

New Roles of the Military

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Among the exogenous variables that influence the definition of the missions of the armed forces in general, three are especially important: the level of economic development of the society as a whole, the existing technology and the overall strategic environment. These three variables taken together determine the way in which the missions of the armed forces are formulated, and inherently its force structure and educational system. Let's examine the major transformations of these variables.

First, economies are experiencing what some call the third industrial revolution. The rhythm of technological innovations is more rapid and product life cycles ever shorter. At the same time, the economy is becoming global. The old national markets are disappearing and are being replaced by a global market dominated by transnational organisations. These organisations are structured in such a way that national boundaries disappear. This evolution generates a perception of global economic interdependence: events or decisions taken in one part of the world generate effects in other parts of the world and are of concern for industrialised countries, which are more inclined to play a regional or global role.

Second, modern armies are organisations using very complex technologies. In fact, in the beginning of the new century, the sheer critical mass of technological novelties, as part of the third industrial wave based on the generation, processing and dissemination of information, has allowed some observers to speak of a "revolution in military affairs". Though designed to be user-friendly and easy to operate by non-specialists, new high-tech weapons also generate new layers of complexity for those in charge of logistics, doctrine, co-ordination, command and control. They entail higher development, production and maintenance costs, as well as a need for educational sophistication and training among commissioned and non-commissioned officers.

Third, the changing strategic environment. Since for the military, this exogenous variable is the most important, we will elaborate this issue more extensively.

The post-Cold War environment, and the threats to interests and forces that it contains, is much more diverse and unpredictable than hitherto. There is no comprehensive and agreed threat analysis for the new world situation, but it is clear that the further one attempts to look ahead, the greater the diversity and unpredictability. It is tempting to look at near and long-term trends apart, but actually the evolutionary process is a continuous one. Moreover, the time scales for particular trends are themselves often unpredictable, and new threats could emerge with unexpected rapidity.

The re-emergence of a global peer competitor to the Western countries brought together in NATO, is unlikely before at least 2020. Nonetheless, a number of countries hold the potential to increase significantly their strategic and military reach

over the next 20 or 30 years. Regional peer competitors could also emerge. The regional peers would not present problems of a global nature, but could have the potential to mount major challenges in niche areas of military capability or within their own geographic sphere. Regional competitors whose regimes operate outside the bounds of international norms, possibly combining hostility to the regional status-quo, attempted acquisition of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and support for terrorist and criminal activity, will arguably present the most serious threats to Western interests in the absence of a peer global competitor.

Significant sources of instability and conflict will continue to exist, and potentially grow, both in Europe and other places. These sources of instability include expanding populations containing a large proportion of disaffected youth, ethnic, racial and religious tensions, competition for resources such as water, oil, food, and strategic metals, and the increasing power of non-state actors. Many disaffected youth are ending up in urban environments. In the year 2000, the world contained more than 400 cities having over one million inhabitants, with 260 of these cities located in the developing world. These urban areas provide fertile breeding grounds for terrorist and criminal groups in their search for new recruits. The distinction between political or criminal motivation behind non-state threats is becoming increasingly blurred, as terrorist groups, drug traffickers and other criminal elements have been establishing strong links with each other.

Many sources of instability are domestic in nature, but due to globalisation and economic and political interdependence, states will often find it difficult to ignore the conflicts that result from them. Foreign adventures as a response to internal difficulties have been a long-standing phenomenon. Moreover, domestic strife can often spill over into neighbouring states and regions. Refugees and economic migrants are an increasing by-product of such problems. Demographic, economic and environmental trends all mean that "failed states" are likely to remain an important feature of the international environment. The erosion of the authority and autonomy of the nation state seems to be an enduring phenomenon, with implications both for the origins of conflicts and the way in which governments can respond to them.

This has had an important influence on the redefinition of the roles of (what is commonly accepted as) the post-modern military. The role played by the military has diversified and expanded into fields not normally associated with the armed forces during the Cold War era. In general, many consider that the main mission of post-modern armed forces is no longer to deter a known adversary and thus preserving the territorial integrity of their respective states. The main mission is to maintain or enforce peace in regions where interests are in jeopardy and humanitarian values are violated. These new missions are of a constabulary nature. Nevertheless, while the possibility of a major regional conflict or a dramatic unforeseeable change in the geostrategic landscape can never be excluded, it remains however essential that credible and cohesive forces for the traditional roles are maintained.

Given their superb logistic and organisational skills, their rigorous training and ability to operate in austere environments for extended periods, it is only natural that civilian policy-makers see the military as an ideal instrument for conducting so-called non-traditional operations. Additional reasons that might be mentioned are the advances in military technology, which have made massive airlift and sealift operations possible, as well as developments in communications technology, such as world-wide television news services like CNN, which can quickly mobilise public opinion.

Nevertheless, a number of critics consider these non-traditional missions as distractions, which can better be left to non-military agencies and organisations. In their opinion, they threaten to diminish combat effectiveness and thrust the military into dangerous political realms. In the words of an outspoken opponent of non-traditional missions, loading these novel responsibilities onto the back of the armed forces could have the perverse effect of diverting focus and resources from the military's central mission of combat training and warfighting. It could also inject the military into domestic politics and civilian affairs to an unprecedented degree.

Nevertheless, the military has been used worldwide throughout history in a large variety of highly political and demanding non-combat roles, both domestically and abroad. In that respect the term 'non-traditional' is a misnomer. The historical record also suggests that the distinction between purely warfighting and strictly civilian activities has been far fuzzier than the critics of non-traditional missions have admitted.

Rather than to try to resist these missions, the armed forces should embrace them, albeit selectively. Of course, the military should not drop its commitment to preparing for war and reduce itself to an international relief agency. Applying combat power on the battlefield has been, and must remain, the primary responsibility of the armed forces. However, providing for common defence has never been limited solely to the battlefield.

So, in addition, armed forces have enhanced their capabilities to intervene militarily in areas ranging from humanitarian and traditional peacekeeping operations to crisis management, peacemaking and peacebuilding. These operations mostly do not involve vital interests, but they constitute a major challenge to armed forces, because of their high frequency and growing importance for the evolution of the international situation and the development of a world order.

Most nations are already actively facing and implementing this new and challenging role for their armed force, especially in peace support operations. The figure of the military warrior is now being coupled with that of 'guardian' of public order, stability and international law, whose action is legitimised by the defence of international law and order rather than by direct national interest. In addition to the figure of 'warrior', that of the peacekeeper, administrator and erstwhile Samaritan is becoming widely known. Some people even talk about 'military diplomats', given the assigned tasks mostly do not require a military victory to achieve a favourable political

situation. It is rather through negotiation, compromise and mediation between local warring factions that the desired political end will be achieved.

In this context, the emergence of the European Union as a military actor in crisis management is significant.

The conflict in the Balkans made clear that there was no political consensus at the time to carry out a European-led peace enforcement operation. This became the catalyst for the December 1998 British - French Summit Declaration at St. Malo in which Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Chirac made explicit that the EU should have a ... "military capacity for autonomous European actions". During the 3 - 4 June 1999 EU Council Summit in Cologne, the formal decision was taken to generate the necessary military capabilities for actually conducting autonomous European operations mandated by the Petersberg tasks. These Petersberg tasks were already defined during the WEU Summit in Petersberg, Germany, in 1992. These fell into three broad categories and included humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping operations and employment of combat forces in the context of crisis management, including peacemaking.

Following the Cologne decisions, the EU rapidly turned its attention to the issue of military capabilities. To launch this subject, the European Council at its 11-12 December 1999 meeting in Helsinki elaborated a "Headline Goal", which declared that by 2003 EU member states would be able to rapidly generate and sustain forces ... "capable of the full range of Petersberg tasks, including operations up to Corps level; (up to 15 brigades or 50-60,000 persons)". The Corps would be ready to deploy on 60 days notice, and must be able to sustain operations for up to one year.

The EU is on its way to establish an autonomous military capability to meet its Petersberg obligations. The main characteristics of these capabilities have to be deployability, mobility, and survivability under an efficient command and control system. There was also an institutional framework that was created and put in place. It provides appropriate mechanisms for consultation and decision-making for launching and conducting military operations by this intervention force.

All these elements have had an important influence on the new role and missions for the Belgian military. The new strategic plan for the modernisation of the Belgian armed forces 2000-2015 was issued one year ago. During the period 2000-2015, Belgium will reform its military organisation : fewer men, but a significantly higher and more modern level of equipment.

The future possible conflicts and threats have one common feature: they will often be asymmetric. For one party, the conflict may be of vital importance, for the other party, it may only be a threat to its prosperity. The result of this will be that the reaction of people in one country on the deployment of men and on possible victims will be completely different from that of people in another country. Our armed forces have to be capable of contributing to the control and the restriction of different fast blazing and complex crises. We have to take up our responsibilities

within the crisis response operations, going from peacekeeping to peace making and peace-enforcement. Belgium is willing to play its part on the international chessboard, as a full member of the international community.

This means that in the future, action will more and more take place further from home and that our units have to be prepared for operations in the complete spectrum of violence. Besides, it is very important to be up to a fast deployment and operations that often last for many years. Moreover, actions always take place in an international context. That is the reason why we have to develop operational structures that are better prepared, more flexible, easier to modulate and easy to integrate internationally. The deployment of our units will be one of our main concerns. Our country will also have to strive for a stronger co-operation and pooling with the European allies in the field of air and sea transport. That is the reason why Belgium actively supports initiatives in this matter.

Summarising, it can be put that the new missions in which the Belgian armed forces take part are:

- crisis management;
- humanitarian operations;
- assuring the security of our national territory and the collective security of Europe;
- rescue tasks;
- and the evacuation of fellow countrymen abroad.

As the missions for our armed forces have changed, it is obvious that we also have to change the structure of our armed forces. Last year we agreed to work out a unified structure for the General Staff. Unity in policy is, just like unity in command, a fundamental principle for our organisation.

Finally, our armed forces should seek actively for more co-operation with the non-military. The more the military is being used for crisis control operations, the more it has to do with humanitarian help and reconstruction in the concerned country. It has to co-operate closely with civil instances.

The Belgian support of co-operation and co-ordination doesn't harm national sovereignty. Co-operation is a matter of strengthening, not of weakening or decreasing the sovereignty of partners.

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