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Comment & analysis

How Europe can win without an army

By Andrew Moravcsik

For many transatlantic pundits, the Iraq crisis is further proof that Europe needs an autonomous military force. This view was forcefully expressed last week by Laurent Fabius, the former French prime minister, who said in the *Financial Times* that Europe "was unable to make its voice heard in the US because it was divided and lacked a unified defence force".

For some years now politicians have found European defence irresistible. European public opinion strongly favours it. European federalists want the European Union to have greater powers. French Gaullists, long convinced that military might means great power prestige, trumpet the idea. Tony Blair, Britain's prime minister, has exploited it to become more "European"; Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister, has exploited it to become more military.

The logic is seductive: if the US respects only military power, a European army will surely command respect. Yet European defence is a dangerous pipe dream. And the Iraq crisis demonstrates why.

A co-ordinated military force with the global capabilities to fight a high-technology, low-casualty war would require Europeans to increase military spending, currently 2 per cent of gross domestic product, to more than the US rate of 4 per cent if it is to overcome a decades-long US lead. No European public would accept this.

However heavily they were deployed, European transport aircraft, satellites and multilingual soldiers would not add up to an effective policy response to US unilateralism. Do Europeans propose to use military force against the US? Launch "pre-preventive" interventions?

Or is the goal to reduce European dependency on Nato? If so, the result would be to encourage precisely the withdrawal from Europe advocated by US hawks. A European rapid reaction force might be useful for peacekeeping but neither it nor a larger force would reverse determined US unilateralism.

The entire notion is in fact incoherent. Europeans have claimed from the start of the Iraq crisis that non-military means should be used more intensively. Yet when Washington sends in the marines, Europeans call for a stronger defence.

The real problem is that European defence schemes distract Europe from its true comparative advantage in world politics: the cultivation of civilian and quasi-military power. Europe is the "quiet superpower". There are at least five ways in which Europe can wield influence over peace and war as great as that of the US.

First, EU accession - perhaps the single most powerful policy instrument for peace and security in the world today. In 10-15 potential member states, authoritarian, intolerant or corrupt governments have recently lost elections to democratic, market-oriented coalitions held together by the promise of eventual EU membership.

Second, Europeans provide more than 70 per cent of all civilian development assistance. This is four times more than the US and is far more equitably disbursed, often by multilateral organisations. When the shooting stopped in Kosovo and Afghanistan, it was the Europeans who were called on to rebuild, reconstruct and reform.

Third, European troops, generally under multilateral auspices, help keep the peace in trouble spots as disparate as Guatemala and Eritrea. EU members and applicants contribute 10 times as many peacekeeping troops as the US. No one outside Washington believes US troops will be able to do the job after the Iraq war.

Fourth, monitoring by international institutions, supported by Europe, builds the global trust that is needed to manage crises. The Iraq crisis might have developed very differently if the Europeans had been able to offer the option of sending, say, 10 times as many weapons inspectors in, 10 months earlier.

Last, the Iraq crisis demonstrates the extraordinary effect of multilateral institutions on global opinion. In country after country, polls have shown that a second United Nations Security Council resolution would have given public opinion a 30-40 per cent swing towards military action. With the US stance apparently lacking international legitimacy, American troops have been unable to open a second front from Turkish territory; and the bill for the war is likely to fall largely to the US.

Americans are not just unwilling but also - for complex domestic, cultural and institutional reasons - apparently unable to deploy civilian power effectively. That is the true weakness of US strategy today, for without trade, aid, peacekeeping, monitoring and legitimacy, no amount of unilateral military might can stabilise an unruly world.

Rather than criticising US military power, or hankering after it, Europe would do better to invest its political and budgetary capital in a distinctive complement to it. European civilian power, if wielded shrewdly and more coherently, could be an effective and credible instrument of modern European statecraft, not just to compel compliance by smaller countries but perhaps even to induce greater American understanding. Europe might get its way more often - and without a bigger army.

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