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The CSDP Mission Planning Process of the European Union: Innovations and Shortfalls

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Abstract: This paper analyses and evaluates the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission planning process, i.e. the procedural model for planning, launching and reviewing CSDP operations. It shows that the EU has developed an intricate planning mechanism by generously drawing upon existing North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) planning doctrine while adding a distinct European touch. These innovations amount to expanding military planning models to civilian operations, tightening political oversight and fostering close links and cooperative mechanisms with the UN peacekeeping system. As such, the innovations mostly pertain to the political aspects of mission planning. However, some problems persist at the strategic and operational levels of mission planning, such as institutional arrangements for planning and commanding operations, procedures pertaining to force generation and inter-pillar coordination, and operational planning doctrine. Lessons learned from recent operational experiences indicate that the mental gap between the political and operational level is in need of remediation. This can be done either by keeping political expectations realistic or by investing more political will and effort in understanding and resolving operational difficulties.

Keywords: CFSP, civil-military relations, ESDP, security/external, political science

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1. Introduction

As the introductory articles to this special issue made abundantly clear, the academic debate about the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is thriving. So far, most of the attention has gone to the genuinely political aspects of the CSDP (formerly known as the *ESDP*).¹ As the EU is undertaking ever more crisis management operations, an ‘operational’ strand of research is emerging in the academic literature (e.g. Gegout 2005, Giegerich 2008, Gross 2009). This line of research initially focused on the political objectives of the operations and what these operations implied about the nature of the CSDP itself. However, there exists a growing interest for the procedural details of how these operations are planned and executed (Hansen 2006, Major 2008, Mattelaer 2008, Simón 2010). Attaining an empirically informed understanding of the role of bureaucracy requires a minimum level of awareness of how the administrative level works in practice. Knowing who does what is only a starting point: one needs a greater familiarity with the meaning and purpose of the different procedural steps of the policy-making process in order to allow for a nuanced understanding of bureaucratic politics as well as policy outcomes.

This article positions itself in this emerging strand of operational research and links it to the debate about the role of bureaucracy and administration in the CSDP by analysing and

subsequently evaluating the CSDP mission planning process. The first section outlines the current procedural mechanisms for planning, launching and reviewing CSDP missions. The second section is devoted to the main innovations the CSDP introduced in operational planning models. The three aspects that stand central here are civil-military integration, political-strategic oversight and EU-UN coordination. The third section discusses some of the most salient problems that persist in the planning of actual operations, namely command and control issues, force generation difficulties and conceptual problems in terms of operational design. The concluding section considers some of the lessons-learned in recent operations and suggests there exists a mismatch between the political and operational levels.

2. The CSDP Mission Planning Process in Brief

While there is much debate about the *finalité politique* of the CSDP, there can be little doubt about what the CSDP is currently about. Driven by the historical experience of the Balkan conflicts, the CSDP is conceived as a crisis management tool – a means to inject some measure of stability in conflict zones. So far, the EU has conducted 24 CSDP operations, of which 7 were purely military operations, 14 civilian missions and 3 of mixed ‘civ-mil’ nature. As a result, it cannot come as a surprise that the debate about how to manage these operations is as old as the CSDP itself. As far as the procedural aspects were concerned, these were originally developed in the so-called Crisis Management Procedures (CMP) in the aftermath of the Nice European Council in December 2000 (Council of the European Union 2001). As a living document, the CMP over the next years received continuous updating and reviewing (Council of the European Union 2003a). Also, it was complemented by an expanding number of planning concepts. Central in this regard were the concepts on military strategic planning, command and control, and force generation, which were first approved in the period 2001 and most recently reviewed in 2008 (insofar as classification regulations allow for referencing, see Council of the European Union 2008b and 2008c). Civilian counterparts for these military concepts are under development (Council of the European Union 2005, 2008a and 2009a). This section gives a brief sketch of the current procedural set up of the CSDP planning mechanism.

In general terms, operational planning takes the form of an iterative dialogue between political authorities and supporting staffs. In the context of the EU, the Political and Security Committee (PSC) embodies the multinational political authority that directs and oversees the work of the Council Secretariat, the EU Military Staff (EUMS) and the staff personnel running the headquarters of actual operations. It is in this dialectic process that operations are designed and operational strategies are formulated. The planning process is key to understanding how an operation works because it provides the conceptual bridge between the political aims and objectives on the one hand and the operational means and resources on the other. Furthermore, the planning dynamic does not only govern the decision-making running up to the launch of an operation, but also the maintaining of political oversight by means of periodic mission reviews. As a process, it has a vertical dimension (from the national capitals

over the political strategic level of the PSC down the operational chain of command) and a horizontal dimension of different functional phases in time.²

The process outlined in the CMP and the related supporting concepts currently looks as follows. As in NATO doctrine, operational planning activity is subdivided into two consecutive disciplines: *advance planning* and *crisis response planning*. Advance planning relates to the continuous planning for potential crises scenarios, whereas crisis response planning concerns the development of a response to an actual crisis. Advance planning can assume the form of either generic planning (drawing up generic concepts as well as catalogues of what capabilities are available for CSDP operations and comparing those with those that are required for pre-identified standard scenarios, see e.g. Giegerich 2008, 16-22) or strategic contingency planning (ongoing monitoring of the security-environment and drawing up country books and non-detailed contingency plans to inform political decision-making). Advance planning thus serves the purpose of reducing the response time when a crisis should occur. In the CMP terminology, monitoring, early warning and advance planning constitutes the first phase in the mission planning cycle. When a crisis develops, the Council Secretariat and/or the Commission can propose policy options, in the ideal case resulting in a jointly drafted options paper.

Figure 1: The Transition from Advance Planning to Crisis Response Planning



Once the PSC decides that “EU action is appropriate” the switch is made from advance planning to crisis response planning. This marks the start of the formal planning cycle leading up to a detailed Operation Plan ready for execution. Crisis response planning is itself a multi-layered process. At the political-strategic level of the Brussels institutions, the political authorities define in consecutive steps the broad outlook of the operation. At the various levels below – military-strategic (if applicable), operational and tactical – an iterative process is started in which the guidance from the level above is analysed and translated into plans of increasing levels of detail.

The first step in the political-strategic initiation of the crisis response planning cycle (i.e. the second phase in the CMP model) is the development of a crisis management concept (CMC).

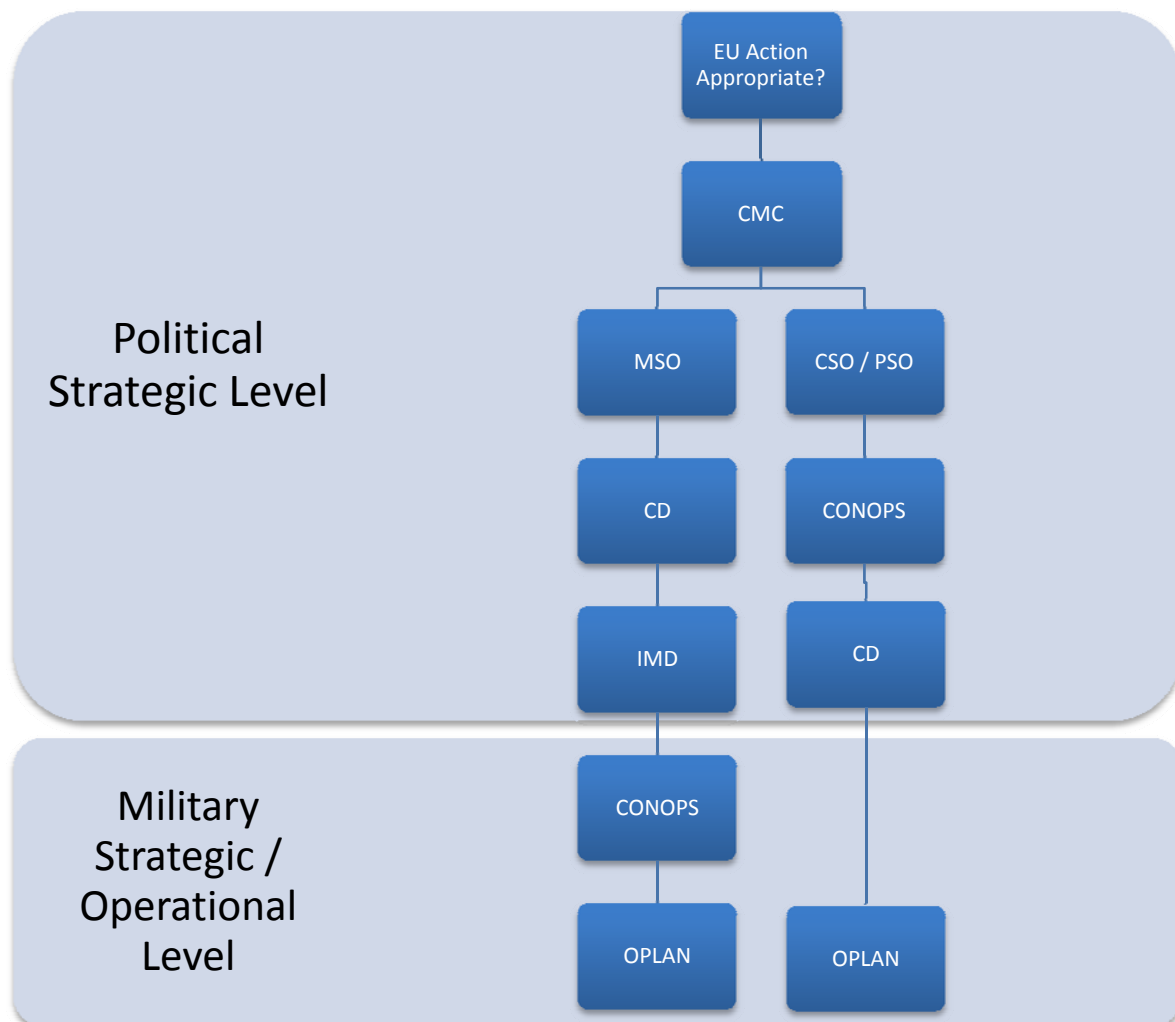
This is the grand strategic plan that the PSC agrees upon, containing a political as well as military assessment of the crisis situation. It is a multi-pillar document outlining the role of the different instruments the EU has at its disposal for reacting to the crisis. The Crisis Management Planning Directorate (CMPD) within the Council Secretariat is tasked with drafting the text.³ In doing so, it is supported by the relevant units within the European Commission. This staff work is normally informed by undertaking fact finding missions. Subsequently, the EU Military Committee (EUMC) gives advice on military aspects and the Committee on Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM) gives advice on civilian aspects. Finally, the PSC agrees upon the CMC before forwarding it to the Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) and the Council of Ministers for formal approval.

The second step is the development of strategic options (i.e. the third phase in the CMP model). These are general outlines of actions designed to achieve the political objectives outlined in the CMC. Depending on the situation at hand, the EUMS develops military strategic options (MSO) whereas the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) develops Police Strategic Options (PSO) or other Civilian Strategic Options (CSO). The European Commission can provide input on relevant accompanying measures in the first pillar. It should be clear that although different staffs may be in the lead, the development of strategic options is very much a cooperative effort, as these options need to be prioritised for the eventual strategic options paper. CIVCOM and the EUMC subsequently comment upon the strategic options, after which the PSC drafts a decision on the various options and forwards it to COREPER and the Council.

At this point in time, the Council can make the formal decision to act. A Council Decision (CD) is the legal act by which the Council establishes the operation, appoints the Operation Commander(s) and decides on the financial arrangements for the costs resulting from an operation.⁴ The third step (or phase four in the CMP) is the development of the operational planning documents. In this regard the procedures for civilian and military CSDP operations diverge. For military operations, the EUMC issues an initiating military directive (IMD), drafted with the support of the EUMS and approved by the PSC, to the operation headquarters identified in the CD. The IMD translates the CD into military guidance for the Operation Commander. From this point onwards, the military chain of command starts developing its own set of planning documents. The critical documents in this regard are the Concept of Operations (CONOPS) and Operation Plan (OPLAN). The CONOPS is a concise statement of how the Operation Commander intends to fulfil his mission whereas the OPLAN is the highly detailed script of the operation in its entirety. Both the CONOPS and the OPLAN have to be approved by the EUMC, the PSC and the Council. The planning doctrine used for developing these documents essentially follows the NATO Guidelines for Operational Planning. For civilian operations, the CPCC develops the CONOPS before the CD is passed in order to make the financial arrangements sufficiently clear. Afterwards, the planning authority shifts to the civilian Head of Mission who is responsible for developing the OPLAN. Similarly, CIVCOM, the PSC and the Council have to approve the civilian planning documents.

In parallel to the process of plan development, but separate from it, runs the process of force generation. Alongside the CONOPS, a provisional Statement of Requirements (SOR) is produced, an overview of the means and resources that are needed in order to be able to fulfil the mission. In a series of force generation conferences – a process not limited in time – the participating member states pledge assets and capabilities for the operation in a dynamic of supply and demand. Once plan development is completed, the OPLAN validated and all the mission-critical elements of the SOR are fulfilled, the Council can formally launch the operation. In the CMP model, we move to phase five (implementation). Phase six concerns the refocusing of EU action (i.e. plan review for military operations), the termination of operations and the lessons-learned process. The entire process can be visualised in simplified terms as illustrated below.

Figure 2: The Generic CSDP Mission Planning Process



Abbreviations:

CMC Crisis Management Concept
 MSO Military Strategic Options
 CSO Civilian Strategic Options
 PSO Police Strategic Options

CD Council Decision
 IMD Initiating Military Directive
 CONOPS Concept of Operations
 OPLAN Operation Plan

3. CSDP Innovations in Operational Planning

The CSDP mission planning process was not developed in a conceptual vacuum – a large body of NATO planning doctrine as well as national procedures and organisational culture was available from which inspiration could be drawn. It is therefore unsurprising to observe that the CSDP model largely overlaps with the NATO model – a tried and trusted standard in defence planning. However, as the EU has traditions and characteristics of its own, not to mention a different membership composition, the procedural planning model was tailored to the CSDP context. This section discusses three of those fine-tuning efforts, namely civil-military integration, increased political oversight and EU-UN cooperation.

3.1. Civil-Military Integration

The EU is often lauded for its potential in developing a comprehensive approach towards crisis management (cf. Gross 2008). Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of the CSDP planning system is that it constitutes a semi-integrated process for planning civilian as well as military operations. On the political-strategic level – at the start of the planning cycle – the CMC is a jointly drafted ‘civ-mil’ document. Subsequently, civilian as well as military options can be developed and compared. It is only as the planning cycle progresses in the operational direction that the procedures for civilian and military operations start to diverge and the staff work is entrusted to separate bureaucracies and command chains.

When compared to the simplistic contrast between hard power and soft power, the integration of CSDP procedures on the political-strategic level is laudable. However, this should not obscure the fact that this level of integration is only a limited first step (Blair 2009, Norheim-Martinsen 2010). Procedurally speaking, there is a long way to go for genuinely integrating civilian and military actions at all levels of the chain of command. For now, the integration is focussed on the joint development of the CMC, after which the model becomes stove-piped along civilian or military lines. Civil-military coordination at the operational level needs to be arranged on a case-by-case basis. Perhaps most importantly, it should be kept in mind that the current level of integration is mostly limited to the second pillar. As some of the major foreign policy instruments such as development and humanitarian aid are part of the remit of the Commission, even a fully integrated CSDP still leaves out a large amount of the EU’s potential. In the crisis management procedures, reference is made to accompanying measures under the first pillar framework, but in practice bureaucratic turf wars are ubiquitous. In the case of EUFOR Tchad/RCA, for example, Commission officials vehemently opposed portraying humanitarian assistance as “flanking measures” of the CSDP operation.⁵ The concept paper on Civil-Military Co-ordination emphasises “a culture of coordination” (Council of the European Union 2003c), yet mission planners joke that while everybody likes the idea of coordination in theory, nobody wants to be coordinated in practice.

While the civil-military integration in the CSDP planning can be seen as a glass half full or half empty, there is one more fundamental innovation hidden in this evolution, namely that a planning process for civilian operations is being developed in the first place (cf. Hansen 2006). While the civilian missions are small and the supporting structures even smaller – when the Police Unit was created, for example, it counted a mere six people – the important issue is that civilian CSDP operations constitute an important laboratory for operational planning. It is clear that the civilian process is strongly inspired by the military model. The vocabulary of developing options, concepts of operations and operational plans is illustrative of the extent to which military doctrine constitutes the *de facto* planning standard. This can be explained in part by the fact that many former military planners have made a career switch to the civilian bureaucracy, but it is also the case that the procedural mindset of operational planning is now finding a broader audience in the civilian world. While one can argue about the extent to which capacities are integrated, the principle fact is that the planning process itself is exported from the military to the civilian realm. As this is a learning process, there is substantial scope for improvement. This will be discussed in the third section.

3.2. Increased Political Oversight

A second remarkable feature of the CSDP planning process is the degree of political control exercised by the member states. The CSDP model features an entire string of planning documents that are vetted by the PSC and its subsidiary organs. It is of course true that the full planning cycle described above is seldom followed from A to Z: depending on the crisis context at hand the planning cycle is shortened to fit the available timeframe. The sequencing of planning documents in the case of EUFOR RD Congo in 2006 serves as an illustrative example. In this particular case an EU Option paper replaced the CMC and MSO papers. Similarly, the Joint Action followed the IMD and CONOPS rather than preceding it (Major 2008, 26). The formal procedures must be seen as enablers rather than laws. That said, when comparing the CSDP model to the NATO and UN models, it is immediately clear that there is a much more extensive political approval process. Rather than having a single politically approved document (such as a UN Security Council Resolution), there tend to be several. Usually, this includes at least the CMC and the CD and often several more. This is not to say the planning work in other organisations is less rigorous, but there is a more constant dialogue between the staff work and the political approval authority. Furthermore, again unlike in the UN system, the formal approval process extends to the operational planning documents (CONOPS and OPLAN).

In the CSDP procedures, there exists a built-in system of double control. On the one hand the EUMC, CIVCOM and various working groups provide a detailed technical check of all planning documents. As in NATO, the EUMC exists partly for the purpose of safeguarding military orthodoxy. It will thus implement a military sanity check on all plans passing through their hands. Such a system is wholly absent in the UN model. On the other hand, the oversight exercised by the PSC on the planning cycle is a constant check on political acceptability. In this regard, the CSDP planning process is more elaborate and formalised than the NATO

model – where there is no such thing as the CD that has to be published in the Official Journal of the European Union. This is not to say there is de facto less control in the NATO system – this is not the case – but on the political-strategic level the CSDP model is more open and formalised. This formalisation is a double-edged sword. The elaborate procedural model in the CSDP ensures the constant involvement of the political level and fosters accountability and oversight by elected governments. Yet it also creates opportunities for political micromanagement that may be ill informed about the operational context and it leaves less room for prudent planning for hypothetical contingencies. Another factor is that this high degree of oversight and centralisation becomes fairly resource-intensive in terms of time and staff capacity. Ingenious decision-making processes can foster the making of sound strategy but do not guarantee so.

3.3. EU-UN Cooperation

Throughout the development of the CSDP as a crisis management instrument, cooperation with the UN played an important part. The first autonomous EU military operation, Artemis, was followed by a Joint Declaration on UN-EU cooperation in crisis management and later by a follow-on document on implementation (Council of the European Union 2003b). In terms of capabilities, both military assets such as the Battlegroups and civilian assets like the Integrated Police Units generate substantial interest in New York. One can thus speak of the growing institutionalisation of EU-UN cooperation (cf. Major 2008). As more operations expanded these models – EUFOR RD Congo and EUFOR Tchad/RCA serve as examples – this evolution trickled down to the procedural level as well. The planning cycle of the Chad operation in particular served as the reference background for the development of guidelines for joint UN-EU planning (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations / Department of Field Support 2008).

It can be argued that the involvement of numerous international organisations in a single operational theatre fragments the efforts of the international community and therefore fosters inefficiency. However, political imperatives need to be accommodated on the operational level. In this regard, the development of procedures and doctrine for cooperation is a development that should be pragmatically welcomed. Drafting a road map for EU operations in support of UN peacekeeping of course does not mean that such support will always be forthcoming – witness the crisis in the eastern Congo in 2008 when the EU turned down the UN's request for an intervention – but the codification of expertise and lessons-learned can facilitate efficient cooperation when political agreement on an operation can be found.

Such institutional cooperation is of course not entirely new. In particular, the close relationship between the EU and NATO was a key feature of the CSDP from the start. The Berlin Plus arrangement that allowed the EU to conduct operations Concordia and Althea by making use of the NATO command chain stands out as the most concrete example in this regard. The importance of common NATO standards and Allied Joint Doctrine publications can hardly be overstated. While this relationship has arguably become diluted over the years

(Scheeck 2008, Norheim-Martinsen 2010), it remains of fundamental importance when discussing the planning and conduct of operations. Whereas highly political problems such as the Greece-Turkey-Cyprus conundrum continue to hamper the EU-NATO dialogue, it is precisely in the domain of political symbols that EU-UN cooperation is a real breakthrough. As the UN remains the primary provider of international legitimacy to crisis management efforts, the relationship the EU fosters with the UN constitutes a critical political enabler for action.

4. Persisting Problems in Mission Planning

In spite of all innovations listed above, operational planning models are never perfect. In this section a number of procedural and conceptual shortfalls are discussed. Some of these have already been hinted at or explored in the available literature, such as the debate on institutional arrangements, others are more obscure and fundamental in nature, such as the conceptual foundations of operational design. These issues mainly serve to illustrate the thesis that much work lies ahead in understanding the intricacies of effective planning for crisis management operations.

4.1. Institutional Arrangements and Planning Continuity

The institutional arrangements of the CSDP are often mired in controversy. In particular the desirability of an EU headquarters is an important driver of this debate (e.g. Biscop 2006). Currently, the options for planning and commanding EU operations are the following. While civilian operations are planned and conducted from within Council Secretariat (the CMC) and subsequently the CPCC, the set-up for military operations is more complicated. The Council Secretariat and the EUMS draft the planning documents at the political-strategic level, yet afterwards planning and command authority needs to be delegated to a designated military headquarters. In this regard, there exist three distinct possibilities: the Operations Centre within the EUMS (only for small, battlegroup-sized operations, so far never used in practice), the EU Operation Headquarters within the NATO strategic headquarters SHAPE, which houses a dedicated EU Staff Group (so far used for operations Concordia and Althea), and a national headquarters that is activated and multinationalised by means of 'augmentee' personnel. On paper, five such operation headquarters have been declared, yet only three have been used in practice and are generally recognised as truly operational.⁶ The re-organisation of part of the Council Secretariat, merging DG E VIII and E IX into the CMPD, testifies that a stable and effective configuration is not yet found. These institutional arrangements have important repercussions on the planning cycle of operations. In this regard, the main diagnosis is that the fragmentation of planning assets – scattered over the Council Secretariat, the EUMS and the OHQ – hinders planning continuity and lengthens the planning cycle.

In the ideal world, an integrated operational staff would support the entire planning cycle from political inception to detailed plans. Depending on the complexity of the operation, the

supporting duties would be spread out over different levels – strategic, operational, and component level – but within the levels, the same team would follow the cycle from beginning to end. In the strategic-level planning of CSDP operations, however, the planning files move from the Council Secretariat to the EUMS or CPCC and subsequently to the military OHQ or civilian Head of Mission. While the exchange of liaison officers and the establishment of dedicated planning teams per operation can help overcome these institutional barriers, it is obvious this requires more time as well as extra energy. In particular the activation of military-strategic headquarters is highly time-consuming. All the ‘augmentees’ need time to familiarise themselves with the operation and the CSDP mechanisms. Furthermore, the Operation Commander is only appointed when the CD is passed – often fairly late in the planning cycle.⁷ In military terms, the CSDP command and control chain is functionally copied from the NATO structure. Yet instead of being manned on a permanent basis, it is a skeleton structure that needs to be built up from scratch when it is activated. For example, the OHQ for EUFOR Tchad/RCA took about three months to get fully operational.⁸

From an operational perspective, the desirability for a permanent strategic headquarters is clear. Preferably, this would even be a structure of an integrated civilian-military nature. So far, this development has been blocked because of its political connotations. The fact that political symbolism so far has trumped considerations of operational effectiveness shows that national perspectives on the CSDP remain stubbornly different. Operational logic, however, cannot be ignored indefinitely. As long as CSDP operations are more like real-time exercises, one can afford operational inefficiency. In the case of genuinely critical operations, one needs well-functioning and robust organisational structures.

4.2. Synchronisation of Procedural Mechanisms

It was already hinted at that the civil-military integration in the CSDP more or less stops at the boundaries of the second pillar. In this respect procedural synchronisation could be improved by clarifying the relationships between the different policy instruments the EU has at its disposal, yet such inter-pillar barriers are notoriously difficult to overcome. Within the CSDP operational mechanisms proper, however, there is another issue of synchronisation at stake, namely between the operational planning process and the force generation process, i.e. committing national forces to a proposed EU operation. On paper, force generation and operational planning are parallel but separate processes. In practice, force generation starts relatively late in the planning cycle, namely with the publication of the SOR accompanying the CONOPS. This means that in the strategic planning phase at the level of the Brussels institutions, planners are left in the dark about the resources that will be forthcoming for completing the mission. It is only informally that the member states can steer the CSDP bureaucracy in the direction of a certain level of ambition.

The answer to the time lag between operational planning and formal force generation so far has been the holding of indicative contribution meetings. The problem is of course that member states are reluctant to commit themselves on the basis of rough estimates rather than

a detailed SOR. This natural tension can only be overcome when operational planning and force generation go hand in hand as a constant dialogue. Unfortunately, the approval of planning documents constitutes a dialogue between the planners and the PSC, whereas formal force generation is a dialogue between the Operation Commander and the troop contributing nations. One can indeed argue that the processes take place in two different rooms where the logic of the debate can be quite different. In the case of EUFOR Tchad/RCA, for example, participants labelled the indicative contribution meeting as “a disaster”.⁹ Although only about half of the estimated resources were committed, planning went ahead anyway. This eventually led to the painful realisation that France would have to fill in all the remaining gaps when the OPLAN was ready – reinforcing the image of the CSDP as a French-dominated project. A case can therefore be made that a lack of political will should become clear early on in the planning process so as not to generate unrealistic expectations.

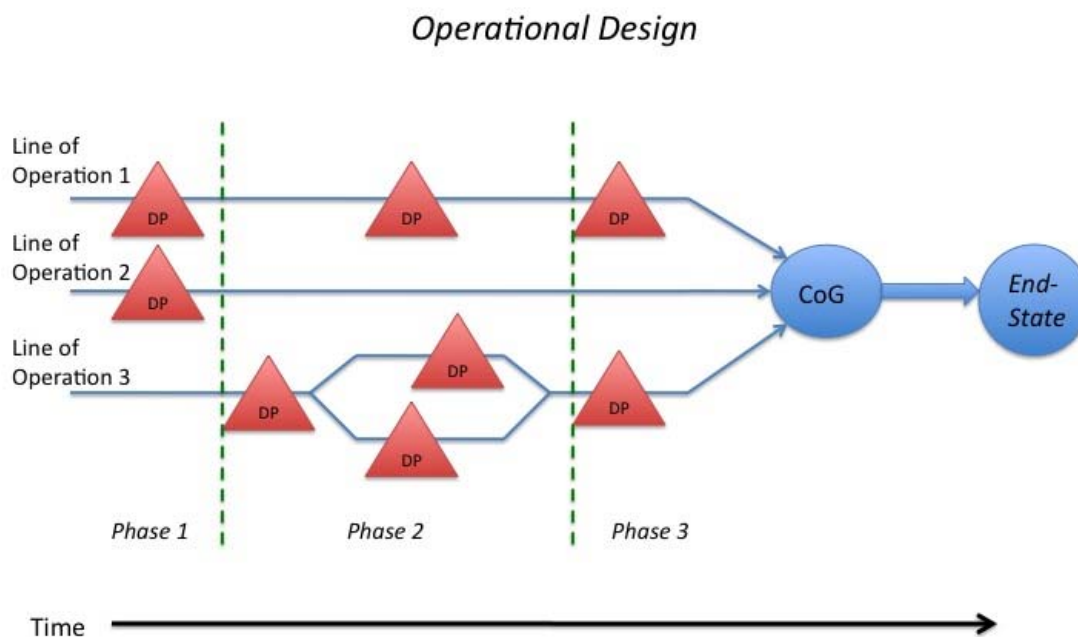
4.3. Doctrine for Operational Design

A third and more conceptual problem in the CSDP planning system is the doctrinal basis for designing operations. Having an efficient procedural model in place for facilitating the planning process is one thing, yet operational planning also requires substance and content. First and foremost this needs to be provided by the planners’ creativity. Secondly, however, a sound set of conceptual planning tools must foster the process of what the military calls ‘operational art’. The reasoning here is that while the creativity and ingenuity of the commander is paramount, theoretical and conceptual constructs can enable the planning staff to think in a well-structured fashion. In this regard, the reference framework for CSDP operational planners is drawn from common NATO doctrine on operational planning. As this is the standard doctrine military officers are taught in their defence academies, this is easily justified. NATO operational doctrine is not so much the doctrine of a political organisation as it is the commonly shared wisdom of the military profession as exercised by all Western armed forces. Unfortunately, there is an emerging debate about the relevance of traditional planning doctrine to contemporary challenges (e.g. Greer 2002, Kelly and Brennan 2009). Indirectly, this poses significant challenges for the CSDP planning model as well: the efforts of integrating civilian and military planning do not seem to be synchronised with this doctrinal reflection process.

Operational art is applied in the practice of operational design, i.e. the development of the general outline of how an operation should develop and accomplish its political objectives. In the operational doctrine of Western armed forces, this is usually based on concepts such as the centre of gravity of conflict parties and lines of operation linking decisive points. In a nutshell, series of decisive points (DPs) in threatening an opponent’s centre of gravity form a set of lines of operation that converge towards the destruction or neutralisation of that centre of gravity (CoG) – the source of the enemy’s strength – which in turn leads to the attainment of the end-state. These concepts go back to the writings of military theorists such as Clausewitz and Jomini and have been continuously discussed and refined in military theorising. As such, they have important intellectual merits as well as a profound impact on

the actual planning of operations. In recent years, however, there has been substantial debate over the question whether this conceptual reference framework is fully applicable when planning operations that are different from conventional force-on-force conflict (Greer 2002, Echevarria 2002, Lessard 2005).

Figure 3: An Operational Design Template



Operational art has essentially been based on the assumption that the neutralisation of the opponent's centre of gravity automatically leads to the end-state. If the end-state is the decisive defeat of a state like Napoleonic France – to adopt Clausewitz' mindset – this makes sense. In contrast, this makes no sense in a peacekeeping context because there is no opponent to fight in the first place. Unsurprisingly, this poses conceptual challenges for CSDP operations as well. The operational planners of EUFOR Tchad/RCA, for example, were not able to define a strategic centre of gravity of what they called 'the spoilers'. Centre of gravity analysis thus became "a very fuzzy exercise".¹ Combined with the end-date of their mission, their lines of operation literally could not be aimed at an overall objective; they simply went 'on'.

It is therefore already being recognised in doctrine development that in the context of peacekeeping, crisis management or counterinsurgency operations, centres of gravity may take wholly different forms that in conventional military operations. In the US and the UK, following the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, the debate on how to rethink operational

design is ongoing. Yet so far these conceptual debates about military theory do not seem to have received much attention in the CSDP context. Most likely this is the case because there is no institutional place for it and because available human resources are scarce. This leads to two distinct shortfalls. On the one hand the experience of CSDP operations – which do constitute a real laboratory for experimenting with operational design – are not being fully processed into the intellectual debate in military circles, if at all. On the other hand, there is the risk that the export of the operational planning model to civilian operations includes the export of concepts that are not applicable to these types of operations. When the planners of CSDP police missions start talking about the centre of gravity of conflict parties, this may still help their analysis of the conflict situation. It cannot, however, provide the same basis for operational design as it does in conventional military operations, as the EU's integrated police units are generally not expected to 'decisively defeat' anybody. There is therefore a good reason to call for a more vigorous debate on operational design in non-conventional contexts, and CSDP operational experience should be an integral part of this debate.

5. Conclusion

What should be made of this evaluation of CSDP planning? First and foremost it should be kept in mind that planning procedures and models are enablers for effective action, but they do not define the action itself. The process is not the product. Planning procedures invariably tend to be short-circuited or tailored to fit the crisis at hand. Conceptual planning tools can structure and facilitate an intellectual debate on operational design, yet they can never fully replace the creativity and ingenuity required from the planning staff. On the other hand, a procedural planning model has important merits in structuring an inherently complex process, and by doing so provides a reference framework for checking whether all key requirements have been fulfilled. The presence of a shared reference framework under the form of conceptual planning tools serves the purpose of codifying professional expertise. Furthermore, it makes the operational planning process less dependent on mere personalities. In this paper it is argued that the CSDP planning system can be characterised as innovative on the political level yet somewhat deficient on the operational level. Experimenting with civilian operations and exporting planning procedures to civilian planning is nothing short of revolutionary. The tight and formalised political oversight on operations can be seen as a check on this experimenting. The fostering of close links with the UN system, politically as well as operationally, makes pragmatic sense from both directions.

On the more practical aspects of operational planning, this paper sketched a bleaker outline. Important institutional as well as procedural problems (command and control; force generation) persist mainly due to political reasons, but with very real negative effects on operational efficiency. An in-depth reflection process about operational doctrine has so far been lacking. In the lessons-learned process, sound lessons such as the nonsensicality of the 'end-date' concept can be discarded all too easily. The end-date concept, which is politically attractive but makes no operational sense whatsoever, now seems to have become generally

accepted in the CSDP community, as evident from the EU's Military Rapid Response Concept (Council of the European Union 2009b). The application of military planning tools such as centre of gravity analysis to the planning of civilian operations is questionable. In any case, a more fundamental reflection process on planning doctrine for CSDP is well warranted.

This split assessment suggests the existence of a mismatch between the political and operational levels. While the development of institutional structures and procedures may have taken place at rocket speed, there remains considerable scope for fine-tuning and doctrine development. At the heart of the matter is the fact that a mismatch between political ambition and operational reality can only be overcome by tuning down political expectation to realistic levels or by investing more political will in resolving operational difficulties. As an astute observer noted, the CSDP has progressed immensely over the years, but the genuinely strategic record is very meagre (Howorth 2009). On the political-strategic level, this means that the questions of high politics cannot be indefinitely postponed. On the operational level, CSDP operations can only exceed the level of posturing in a systematic way by displaying a sense of political realism rather than wishful thinking, as well as a genuine willingness to address the issues outlined above.

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Endnotes

¹ This article consistently adopts the post-Lisbon Treaty EU terminology, i.e. referring to ‘CSDP’ rather than ‘ESDP’, ‘Council Decision’ rather than ‘Joint Action’ etc.

² In terms of the levels of analysis, this article adopts the applicable EU definitions (as set out in Council of the European Union 2008b), even when these are not devoid of semantic confusion. The political-strategic level here refers to the Brussels institutions, the military-strategic level (if applicable) is situated in the operation headquarters, and the operational level applies to everything that happens in the field. In some phrases, such as operational planning and operational design, ‘operational’ does not refer to the operational level, but simply means ‘of operations’. Operational planning is thus used as a catch-all formula for referring to the planning of operations on both the strategic and operational levels.

³ During the French presidency in 2008 it was decided that all planning capacity within the Council bureaucracy (Council Secretariat DG E VIII and E IX and the CivMil Cell in the EUMS) would be merged into a single entity responsible for CMC development. This became the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), which became operational in February 2010. This reorganisation was part of a broader reform process triggered by the Lisbon treaty, which was at the time of writing not yet completed (cf. Gebhard 2009).

⁴ In pre-Lisbon terminology, a Council Decision was called a Joint Action.

⁵ Personal communication with an official of the European Commission’s DG ECHO, 14 January 2009.

⁶ The French OHQ of Mont Valerien was used for operations Artemis and EUFOR Tchad/RCA, the German OHQ in Potsdam was used for EUFOR RD Congo and the British OHQ in Northwood is currently being used for the counter-piracy operation Atalanta. The Italian and Greek headquarters (Rome and Larissa) have so far been used only for training purposes.

⁷ In the EUFOR Tchad/RCA case, for example, the Joint Action was passed mid-October, whereas the joint operational planning group was already established six weeks earlier. As the Joint Action (now Council Decision) nominates the operational commanders, the planning group was devoid of a commander during this initial period (cf. Mattelaer 2008).

⁸ Interview with EU official, Brussels, 20 August 2008.

⁹ Interview with German official, Brussels, 9 July 2008.

¹ Interview with EU official, Brussels, 24 September 2008.