcan, 2013: 132). Still according to this author, it is mainly because actions between European members were not coordinated that ESDP did not succeed in the hard power aspect in Libya.

In fact, if ESDP was able to provide economic and humanitarian support most of the time, it failed to provide military capabilities, at the beginning because of the lack of means but afterwards – like in the case of Libya – because of the lack of political will:

> "For Koeing, who analyzes the horizontal, vertical, interinstitutional, and multilateral dimensions of EU coherence in the Libya crisis, asserts that unilateral actions or inactions of the member states mainly account for the EU's confused response. Similarly important, she suggests that the post-Lisbon institutional structure has done little to recompense for these internal divisions" (Gurcan, 2013: 133).

However, the non-military aspect of EU has to be balanced as The Berlin Plus agreement (2003) helped the EU to launch its own military operations : "The conclusion of the Berlin Plus agreement facilitated the launch of the EU's first-ever military operation, Operation Concordia, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) in December 2003. EUFOR Althea, the military operation launched in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2004, was the second military CSDP operation carried out within the wider framework of Berlin Plus" (EEAS website, 2017).

There is no denying that in order to use its full potential, ESDP – actually CSDP since 2009 - has to be less intergovernmental, a hard task to accomplish knowing that member states never wanted to share the defence competence with the European Union and keeping it as a "parallel competence" allowing them to put veto on every decision they want in this area.

An irregular relationship leading to an altered efficiency: emergence of alternative actors and clues to improve NATO and CSDP effectiveness

If relationships between NATO and CSDP got better through the return of external threats, the United States are still showing some suspicion: "It was this equivocation which had led George Robertson to suggest earlier in the year that the US suffered 'from a sort of Schizophrenia' where European defence was concerned" (Cornish, Edwards, 2001: 592). This

irregular consideration between the two organisations did not allow them to use their potential at their best and this provoked the rise of alternative groups willing to take care of defence concerns.

In fact, some countries belonging to one organization do not show the will to belong to the other automatically. This is the case for example of countries like Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden that are members of the European Union and so of CSDP but not of NATO:

> "Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden are countries which have adopted a strict position of neutrality when it comes to armed conflicts. However, despite their neutrality, these countries (especially Sweden) also have a long tradition of conducting peacekeeping operations under the flag of the United Nations." (Ricci, 2014)

But even more than trusting another organisation when it comes to armed conflicts, some states that noticed the lack of efficiency of the CSDP/NATO partnership decided to build other alternatives as it was the case with the Visegrad Group: "It is worth mentioning that after seeing the incompetency of the EU and NATO to prevent the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary formed an alliance named the Visegrad Group, or V4" (Gurcan, 2013: 132). This probably shows the necessity for both organisations to stop thinking about the nature of their relationship and instead focus on the best ways to cooperate for the sake of successful security operations. However, Gurcan's point of view can be criticised when we look closer at the reasons behind the creation of the Visegrad Group. Indeed, the establishment of this structure did not seem motivated by a lack of competency of EU and NATO but rather by a will to get these countries closer because they had the same issues to tackle: " the desire to eliminate the remnants of the communist bloc in Central Europe; the desire to overcome historic animosities between Central European countries; the belief that through joint efforts it will be easier to achieve the set goals, i.e. to successfully accomplish social transformation and join in the European integration process; and the proximity of ideas of the then ruling political elites" (Visegrad group website, 2017).

Several solutions are suggested to improve the relationship and especially consistency between CSDP and NATO. Some like the British labour party politician Desmond Browne suggested efforts coming from both structures:

"Both NATO and the EU need to reinvigorate their internal processes to make them better suited to the demands of the 21st century. In the case of NATO this means delivering the Comprehensive Political Guidance. This will require adapting both the Brussels HQ and the military command structure, but also the underlying culture and processes to make them fit for the demands the Alliance now faces. For the EU it means ensuring that Europe truly can deliver a coherent effect, across its pillars, and work with other players to achieve the effective multilateralism called for by the European Security Strategy" (Browne, 2007: 13-14).

Others focus on a particular effort of the member states of the European Union to give more means to CSDP and have more flexibility by softening the intergovernmental aspect of this structure and by cooperating fully with NATO, something already mentioned in 2001 by some authors:

"There needs to be wholehearted, unambiguous European adherence to acting only "where NATO as a whole is not engaged [...] There needs to be reaffirmation of the cardinal NATO principle that risks are to be shared by all allies and that there must not emerge, formally or informally, a "division of labor" between NATO and EU/ESDP[...]European governments need to commit themselves to keep defense spending up or, where it is falling, stop the slide. The European allies should avoid duplicating those NATO assets that would be available to the EU (through the ESDP) where these divert defense moneys away from other critical areas" (Hunter, 2001: 18-20).

Conclusion

It could be noticed that the relationship between NATO and CSDP was a reflection of the transatlantic link: strong when common external threats are rising, this link tends to weaken when international relations are quite peaceful.

At the beginning, ESDP has been perceived suspiciously by the United States, fearing that this new structure with the same goals wanted to balance NATO instead of sharing the burden. However, a compromise has been found in Berlin in 1996 so NATO could be reassured by asserting once again its predominance as the main security actor, something that was eventually needed because ESDP was not ready to face heavy military challenges at the

beginning of the 21st century or was ready to face it but still through NATO's help and the measures agreed in the Berlin Plus Agreement (2003).

Nevertheless, the irregularity of this relationship in function of the international context and the persistence of institutional and political confusions pushed some states to be independent of these structures or even to build an alternative solution as it was the case with the Visegrad Group. Consequently, the question now is no more are CSDP and NATO more partners or rivals but rather, whatever their relationship, how can they find practical solutions to get back credibility and to guarantee the efficiency of their interventions as growing threats such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction currently jeopardize the Western tranquillity ? If both organisations do not make these efforts it is likely that the situation will stay the same as already predicted 14 years ago: "The US fights, the UN feeds and the EU funds" (Winn, 2003: 151).

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