



SMART DEFENSE: OVERCOMING HURDLES AND PASSING BATONS

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“While it is clear NATO members should do more to pool military assets, such ‘Smart Defense’ initiatives are not a panacea.”
Robert M. Gates, former U.S. Secretary of Defense, 10 June 2011

Introduction

There is no official running event that combines hurdles with relay races. This may be the case for smart defense, where obstacles in capability development and burden sharing are mixed with sovereignty transfer. This does not mean, however, that such a race will not take place in the future. Just like smart defense, one day this approach may become the normal way of doing business within NATO. For now, though, that is unlikely to occur.

The bedrock of an alliance is collaboration. The difficulty in collaboration is finding agreement about what is needed for security purposes. What is needed now, its urgency, what will be needed in the future, and how much it will cost are the constant concerns of political leaders. Those are the natural ingredients of grand strategy at both the national and allied levels. When a strong and evident threat is present, consensus is reached almost naturally. That was the case during the Cold War days. Almost a quarter century has passed since the dismantlement of the Berlin Wall, however, and consensus seems to be eroding over an increasing number of issues on the agenda of the most successful alliance in history.

NATO, the paradigmatic alliance, has embraced the new term “smart defense” as a sophisticated concept that captures the new way of doing business within the alliance. This article analyzes the concept of smart defense and explores possibilities for its successful utilization within the NATO context.

The present security environment can be characterized by a triangle of austerity, operational challenges, and uncertainty¹ that puts a lot of pressure on the perception of what is needed for defense purposes, given the wide array of threats often listed as probable. That leads to very different standpoints among NATO members, mainly because there is no strong threat that could unite everyone’s efforts and serve as a guide to establish priorities.

The expression “smart defense” was first advanced by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the 2011 Munich Security Conference. Rasmussen promoted the idea as “how NATO can help nations to build greater security with fewer resources but more coordination and coherence, so that together we can avoid the financial crisis from becoming a security crisis.” and reiterating that: “we need a new approach: Smart Defense – ensuring greater security, for less money, by working together with more flexibility.”² Apparently these first statements would indicate that “smart defense” was only about efficiency and burden sharing. As it evolved over the last two years and as we will see in the next sections, smart defense has the potential to

¹ Bastian Giegerich, “Smart Defense: The Analyst’s View: How Can Smart Defense Work in Practice?” *NATO Review Online*, 12 April 2012 (video clip), available online at <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/smart-defence/Smart-Defence-analyst-view/EN/index.htm> [accessed 14 October 2013].

² Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Building Security in an Age of Austerity,” Keynote speech by NATO Secretary General at the 2011 Munich Security Conference, 4 February 2011, available online at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_70400.htm [accessed 14 October, 2013].

become a major transformation concept for the alliance if there is sufficient political will among allies or could instead remain a meaningless term in allied jargon.

In this article, a critical assessment of the concept of smart defense will be offered. Firstly, we will attempt a definition, and give some examples. Secondly, we will analyze the concept, advancing its pros and cons. Thirdly, we will identify critical conditions of the implementation of smart defense. This concept would work in concrete cases if the traditional decision making of the alliance is maintained, that is if consensus is reached among allies on an *ad hoc* basis, but not as a fully fledged organizational transformation concept.

What is Smart Defense?

Narrowly defined, smart defense is about European allied capabilities.³ These capabilities should be developed in such a way that current and future allied operations do not rely so much on critical capabilities possessed only by the United States, as was seen in the recent NATO operation Unified Protector in Libya and in the NATO-led ISAF operation in Afghanistan.

Confronted with a rise in costs from 50% during most of the Cold War to more than 75% of its share of the alliance budget, the U.S. is pressing European allies to do more or face the consequences of a “dim, if not dismal future” for NATO.⁴ In order to maintain NATO’s relevance, the idea of creating more European capabilities with less money has been championed by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen for two years under the term “smart defense,” which has been described as a “vital priority for the alliance.”⁵

If only capabilities and burden sharing were involved, this wouldn’t be such a novelty in the current state of allied affairs, since those issues have been on the table ever since the very beginning of the alliance. What makes the implementation of smart defense so urgent now are the financial restraints of governments all over Europe, which led to slashing defense spending as well as uncertainty about future allied engagements. The strategic concept approved in the 2010 Lisbon Summit established new roles for the alliance and new capabilities for NATO, such as missile defense and cyber warfare, which require investment and burden sharing.

Since there are currently both overlapping capabilities and striking gaps among European allies, it makes sense to have a coordinated allied policy and a coherent orientation in order to reach synergies and avoid wasting precious tax payers’ money in times of scarcity. If one adds to this state of affairs the daunting challenges required to face the future, then a framework to guide defense investment would be useful. The particular occasion of the 2012 Chicago Summit, which would otherwise have been an implementation convention, offered an opportunity for advancing

³ Jacopo L. MacDonald and Jacob Henius, “The Basics of Smart Defense” in *Smart Defense: A Critical Appraisal, Forum Paper*, NATO Defense College, Rome 2012, available online at: <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=326> [accessed 14 October 2013].

⁴ See, for instance, the farewell speech to NATO of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, available at: <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1581> [accessed 14 October 2013].

⁵ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Smart Defence can help nations to build greater security with fewer resources but more coordination and coherence,” *European Security and Defence* 1/2011, available online at http://www.europeansecurityanddefence.info/Ausgaben/2011/01_2011/01_Rasmussen/Rasmussen.pdf [accessed 14 October 2013].

such a guiding alternative to provide for answers to allied shortfalls and reorient diminishing defense investment.

The Smart Defense Initiative⁶ is designed for “pooling and sharing”⁷ military capabilities. Capabilities development, particularly on the European side, has been around for quite some time in NATO. One can trace this issue back to the Defense Capabilities Initiative of 1999, with emphasis put on deployability, sustainability, and force protection in acknowledgement of the lessons learned during the decade of Balkan interventions. Then, in 2002, the same issue was addressed again in the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC), where allies “agreed to improve capabilities in more than 400 specific areas, covering eight fields essential to today’s military operations: chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense; intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition; air-to-ground surveillance; deployable and secure command, control and communications; combat effectiveness, including precision-guided munitions and suppression of enemy air defenses; strategic airlift and sealift; air-to-air refueling; deployable combat support and combat service support units.”⁸

As a consequence of NATO involvement in Afghanistan, during which the first lessons learned from that theater of operation highlighted shortfalls, the PCC was reaffirmed in the 2004 Istanbul Summit: 40 percent of ground forces would be deployable while eight percent would be supported during any overseas mission and at any given time. In this respect, smart defense is nothing new, since it follows the NATO tradition of incorporating lessons learned from the tactical and operational fields into the allied strategy in order to shape the future with necessary flexibility through capabilities development and adjustment.

What is new with the smart defense approach is the possibility of creating an intermediate level of capabilities development between the alliance and national levels, by allowing the possibility—with allied consent—of multinational arrangements with some allied and partner countries. How this idea will be implemented remains to be seen, but there are some examples already at work. Emphasis is being placed on three particular principles of smart defense, also known as constituents, namely prioritization, specialization, and multinational cooperation.⁹

Prioritization deals with the order that should be given to the specific capabilities to endorse critical gaps. Following PCC procedures, eleven critical capabilities were identified during the 2010 Lisbon Summit, which later became known as the Lisbon Capabilities Package.¹⁰ This should not be seen as the demise of other allied capabilities. Four of them are related to current shortfalls in ongoing operations, namely the Afghan Mission Network; countering Improvised Explosive Devices (IED); improving airlift and sealift capabilities; and collective logistics

⁶ The acronym will certainly be confused with the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative.

⁷ This expression is taken from the so called Ghent Initiative, which is the EU-led effort to coordinate actions related to member states’ defense investment. The facilitator is the European Defense Agency (EDA), which is working closely with NATO in order to avoid duplication of efforts.

⁸ “Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC),” available online at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50087.htm?selectedLocale=en [accessed 14 October, 2013].

⁹ “Smart Defence,” http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-DD03ED08-8D38CA5F/natolive/topics_84268.htm [accessed 14 October, 2013].

¹⁰ “Improving NATO’s Capabilities,” available online at ” http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49137.htm [accessed 14 October, 2013].

contracts. Three of them are designed to counter evolving and emergent threats: missile defense, cyber defense, and stabilization and reconstruction. The remaining four are intended to address specific critical long-term enabling capabilities for operations: information superiority, air command and control, joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), and Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS).

Under the Pool and Sharing EU Capabilities Initiative, the European Defense Agency (EDA) established its own priorities, including counter-IED; medical support; ISR; helicopters; cyber defense; multinational logistics support; Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)¹¹ information exchange; strategic and tactical airlift management; fuel and energy; and mobility assurance.¹²

After all, prioritization reflects the order of importance that multinational organizations give to specific topics that are deemed to be critical. They should influence national defense planning in such a way that countries may choose whatever capabilities are suitable for the alignment of their national requirements with those of the multinational organization to which they belong in a “transparent, cooperative, and cost-effective” manner.¹³ This obviously sets the stage for each country’s specialization.

Specialization under the Smart Defense Initiative means the concentration of efforts in areas that allies think they are strong and that are in those areas that are valuable for collective endeavor. Among allies and partners, the only nation that has the capabilities to conduct full spectrum operations is the United States. European member states have conducted some sort of specialization in the past, be it for their geographical situation (not every member state has a navy, for instance), and are prone to even more specialization, since most of them simply cannot afford to develop or buy modern (American) military equipment. If the decisions were to be taken individually to conduct uncoordinated cuts in the defense budget that would inevitably lead to some kind of specialization. This kind of specialization is called “specialization by default.”¹⁴

The wiser alternative is to consult and coordinate with other member states prior to making individual decisions on what capabilities to maintain and what capabilities to discard. The aim is to synchronize individual state’s defense planning with the alliance’s defense planning so that collective capabilities are not affected. This procedure of “specialization by design,”¹⁵ which requires cooperation among allies while respecting the principle of sovereignty for decisions, is being encouraged by the Alliance.

¹¹ The Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) is the European Union policy related to military and defense issues.

¹² [EDA] “Capability Develop Plan,” available online at <http://www.eda.europa.eu/Aboutus/Whatwedo/eda-strategies/Capabilities> [accessed 14 October, 2013].

¹³ “Smart Defence,” available online at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84268.htm?selectedLocale=en [accessed 14 October 2013].

¹⁴ “Smart Defence,” available online at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-BAF855A0-C4D5EE19/natolive/topics_84268.htm [accessed 14 October 2013].

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Multinational cooperation means that each member voluntarily joins projects that are shared by other members, thus acquiring a capability it could not afford by other means. Some groups of nations may form clusters of capabilities based on communalities like geography, culture, or common equipment, or as Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, NATO Deputy Secretary General defines it, a “sensible division of labor, when they can’t do the same thing.”¹⁶

Ludwig Decamps, NATO Director of Smart Defense, refers to smart defense as a process of “learning by doing,” in exploring how to develop capabilities.¹⁷ The first batch of 25 practical projects in the realm of smart defense was discussed during the Chicago Summit.

Although the expression “smart defense” has only been introduced relatively recently, the outcomes of the principles laid out above have been around for quite some time in NATO. For instance, the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force, normally known as AWACS,¹⁸ a set of 17 Boeing E-3A Sentry aircraft and support facilities, is an excellent example of allied collaboration and is highlighted as a perfect example of smart defense, offering an overarching capability that is expensive, complex, but critical for current military operations. There are 17 nations participating in this program, which responds to a collective need. Unfortunately, this example is an exception rather than the rule in NATO allied capabilities. Other capabilities, like Alliance Ground Surveillance, have taken more than two decades to launch, but decisions were taken during the Chicago Summit to start the procurement program that eventually will lead to the acquisition of the system, including five Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). In this case, there is a group of 14 nations¹⁹ participating directly in the program, while provisions are being made to guarantee that the system will be interoperable with the French and British national systems.

This capability will be owned and operated by NATO on behalf of all allies, as is the case with AWACS. Other classic examples of smart defense include the Baltic Air Defense cooperation and the multinational European Participating Air Forces (EPAF) project to upgrade the F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter jet. The advantages of this type of collaboration are already being seen in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program. Another example of pooling and sharing in NATO is the possibility of sharing some capabilities with allies and partners, as in the case of the Strategic Airlift Capability offered by three C-17 cargo aircraft, operating from Papa Airbase in Hungary. Some other projects include the Italian-led counter IED initiative, the German-led maritime patrol aircraft capability, and the effort to coordinate helicopter maintenance.²⁰

¹⁶ Alexander Vershbow, “Smart Defence: The Political Angle,” *NATO Review Online*, 12 April 2012, (video clip), available online at <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/smart-defence/Smart-Defence-Political/EN/index.htm> [accessed 15 October 2013].

¹⁷ Ludwig Decamps, “Smart Defence: What Does it Mean?” *NATO Review Online*, 12 April 2012, (video clip), available online at <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/smart-defence/Smart-Defence-Meaning/EN/index.htm> [accessed 15 October 2013].

¹⁸ Airborne (Early) Warning and Control System.

¹⁹ Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the United States.

²⁰ Ludwig Decamps, “Smart Defence: What Does it Mean?” *NATO Review Online*, 12 April 2012, (video clip), available online at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/smart-defence/Smart-Defence-Meaning/EN/index.htm> [accessed 14 October 2013].

Two remaining issues must be considered when addressing smart defense: the industrial standpoint and readiness efforts. Cooperation in the industrial sector is vital for the development of capabilities. In this case, the Trans-Atlantic Defense Technological and Industrial Cooperation (TADIC) is being proposed to coordinate American, Canadian, and European perspectives. A preliminary meeting took place in October 2011 at the level of the national Armaments Directors in order to identify a roadmap for enhanced technical and industrial cooperation between the two sides of the Atlantic. Capabilities development does not mean, however, that every state must buy the same equipment. Thus, special concern is being given to the interoperability of a federation of systems. The NATO Secretary General advanced the Connect Forces Initiative in February 2012, again at the Munich Security Conference,²¹ as a means of interconnecting capabilities and forging synergies, illustratively defined as the “plug and play” approach. The three strands pursued under this last initiative are: education, training,²² and technology.

All in all, we can say that smart defense is a combination of several methods of capabilities development and sustainability, using a mix of old and new approaches, following the principles of prioritization, specialization, and multinational cooperation in a synchronized and cost effective way, including the increased number of alliance-owned, alliance-operated projects; regional projects to address regional challenges;²³ *ad hoc* projects under the leadership of a European member; collaboration among industrial partners; and cooperation with partners and international organizations. Smart defense seems to be nothing more than rational deeds under fiscal constraints. However, no matter how rational a solution might be, a deeper analysis of the concept should identify some advantages and problems that lie ahead, which we will address in the next section.

²¹ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Remarks” at the Munich Security Conference plenary session on “Building Euro-Atlantic Security,” 4 February, 2012, available online at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_84197.htm [accessed 14 October 2013].

²² An increase in the number of NATO exercises is expected, now that some national deployments are being retracted. The key element of the exercises within the Alliance will be the NATO Response Force, since it brings together multinational and joint assets of land, air, sea, and special forces.

²³ The BENELUX (Belgium, The Netherlands, and Luxemburg) and the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO), which include two NATO allies (Norway and Denmark) and two NATO partners (Sweden and Finland) are presented as case studies for efficient capabilities development. Other examples include the Visegrad group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and the Treaty for Cooperation in Defense and Security issues signed between France and the United Kingdom in November, 2010.

Critical Considerations

Despite the rationality of pooling and sharing military capabilities across the Alliance, the urgency imposed by decreasing budgets, and the marketing efforts of NATO officials, who tend to portray smart defense as the “silver bullet against capabilities shortfalls,”²⁴ the concept deserves a proper analysis. In this section, we will explore the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats of smart defense. The author does not claim that this review is exhaustive, since it is acknowledged that smart defense is a “learning by doing”²⁵ process, thus deferring to the future the definitive proof of the concept.

Taking into account the spectrum of threats that NATO, as an alliance, has to face, the military capabilities required, and the heterogeneity of member states, some type of multinational collaboration is essential. It is impossible for each and every country to develop the full spectrum of capabilities required by modern warfare scenarios.²⁶ Above all, the proposal for smart defense is very useful because it demands strategic elaboration. In this sense, it is seen as a top-down approach, a sort of moral obligation, although strictly not mandatory, to at least do more for the collective good. The main problem is that it touches deep engrained sentiments and procedures, rooted in strategic cultures based on sovereignty, thus affecting states’ freedom to choose capabilities thought to better serve national strategy. Among the concept’s advantages is the coherence it provides to the defense planning process, in a cost-effective way. Now is the right time to advance such a concept due the financial crisis in Europe, the forecasted operational pause, and fresh memories of allied drawbacks. On the problematic side, one could envision that the lack of a concrete definition of the smart defense concept and the possibility of creating an intermediate level of decision-making by supporting sub-groups that could eventually lead to alliance’s dissolution in the future.

Strengths

- **Coherent allied defense planning.** Usually, defense planning in NATO is cumbersome. The process evolved from force planning to the integration of several planning areas²⁷ with the objective of obtaining harmonization among individual contributions while providing the alliance with the necessary capabilities to face perceived threats with adequate burden sharing. The new process, adopted in 2009, relies heavily on consultations between the civilian and military staffs of various agencies in NATO headquarters and in NATO capitals before establishing targets. The process of *a priori* consultation encourages members to coordinate their own defense planning processes and

²⁴ Jacopo L. MacDonald and Jacob Henius, “The Basics of Smart Defense” in *Smart Defense: A Critical Appraisal*, Forum Paper, NATO Defense College, Rome 2012, p. 5, available online at: <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=326> [accessed 14 October 2013].

²⁵ Ludwig Decamps, “Smart Defence: What Does it Mean?” *NATO Review Online*, 12 April 2012, (video clip), available online at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/smart-defence/Smart-Defence-Meaning/EN/index.htm> [accessed 14 October 2013].

²⁶ Even if they did, they would be considered “Bonsai Armies” (Christian Mölling, “Europe Without Defence,” SWP Comments, 38, November 2011, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, available online at: http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2011C38_mlg_ks.pdf [accessed 15 October 2013], given the small amount of troops that individual nations can mobilize compared to large armies like the Russian or Chinese armies.

²⁷ As a result of the new NATO Defense Planning Process adopted in 2009 the domains subject to allied planning are forces; resources; armaments; logistics; nuclear; C³ (consultation, command, and control); civil emergency; air defense; air traffic management; standardization; intelligence; medical support; and research and technology.

to set realistic force goals. Smart defense will add a new set of priorities given the three time scales envisaged: current shortfalls on ongoing operations, evolving and emergent threats, and critical long-term enabling capabilities for operations. The new NATO Procurement Agency will play a decisive role in identifying the areas subject to multinational cooperation and integrating the efforts of other Alliance and members' bodies involved in planning, thus providing greater coherence to the planning process.

- **A guiding framework for national planning.** Related to the previous point, the priorities and gaps in capabilities identified by the Alliance will serve as a strong indication of what is valuable for the collective effort. Traditionally, nations did their national planning individually and offered the outcome to the Alliance. This has led to an abundance of some resources and gaps in other capabilities. Instead of the traditional guesswork about the future of national defense planning based on decisions reached individually by states, only later to reach the conclusion that some of these capabilities developed may be useless to the Alliance, nations will now have guidelines so they can anticipate what is of value for the collective effort. This will certainly have an effect on national prioritization and investment decisions about future capabilities as well as a strong indication of what capabilities should be discarded.
- **High-end capabilities, equitable entry fee.** The main strength of smart defense is the possibility of providing access to sophisticated, complex, and normally very expensive capabilities that medium-sized and small countries would never be able to develop or acquire on their own. As a result of previous investments, NATO major powers such as France, the United Kingdom, and the United States are already at the front edge of military evolution. The majority of other member states can only afford to have access to those capabilities through multinational projects, such as new fighter aircraft development, missile defense, ISR, strategic transport, and force projection. Multinational projects are complex and usually protracted. If they are conducted *ad hoc*, risk increases substantially, which is then reflected in the price that countries pay for these systems. In this respect, smart defense offers the possibility of lowering development costs by diminishing the risk of those projects and gaining in economies of scale for a reasonable sharing of costs among participating nations.
- **Cost-effectiveness.** By pooling and sharing resources, nations can save money in the operating costs of common equipment and gain critical mass when negotiating with the suppliers in what otherwise would have been dispersed efforts.

Opportunities

- **Euro crisis.** The scarcity of fiscal resources that affects almost every country in Europe can be seen as a natural enforcer of cooperation among European member states. Rigorous analyses of security priorities and realistic approaches to their implementation are being conducted in every European capital. This reality check has led to dramatic cuts in defense spending. With the possibility of “doing more with less” promised by smart defense, now is the right moment to offer alternative ways of thinking about military

capabilities. National governments now have the option of conducting “specialization by design” instead of “specialization by default”²⁸ in a synchronized way across the Alliance.

- **Operational pause.** The Alliance is ending its combat mission in Afghanistan in 2014. Apart from any development regarding the Syria crisis or any unexpected contingency, the only remaining NATO major operation will be Operation Active Endeavor, which has seen the active participation not only of members but of partners, as well. This means that allies may enjoy an operational break to rethink their capabilities in the face of recent and anticipated challenges. This pause offers the opportunity for refocusing at the allied level as well as at the national level by incorporating the lessons learned from previous deployments.
- **Shortfalls are fresh in memory.** NATO now has the experience of two decades of active operations. This valuable experience has demonstrated how allies can work together in a multinational security arrangement to reach political ends like pacifying the Balkans and protecting the vital sea lines of communication in the Mediterranean. Operational employment of allied assets has also shown the drawbacks of allied action, for instance during Operation Unified Protector in Libya from February through October 2011, where only eight members participated in combat operations and critical capabilities like ISR and air-to-air refueling; even ammunition had to be provided by the United States. European allies have been accused of being free riders under the collective defense umbrella at American expense and of having plans to become a large neutral region, cut off from a chaotic world. Americans have been accused of convincing the Europeans to not develop strategic collective assets, as they are redundant in face of NATO, thus maintaining the continent’s dependence on American assistance. However, both sides of the Atlantic agree on relevance of the transatlantic link. This may be the right time to advance a new “transatlantic bargain.”²⁹

Weaknesses

- **Vagueness.** Despite all its popularity in official discourse and the media, the concept of smart defense remains rather vague.³⁰ An official definition is not available and current criticism suggests that there will never be one.³¹ Smart defense is described as “new way

²⁸ Jakob Henius, “Specialization, the Gordian Knot of NATO’s Smart Defense,” in *Smart Defense: a Critical Appraisal*, Forum Paper, NATO Defense College, Rome 2012, available online at: <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=326> [accessed 15 October 2013].

²⁹ See, for instance, Karl-Heinz Kamp and Kurt Volker, “Toward a New Transatlantic Bargain,” *Policy Outlook*, 1 February 2012, available at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/transatlantic_bargain.pdf [accessed 15 October 2013] and Mark D. Ducasse, ed., “The Transatlantic Bargain,” *NDC Forum Paper* 20, NATO Defense College, Rome, 2012, available online at: <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=314> [accessed 15 October 2013].

³⁰ J. MacDonald, 2012, p.5.

³¹ See, for instance, Patrick Keller, “After the Operations: Outlook for the NATO Summit in Chicago,” *Analysen und Argumente*, No. 100, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., Sankt Augustin, 3 February 2012, available online at: <http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.30100/> [accessed 15 October 2013].

of thinking,”³² a “new label for an old idea,”³³ a “framework,”³⁴ or even a “euphemism.”³⁵ From “buzzword” to “bumper sticker slogan,”³⁶ critics have warned allied decision makers to exercise caution due to the extreme political consequences of improper use of an imprecise concept related to military capabilities and burden sharing.

- **Risk of causing a stalemate.** Arising from the issues mentioned in the previous bullet is the danger of inaction. Since smart defense envisages three timeframes (immediate, medium term, and long term) while it promises to “do more with less,” the same objectives that make smart defense so urgent (increased European capabilities) may encourage inaction by less capable members, who may choose to wait and see or “stick to what you have” as precautionary measures.
- **Ambitious.** Convincing the European member states that the Americans are right about how to conduct a war may prove to be difficult. In this sense, without a properly defined threat to European member states, they may look at American pressure on the Europeans to spend more on defense as serving only American interests. It is here where different threat perceptions may cause increasingly different approaches to security issues. Expensive weapon systems—or for that matter, a global security agenda—may create a big divide in the establishment of priorities in defense investment. The current American narrative may prove to be too ambitious to gather the necessary political support from European electorates.

Threats

- **“Ghettoization.”** During the 2012 Chicago Summit, 25 smart defense projects were announced. These projects (deemed Tier-One) respond to the immediate shortfalls already mentioned. Each will have a lead nation and participating members.³⁷ According to General Stéphane Abrial, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT), these groups integrate from between “three to eight [countries] at a maximum”³⁸ for the sake of efficiency. Although this procedure is negotiable, one can see the danger

³² “Smart Defence,” http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-693EC3EC-D1067940/natolive/topics_84268.htm [accessed 15 October 2013].

³³ “NATO Parliamentary Assembly Secretary General, David Hobbs, Calls on Chicago Summit to Overcome Past Obstacles to Closer Defence Cooperation,” <http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=2775> [accessed 15 October 2013].

³⁴ Bram Peter De Ridder, “Smart Defense through Smart Strategy: The Need for a ‘Best Deal’ Policy,” *Atlantic Community*, 12 April 2012, http://www.atlantic-community.org/index/articles/view/Smart_Defense_through_Smart_Strategy%3A_The_Need_for_a_%22Best_Deal%22_Policy [accessed 15 October 2013].

³⁵ Dirk Siebels, “Spending Together, Saving Together,” 8 April 2012, available online at http://archive.atlantic-community.org/app/index.php/Open_Think_Tank_Article/Spending_Together%2C_Saving_Together [accessed 15 October 2013]. See also:

<http://www.securityconference.de/Top-News-Detail.55+M58961f061fc.0.html> [accessed 17 May 2012].

³⁶ J. MacDonald, 2012, p. 24.

³⁷ Remarks by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Allied Command Transformation Seminar, Washington, DC, 28 February 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_84689.htm [accessed 15 October 2013].

³⁸ AFP, “Face à l'austérité, l'Otan veut "changer d'état d'esprit,," 10 May 2012, http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/monde/face-a-l-austerite-l-otan-veut-changer-d-etat-d-esprit_1113057.html [accessed 15 October 2013].

of certain clusters forming within the alliance that may lead to serious disputes among allies, particularly if other national interests are present, like national industries or old grievances, for instance. This may also give the impression of several exclusive clubs, revealing a crude reality but not supporting the necessary allied solidarity. These “internal coalitions of the willing”³⁹ may have a profound impact as time mounts, eroding trust among allies.

- **Fission.** Specialization will render some countries dependent on the willingness of others to provide a necessary capability. To avoid that dependence, members may choose to develop alternative competences that they think are essential for their own countries, outside the alliance range; that will inevitably lead to the duplication of efforts and to overlapping capabilities. If a member feels it is being marginalized, trust, once again, will decrease; this may provoke detachment from the allied agenda. If this process is repeated, then a chain reaction can result and alliance realignment may ensue. Lord Salisbury once said that “the only bond of union that endures [among nations] is the absence of all clashing interests.”⁴⁰ This principle of political realism certainly applies to NATO, which has undergone critical moments, related to divergent national interests, but none of which was considered “clashing.” If certain blends of interests are damaged, however, there is then the danger of fission inside the Alliance.
- **Increased bureaucracy.** Despite all legally binding arrangements, decision making can flounder if a country decides to veto a particular project. NATO decision making is based on consensus. When there is strong disagreement, without proper leadership, the mesh of intricate consultations required for defense planning may deteriorate or fall apart. Certain analysts say that the Alliance will “increasingly become a looser ‘talking shop,’ where security issues are debated but not necessarily resolved.”⁴¹ NATO Secretary General Anders F. Rasmussen addressed this issue in the same speech where smart defense was introduced. He said, “I know that Allies don’t always find multinational cooperation the most attractive option. There are lingering concerns about delayed delivery schedules, inflated overhead costs, and slow decision-making. And of course, defense is tightly bound with national sovereignty, industry, and jobs.”⁴²

If Libya is to be an example for future NATO operations outside of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, then the whole idea of burden sharing may be hard to sell, especially because coalitions of the willing may always be formed outside of the Alliance. The whole process of

³⁹ Steve Erlanger, “Libya’s Dark Lesson for NATO,” 3 October 2011, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/sunday-review/what-libyas-lessons-mean-for-nato.html?pagewanted=all> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, “Sources of Tension Between Western Europe and the United States,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 312, The Future of the Western Alliance (Jul., 1957), pp. 22-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1031411> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴¹ Fareed Zakaria, “NATO: From Military Alliance to Talk Shop?” 6 February 2012, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/06/nato-from-military-alliance-to-talk-shop/> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴² Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Building Security in an Age of Austerity,” Keynote speech by NATO Secretary General at the 2011 Munich Security Conference, 4 February 2011, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_70400.htm [accessed 15 October 2013].

implementing smart defense will be essentially political instead of technical or economic. Given that sovereignty issues are at the core of Alliance decision making, NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow acknowledges the difficulties related to the feasibility of developing multinational capabilities, saying “more often than not, nations want to be self reliant.”⁴³ This does not mean that the idea should be abandoned just because it’s difficult to implement. What it does mean is that creative ideas should be employed to convince members that they will be better off if they adopt multinational approaches to capability development. Special care should be given to critical issues. These topics will be addressed in the next section.

Will the Smart Defense Initiative Work?

So far, we have described what smart defense is and identified its main strengths and weaknesses. In this section we will discuss smart defense success. The Chicago Summit addressed smart defense as very important topic for the Alliance, since it was the second item on the summit agenda.⁴⁴ NATO Defense Capabilities were addressed in a particular summit declaration,⁴⁵ where allies established a new goal for its forces in 2020: “modern, tightly connected forces equipped, trained, exercised, and commanded so that they can operate together and with partners in any environment.” Smart defense is identified as being “at the heart” of the capability development process. As expected,⁴⁶ a new set of capabilities was announced, including the interim ballistic missile defense capability; three timeframes were established for developing those capabilities: immediate, medium term, and long term. The initiatives to cover current shortfalls in operations include:

- **Afghan Mission Network (AMN)**
AMN is a secret digital network that allows the exchange of tactical and operational information among ISAF partner nations. AMN is not a new project, since it has evolved over several years, but needs further development.
- **Counter-IED**
Italy will continue its leading role in a group of nations that are developing an ambitious program to face the main cause of casualties in Afghanistan. Some elements of the program are old, but the methodology (attacking the IED network) is new and some technical details are still under development, such as special sensors used in air platforms.
- **Improving airlift and sealift capabilities**
Many members and partners have already pooled resources in order to acquire or rent strategic mobility for their forces. In-theater air transport is also critical. Not necessarily new, this project improved coordination among allies and partners. As an example, the

⁴³ Alexander Vershbow, “Smart Defence: The Political Angle,” *NATO Review Online*, 12 April 2012, (video clip), available online at <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2012/smart-defence/Smart-Defence-Political/EN/index.htm> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴⁴ The other two items are Afghanistan and partnerships.

⁴⁵ “Summit Declaration on Defence Capabilities: Toward NATO Forces 2020,” 20 May 2012, available online at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87594.htm [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴⁶ “Improving NATO’s Capabilities,” http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49137.htm [accessed 20 May 2012].

four year old HIP Helicopter Initiative,⁴⁷ led by the Czech Republic, is facilitating air transport by helicopters inside Afghanistan to those nations that cannot afford to deploy their own assets.

- **Collective Logistics Contracts**

This project aims at launching procedures for logistical support before the beginning of an operation in areas where collective responsibility and common funding is involved, including medical support, through the use of rapidly usable contracts. There is nothing really new in this project, but it may have a strong impact on the mobility of forces.

Most of these initiatives have been on the table for some time and are mainly related to the Afghan operation. What appears to be new is that the label smart defense is attached to them. Otherwise, these projects would be considered business as usual. Nevertheless, they may be seen as prototypes for more sophisticated capabilities. The use of the expression smart defense seems to be highly rhetorical in these cases, but may be useful for developing trust among allies and to illustrate the “new way of doing business.” Trust is the single most necessary ingredient for the implementation of smart defense.⁴⁸ The capabilities mentioned above are very concrete, with a precise timetable, mostly related to ongoing operations in a remote location. This means that they do not involve sovereignty or heavy investment issues, thus can be easily agreed upon. Approving these capabilities will open the door for the next stage of implementation of the smart defense concept, which is supposed to deal with evolving and emerging threats, namely:

- **Missile defense**

At the Lisbon Summit of 2010, it was announced that NATO would develop a missile defense capability to counter medium-range missile threats as part of the allied integral defense posture. This is to be achieved through the use of some American sensors and weapons installed in member states, as well as several other contributions, including common funding for the command and control system. As mentioned before, the interim capability of the system was announced in Chicago. The system is expected to reach full capability by the end of the decade. Once again, implementation plans were made well before smart defense was defined.

- **Cyber defense**

This new capability made its first step towards full operational status after the June 2011 approval of the NATO Policy on Cyber Defense and its associated Action Plan. In February 2012, a 58 million Euro contract was awarded to establish a NATO Cyber Incident Response Capability (NCIRC), which will be fully operational by the end of 2013.⁴⁹ This capability is intended to protect the NATO information network from cyber attacks. There are provisions to assist member nations in case of a cyber attack to their national infrastructure.

⁴⁷ See “Allies sign declaration of intent for HIP helicopter initiative,” 23 October 2009, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_58509.htm [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴⁸ John Vandiver, “Can NATO’s European Members Share Resources?” *Stars and Stripes*, 6 May 2012, available online at: <http://www.stripes.com/news/can-nato-s-european-members-share-resources-1.176447> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴⁹ “NATO and Cyber Defence,” available online at http://www.nato.int/cps/ar/natolive/topics_78170.htm, [accessed 15 October 2013].

- **Stabilization and reconstruction**

This broad capability is geared towards post-conflict situations where the Alliance, more than all other actors involved, seeks to have an enhanced role. Assistance to Afghanistan after 2014 will certainly fall under this topic.

Members may have different priorities supporting this set of priorities, but there were no signs of difficulties in reaching consensus among allies. These are typical examples of collective action at the Alliance level. Traditional burden sharing applies in order to obtain the optimal blend of national and NATO-owned and operated components for collective defense. Smart defense helps to accommodate this set of capabilities, particularly related to multinational cooperation. The same can be said about the next set of capabilities, considered to be critical long-term enabling capabilities for operations:

- **Information superiority**

This is a broad capability that is viewed as a key enabling element for operations. The acquisition of networked systems will cover several domains, including land, air, maritime, intelligence, logistics and the common operating picture. Since this is a long-term capability, the Connected Forces Initiative technical component will be mainly focused on pursuing the necessary interoperability among legacy assets in the interim period. Here is where one can see the smart defense principles at work, because nations will have to make choices, prioritizing between traditional or future capabilities, which necessarily leads to specialization.

- **Air Command and Control System (ACCS)**

This capability provides real time Command and Control across allied European airspace for traditional air defense and missile defense.

- **Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (JSIR)**

JSIR is a capability that will provide for the entire process of collection and dissemination of information among several entities, integrating ISR from NATO systems such as AWACS, Allied Ground Surveillance (AGS), and national ISR platforms.

- **Allied Ground Surveillance**

AGS is a capability that was launched in 1995 and has had major delays, but has made progress through the acquisition of five Global Hawk Block 40 high-altitude, long-endurance UAVs and associated systems by 13 allies.⁵⁰ There are also provisions for integrated future national systems, as participation in kind. AGS is probably the most paradigmatic of all of the systems listed here as far as having some smart defense DNA. It fills an allied shortfall, critical to modern day operations; it is conveniently prioritized by NATO and by the EDA; it represents specialization; and is a product of multinational cooperation at an affordable cost.

Other examples of capabilities under consideration are: pooling and sharing maritime patrol assets, under German lead; air policing in the Baltic states; training helicopter pilots, under the leadership of the Czech Republic; robots for demining operations; multinational cooperation on munitions, led by Denmark; multinational logistics partnership for fuel handling, led by France;

⁵⁰“Fact Sheet: Chicago Summit – NATO Capabilities,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/20/fact-sheet-chicago-summit-nato-capabilities> [accessed 15 October 2013].

Universal Armaments Interface, for interoperability of fighter jets' ammunitions; pooling and sharing multinational medical treatment facilities; maintenance of Mine Resistant Ambush Vehicle, led by the U.S.; and the Deployable Contract Specialist Group, for rapid contracting.

These 21 projects are packaged under the brand of smart defense. They indicate the consensus that nations have reached so far. As a consequence, we may say that smart defense is already working. Despite the diplomatic language that was used praising the innovative solution of "doing more with less," difficulties lie ahead. Convincing some countries that they may want to relinquish some capabilities in order to be able to invest in others may be impossible. Although there are signs that some division of labor was already accomplished, such as the Netherlands selling its 13 strong P-3C fleet to Germany and Portugal, the ultimate decision remains within each member state. Thus, NATO has to use some incentives for specializing countries.

Tomáš Valášek⁵¹ recommends three reinforcing approaches in order to make smart defense a success:

- Reassurance for specializing countries is key. If, for example, a country agrees to abandon a certain capability, then NATO must guarantee that that same capability will be available for that particular country when needed and that no other member could block that use. This would, however, be a departure from consensus-based decision making in NATO so agreement seems highly unlikely.
- Quick reimbursement of start-up expenses of collaborative projects.
- Distribution of lessons-learned from all multinational projects in order to encourage those thinking in participating in multinational cooperation efforts.

Specialization seems to be the most difficult facet to obtain. Abandoning entire services or some critical capabilities like a submarine force⁵² in favor of some type of allied capability seems very unrealistic. On the other hand, and despite all multinational collaboration at the state level and some embryonic experiences, sharing of national military resources between European countries on a permanent basis is practically impossible. Combined European military services are, for now, out of reach. Roger Ingebrigtsen, former Norwegian State Secretary, said it clearly: "shared units in the force structure are currently not on our agenda."⁵³ As a consequence, smart defense projects within NATO have a greater chance of being successful if they are on the Common Security and Defense Policy agenda, as was seen with the European Defense Agency priorities example, because European nations will want to have the same capabilities to use under NATO or European Union command and control.

⁵¹ Tomáš Valášek, "How to Make "Smart Defense" a Success," *Globsec 2012 Policy Briefs*, Central European Policy Institute, available online at: <http://www.ata-sac.org/globsec2012/uploads/documents/GPB/GPB%20Val%C3%A1%C5%A1ek.pdf> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁵² Admiral Stavridis (SACEUR) blog, "Sailing on to the NATO Chicago Summit," 30 April 2012, available online at <http://www.eucom.mil/blog-post/23317/sailing-on-to-the-nato-chicago-summit> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁵³ Roger Ingebrigtsen, "Smart Defense, the Norwegian perspective," 24 April 2012, available online at <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/fd/whats-new/Speeches-and-articles/Speeches-and-articles-by-other-apolitica/speeches-and-articles-by-state-secretary-2/2012/smart-defence--the-norwegian-perspective.html?id=679432> [accessed 15 October 2013].

Matteo Scianna⁵⁴ calls for the establishment of a level of ambition in the European Union to wage a war like Kosovo or Libya without the U.S. This would certainly help in implementing the concept of smart defense. Maximalist approaches like NATO imposing a mandatory capability package on members cannot be foreseen. What is more probable is NATO working as a broker to identify certain critical capabilities and trying to convince members to specialize by using the right stimulus. Smart defense thus is a framework,⁵⁵ through which member nations can collaborate more efficiently. This means that sophisticated capabilities like Theater Ballistic Missile Defense and Cyber Defense, which are perceived to have a clear collective defense role, are more prone to be adopted by European member states. Other projects, despite the reasonability of multinational cooperation, will be supported only to the point where they start interfering with long held national interests, because they are rooted in very different threat perceptions. NATO capabilities outside traditional Article 5 defense planning will face a hard road to approval. This leads to the conclusion that smart defense's fate will be decided on a case-by-case basis and not as an overarching capability development method.

NATO will retain incalculable value if it continues to do what has always done: provide the cement that holds the bricks together. Until trust is developed and a comprehensive set of capabilities can be pooled and shared accordingly, an incremental approach is expected, starting with education, training, and exercising, which are seen as less controversial topics than operational capabilities. A promising focus to start with will be on "common standards, interoperability, connectivity ... the DNA of smart defense, because they are the platform on which these collaborative efforts to get more for our buck have to be built," in the words of Philip Hammond, the UK Defense Secretary during the 2012 Munich Security Conference.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Threat perceptions are at the heart of the decisions that guide capability development for defense and security purposes. Conventional threats against NATO territory are assessed to be low. Despite this, the current security environment can be characterized by austerity, operational challenges, and uncertainty. This leads to very different threat perceptions among NATO members, especially among European members that have seen their defense budgets slashed in recent years. The expression smart defense has been touted by NATO officials during the last two years as the allied response to overcome capability shortfalls, such as the ones encountered in Afghanistan and in Libya recent operations. At the same time, new capabilities find their way to implementation status, such as missile defense and cyber defense, following the direction established in the last NATO Strategic Concept. "Doing more with less" is the motto for smart defense.

⁵⁴ Matteo B. Scianna, "It's Smart Defense, Stupid, The European Common Security and Defense Policy and Hegemony in the 21st Century," *Small Wars Journal*, 8 February 2012, available online at: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/its-smart-defense-stupid> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁵⁵ Bram Peter De Ridder, "Smart Defense through Smart Strategy: The Need for a 'Best Deal' Policy," *Atlantic Community*, 12 April 2012, http://www.atlantic-community.org/index/articles/view/Smart_Defense_through_Smart_Strategy%3A_The_Need_for_a_%22Best_Deal%22_Policy [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁵⁶ *Apud* John Vandiver, "Can NATO's European members share resources?" 5 May 2012, *Stars and Stripes*, available online at <http://www.stripes.com/news/can-nato-s-european-members-share-resources-1.176447> [accessed 16 October 2013].

Smart defense is about European allied capabilities and a follow up to previous initiatives like the 1999 Defense Capabilities Initiative and 2002 Prague Capabilities Commitment. In this respect, there's nothing new about smart defense. What is really new is the possibility of having an intermediate level of capability development between the alliance and national levels. Priorities set out in the Lisbon Summit are very similar to the Pool and Sharing EU Capabilities Initiative. Prioritization is one feature of smart defense. The others are specialization and multinational cooperation. The type of specialization envisaged by smart defense is a "specialization by design" and not a "specialization by default" as a consequence of shrinking budgets. Member states have to consult with one another before they decide to appropriate money for costly defense projects or phase out existing capabilities.

Cooperation is the division of labor among those pursuing multinational endeavors. AWACS is one traditional example of successful smart defense. Others, like AGS, although not so successful, are being launched. In the first case, 17 nations provide for the allied capability, while in the second there are 14 participating nations. Some other programs already in place are the European Participating Air Forces, dealing with the upgrading of F-16 fighter jets and Strategic Airlift Capability. To address the problem conveniently, a Trans-Atlantic Defense Technological and Industrial Cooperation (TADIC) is being considered; interoperability issues will be dealt with through the Connected Forces Initiative so that members and partners can "plug and play." Smart defense can be defined as the combination of several methods of capabilities development and sustainability, through a mix of old and new approaches, following the principles of prioritization, specialization, and multinational cooperation in a synchronized and cost effective way.

Although it may seem rational, smart defense must be analyzed further. The main advantage of this concept is the coherence of the defense planning process. Then there is the opportunity which is related to the financial crisis in Europe, the reduction in operational activity, and the lessons learned in recent operations. On the debatable side of the issue, we posit the lack of a concrete definition of the smart defense concept and the possibility of introducing an intermediate level of decision-making between allied and traditional nation levels that could eventually lead to an erosion of the alliance in the future.

The capabilities announced in Chicago cover three timeframes: immediate, medium term, and long term. Other than the label "smart defense," capabilities planning can be seen to be business as usual. As a consequence, we may say that smart defense is already at work. The difficult part is still to come, as allies need to be convinced to relinquish some capabilities in order to possess others. Some have done so voluntarily. If smart defense is to be a success, some incentives must be found. Binding compromises and material compensation will certainly help as well as access to lessons learned.

Specialization seems to be the most difficult feature to obtain. Maximalist approaches that see smart defense as a transformational concept are exaggerated. Smart defense will have to promote trust among allies; for that to happen, an incremental approach to implementation starting with less controversial issues like education, training, and joint exercise is advisable.

This article started with an analogy between two types of races that are not mixed: hurdles and relays. The hurdles of burden sharing will be overcome one way or another for the purpose of collective defense. Relays will also happen between European members at the sub-regional level. Whether they shall emerge as a completely new sport that has never been tested remains to be seen. European nations at the moment are not eager to test new political arrangements dealing with sovereignty. For that, they have the European Union.

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