

Remarks for the EUMC meeting 26 October 2021 by General Gustav Hägglund

EUMC was established on 9 April 2001 by Council Decision which also appointed me as Chairman of the new EU organ. A lot of preliminary work had been carried out in the Interim Military Body where we the CHODs of the Member States had, for example, approved the TOR for EUMC and elected its chairman. The EUMS was beginning its work. The table was set out for our work to create the tools needed for EU humanitarian, rescue and crises management operations, the so-called Petersburg tasks.

Challenges

The main challenge was the consensus that was required in all substantial decisions. I had to transform from commander to consensus builder. It was quite a learning process!

Consensus could only be achieved through understanding the objectives and fears of the Member States involved in the process. My most important advisers were, of course, the Milreps with whom I counselled frequently. The decisions were, however, taken in the capitals. Therefore, I found it not only polite but very useful to visit the Member states and later also the candidate countries. During these visits I had the opportunity to learn to know the CHODs and their desires concerning EUMC work ahead. I was frequently received by the Defense Ministers as well, which broadened my understanding of political aspects influencing our work. It turned out that France and the UK were the main goalkeepers; for France, EU autonomy was the number one objective, for the UK, safeguarding transatlantic ties. Maneuvering was possible only between these pillars.

Political aspects were as well aired in the PSC. Chaired by the Presidency, PSC was a kind of political umbrella to EUMC through which our reports, initiatives and proposals went to the Council. I participated twice a week in the PSC meetings sitting as an expert next to the chairman, whom I met privately in addition once a week.

At that time SG/HR Javier Solana was director and spokesman of ESDP, whereas the European Commission had little influence. In addition, EUMS belonged administratively to his secretariat. With the DGEUMS I met him on Wednesdays, reported on proceedings and open questions and got often useful comments particularly on political matters.

Coordination with NATO was vital since duplication should be avoided by EU using NATO assets in its operations in accordance with the Berlin+ agreement. Personal contacts and mutual appreciation facilitated cooperation. NATOMC chairman Harald Kujat had actually asked me to apply for CEUMC and felt, I guess, a certain responsibility for my success in the work. We co-chaired NATOMC-EUMC meetings every two months. SACEUR Joe Ralston was an old hunting friend of mine since he, as deputy chairman of JCS, visited Finland. I asked one of the NATO CHODS, who the power broker is in NATO, the Secretary General, the Council President, SACEUR or who? The US ambassador, he replayed after a while. So, I established a very useful contact to the ambassador, Nicholas Burns, by inviting him for breakfast to my home. He came with the US ambassador to the EU who also turned out to be a useful contact.

Achievements

Our primary task was to achieve the Helsinki Headline Goal according to which the Union should be able to deploy within 60 days 60 000 soldiers for one year in Petersberg operations. The member states were requested to earmark forces for such operations. Within less than a year, units numbering over 100 000 soldiers were earmarked. Member states also earmarked four headquarters, which were able to lead corps level operations. A small operational cell and a SITCENT were established in EUMS.

The functioning of all these measures and preparations had to be tested in real operations. A small NATO operation moderated the situation in FYROM. This could be handed over to the EU as a learning tool to gain experience in setting up an operation, running it and implementing Berlin+. The CHODs, however, considered a handover unpractical since the operation was running smoothly in NATO command. When I informed Solana of the outcome of the meetings, he was very disappointed with the EUMC and with me as a Chairman. He was, however, able to push through the handover in the EU and NATO councils. The operation became a very useful learning experience for the EU. With Berlin+, it was very top heavy: six flags officers in the chain of command of 350 moderators.

Ituri province in Eastern Congo provided an opportunity for a much more challenging operation. Situation there was chaotic with soldiers moving freely around. Originally, it was planned as a UN mandated French operation but was executed as an EU operation with France providing the biggest contingent. The US had promised air transport for the French operation but it withdraw its support when the operation was transferred to the EU. All in the US were obviously not supportive of the EU entering the military field. The autonomous EU operation with 2000 soldiers pacified the province in three months and handed then the area over to an UN peacekeeping force. This operation stood models for us when we initiated the creation of a rapid reaction force: it should be 1500 men strong, deployable in two weeks for a limited period of time, during which a force for permanent deployment could be summoned. The EU Council concluded in June 2003 that the tools for crisis management operations had been created and operational readiness achieved.

My failure

Common defense was not on the EUMC agenda. It was though mentioned in the Maastricht Treaty as one possible development. I felt it should be explored. Without military means to its defense, the EU would never be accepted as a serious actor in international affairs.

The two most substantial arguments against EU defense are the avoidance of duplication with NATO and the maintenance of transatlantic ties. Any solution must address both.

My recipe was a two pillar NATO – with the EU as one pillar and the US the other. The Washington Treaty would remain unchanged. Each pillar would have responsibility over its area and support the other, if need arises. NATO European structures would be handed over to the EU. The US would maintain the nuclear umbrella but otherwise withdraw its forces from Europe as soon as the EU created capabilities substituting US specific capabilities, particularly in C41 and missile defense.

I discussed my idea with many people, whose opinion I appreciated and aired it in speeches and memos. Nobody could deny the rationale of my proposal but, unfortunately, it was not followed because of three reasons, I assume:

Firstly, after the disappearance of the common enemy 1991 NATO had become a useful US foreign policy tool for extending its sphere of influence eastward and a crises management fig leaf for US interventions.

Secondly, economic gains for European countries of outsourcing their defense to the US.

Thirdly, the EU unanimity requirement in decision-making process prevented timely response to upcoming crises as was demonstrated in EU's inactivity in the recent pull back from Afghanistan. Adequate reaction would require decision making by majority. Qualified if appropriate, which the Member states so far have rejected.

Perhaps my proposal would now gain some relevance when the importance of common defense has risen on the EU agenda. The main opponent of a common EU defense, the UK, has left the Union. The US has turned westward towards China and abandoned nation building from her agenda. Autonomous defense is likely to evolve from an option to a necessity for the EU. EU civil components would strengthen NATO's crisis management capabilities.

Possible Russian conventional military challenge can be countered if the EU gets its defense in order; remember that the EU has:

Four times more citizens
eight times more money and
twice as many soldiers already now in arms than Russia.

Operational autonomy is within reach if deficiencies in C4I and missile defense are addressed firmly. It will not happen overnight but well in a few years. We clearly have the resources for a credible defense. The question is do we have the will.

Summary

My three years as CEUMC were very rewarding. We felt that we were involved in important work. We were creating something completely new. The momentum was there and the process was quite dynamic. Everybody did his best to overcome obstacles and get the job done. It required a lot of persuasion and compromising. We fulfilled our task, which is the best reward for dedicated people. The EU got a crisis management capacity. Common defense did not advance but it was not in our mandate, it was only my private initiative. I hope it will be included in EUMC's mandate soon since it will never advance without your support. I wish you all the best and success in your important work improving EU's joint capabilities to defend itself.