

OPTIONS FOR STRUCTURING THE LEVEL OF AMBITION IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF DEFENSE

*Dragoş ILINCA, PhD**

***Abstract:** Traditionally, the military level of ambition (LoA) is interlinked with operational aspects, providing a more precise perspective on the number and types of operations that a given country could perform within a limited period. In the same vein, LoA has particular relevance within the defense planning framework providing quantitative and qualitative parameters for forces and capabilities allocated for operational commitments. Obviously, the constant requirement of matching the security environment evolutions poses certain challenges in structuring the process meant to define the LoA, both in terms of operational planning and on resources available for defense. These aspects are more relevant when it comes to generate the LoA in the multinational context, especially in NATO and EU framework.*

***Keywords:** NATO, EU, Common Security and Defense Policy, European defense, defense planning, Level of Ambition, EU Global Security Strategy*

Introduction

Defining the military level of ambition in the current security environment is a complex process, both from a national perspective and from that of multinational cooperation formats. The main challenges lie with the latter, in particular regarding the way in which different models applied by member states for structuring the level of ambition. The relevant aspect is the way in which LoA is connected to their potential, viewed both from the perspective of force generation and the existence of support capabilities in the theatre. In this paradigm, the issue of standardizing the level of ambition through a single formula is an objective in itself, difficult to achieve in the absence of a sufficiently rigorous and, equally, flexible

* Head of research department, Institute for Defense Policy Studies and Military History, dilinca@yahoo.com

procedural framework meant to allow a proper integration of different national typologies.

As the experience of the last decades indicates, defining the level of ambition on the military component of LoA requires a thorough analysis process. From a national perspective, it is difficult to talk about common typologies for generating this tool. Practically, each state defines its specific approaches as a direct result of the interaction between strategic objectives and the available resources. In the same vein, it is worth taking into account the different paradigms in which this process is conducted, the major differences being given by the status and position of the actor in the international security context, respectively by the membership in multinational organizations. The common element of the options used by different states is setting the military level of ambition as the main indicator that can provide the benchmarks for the national ability for operational projection of the security objectives. The place of the LoA must also be considered in the broader equation of the level of ambition in the field of defense. It draws attention to the practical and conceptual interaction between these elements, at the level of which military aspects are integrated into a more comprehensive construct of national defense objectives.

Development of the military level of ambition in NATO context

For countries which are part of multinational cooperation formulas, especially NATO and EU, the process of defining the LoA requires full integration, within the internal analysis, of the multinational aspects in relation to capabilities and forces commitment. Consequently, the interoperability criterion is widely used by the national planners as one of the main parameters in shaping the practical commitments with a view on the LoA itself. Therefore, additional ways for fine-tuning the defense planning system are required. This approach will facilitate the identification of LoA in a more realistic and credible way, being also in full compliance with the sustainability as well as with the operational requirements for external commitments. Therefore, the central role is played by the full spectrum of the missions that the forces committed to operations are supposed to perform. The significance of this indicator is more relevant from the perspective of an extended set of missions in which various types of forces and capabilities must be integrated into functional formulas. Thus,

*OPTIONS FOR STRUCTURING THE LEVEL OF AMBITION
IN THE CONTEXT OF
MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF DEFENSE*

setting the missions has a particular relevance in guiding the planning process and aggregating the LoA substance. Within this framework, several aspects are taken into account, namely: security aspects in the operational theatre, geographic distance and requirements of the deployed forces in terms of capabilities. Besides the deployment parameters, drafting the LoA has to reflect the concurrency level of operational commitments based on the national capability for simultaneously sustaining several operations.

There is no unique formula for evaluating the various types of criteria or parameters due to fact that those are used in accordance to the national specifics. Within this framework, there can be assumed the coexistence of two ways of expressing the LoA. The first one is centered on projecting the number of missions and operations. This typology can be augmented with other parameters such as: types of missions envisaged; level of intensity in operational environment; period for deployment. The second one is focused on a more general approach, by expressing under LoA an overall number of forces, which are intended to be deployed. In most of the cases, the figure results from the operational readiness of various elements of the national force structure.

Discussion on military LoA in the multinational format is closely related to the way in which member states are defining this objective. It is about an ambivalent relation, centered on interaction between national models and typologies through which a common model is generated. Yet, this should not be perceived, basically, as a sum but rather as a common denominator of national options. There is no doubt that the development of LoA is linked with the role of played by NATO in the context of European and Euro-Atlantic security. According to the objectives assumed through Strategic Concept adopted during Lisbon Summit (20 November 2010), the political level of ambition of the North Atlantic Alliance was underpinned by three components. The first one is related to the fundamental responsibility for ensuring collective defense of the NATO members, according to Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty. The basic principle in implementing this objective, from the LoA perspective, requires solidarity among member states in implementing the mutual assistance in case of an aggression against one of them. The type of threats is tackled both from the perspective of the state that would suffer the aggression as well as from the perspective of the Allied integrated response in such circumstances. On a

similar note, the process of shaping the response requires a comprehensive set of tools and capabilities, including on political and diplomatic fields. According to the political decision adopted in Lisbon, the second landmark is related to the capacity to sustain NATO's active engagement within the overall international crisis management framework. Given the particular dynamics of the security threats and challenges special attention is paid both to the ability of avoiding escalation of the conflict situations that could affect Euro-Atlantic security and to the capability of supporting operational commitments in the post-conflict reconstruction domain.

Obviously, these objectives address the internal capacity to adapt the employment of NATO's political and military capabilities towards an extended set of security challenges. Moreover, NATO has an important role to play through contribution in the field of partnership and cooperation, in support of international security. The partnership formulas developed by NATO in various configurations, with countries and organizations with relevant responsibilities in the field of security, are focused on strengthening international community efforts focused on arms control, proliferation and disarmament. This contribution should be seen as a valuable support for undertakings of the candidate states for membership, according with the NATO's open doors policy¹. LoA drafting is taking place within the overall framework of NATO Defense Planning Process (NDDP)² which is the backbone of the political objectives implementation process. The first stage of this undertaking is related to the establishment of the political guidance based on the Strategic Concept provisions, allied evaluations and other documents. The outcome is integrated in a framework document, which will provide a picture of the operational aspects, in terms of number and types of operations, which NATO can undertake. Currently, the agreed objectives in defining the LoA aiming at 8 operations (1 major joint consolidated

¹ Active Engagement, Modern Defense - Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon 19-20 November 2010. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm, [30 October 2019].

² NDDP comprises 5 steps conducted over a period of 4 years. It includes: establish political guidance; determine requirements; apportion requirements and set targets; facilitate implementation; review results
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49202.htm.

*OPTIONS FOR STRUCTURING THE LEVEL OF AMBITION
IN THE CONTEXT OF
MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF DEFENSE*

operation (MJO+)/2 major operations (MJOs) + 6 smaller joint operations (SJOs)³. It is worth mentioning that the adaptation of the LoA occurred within the NATO reform process, started in the first decade after the end of Cold War. The main driver of this process was the adaptation⁴ of the North-Atlantic Alliance to a new security environment, significantly changed by the emergence of new challenges and risks. Such a conclusion is validated also from the perspective of main parameters of LoA adopted by NATO in 2003. These were centred on the objective to reach the capacity to perform three major joint operations⁵. Obviously, it highlighted the importance attached to the projection capability, in which LoA had to match the global outreach of security challenges.

European approaches in the framework of Common Security and Defense Policy

In the aftermath of St. Malo Declaration (December 1998), granularity was added to the process of defining the LoA of European Union in the field of crisis management. The Helsinki European Council decisions (December 1999), framed for the very first time a robust LoA (Headline Goal 2003). Based on the premise of concurrent operational commitments, the agreed option was to create, by the end of 2003, a Rapid Reaction Force. The parameters involved the creation of a land force structure with 50-60,000 personnel, supported by air and naval components, able to be deployed in 60 days with a view to being maintained in theatre of operation up to 1 year⁶. Within this framework, the political commitment of

³ Interview with general Philip Breedlove, SACEUR, U.S. Air Force in Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC), Edition 18, Autumn/Winter 2013, p. 7 in Hans Binnendijk, *NATO needs a European level of ambition*, in Defense News, 7 December 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/2018/12/07/nato-needs-a-european-level-of-ambition/>, [31 October 2019].

⁴ The adaptation process started to be reflected in LoA by adopting the Comprehensive Political Guidance - CPG, adopted by NATO in 2006. Within this approach, the operational commitments were shaped in a more global perspective https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49176.htm [1 February 2020].

⁵ Sten Rynning (ed.), *NATO's New Strategic Concept. A Comprehensive Assessment*, DIIS Report 2011:02, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, p.130.

⁶ Chaillot Paper 47, *From St. Malo to Nice. European Defense: core documents*, Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union, Paris, 2001, p. 82-92.

the member states lay primarily on having an ambitious LoA, without providing further clarification on the type of forces, the availability aspects, enablers and logistics. Obviously, we are talking about a quantitative approach in defining the LoA, corresponding to the initial stages of the European cooperation in the field of defense. Moreover, the decision to adopt Headline Goal was derived from the overall trend of that period regarding the shaping of robust commitments which was inspired, basically, from the operational experience in the Western Balkans⁷. It is worth remembering that most of the member states were fully involved with forces and capabilities in NATO missions deployed in this area. At the same time, the political options highlighted the EU availability to take over additional tasks in managing the security situation in the region.

On this basis, HLG2003 became the main guiding element for European defense planning system. Under this framework new requirements were identified for further refinements of the commitments made by member states in order to fill the capabilities gaps. On a similar note, the political will to assume an expanded geographical role and more diverse tasks under ESDP required the adaptation of LoA. In this respect, EU Security Strategy (EUSS) highlighted the need for a tailored and timely response from EU in the field of crisis management. Translating it into practice, this will require a different approach than the one that was used in the case of HLG 2003. From this perspective, EUSS was a landmark for the European defense cooperation. Its relevance for LoA could be seen from the perspective of the remaining shortfalls⁸, after the HLG2003 was officially declared as being fulfilled⁹, in terms of command and control, force protection, deployment capabilities, communications a. s. o.

⁷ The adoption of Headline Goal was carried out in a period of maximum effort undertaken by most of the member states in the context of NATO's missions in the Balkans (SFOR - Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina – 30.000 personnel) and Kosovo (50.000 personnel).

⁸ Schuwirth, Rainer. *Hitting the Helsinki Headline Goal*, NATO Review, 01.09.2002, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2002/09/01/hitting-the-helsinki-headline-goal/index.html>, [15.01.2020].

⁹ Based on the member states commitments, the quantitative aspects of HLG2003 were fulfilled (land forces -100.000 personnel; naval forces – 100 ships; air – 400 fighters), creating the conditions for undertaking of the crisis management missions, in accordance

*OPTIONS FOR STRUCTURING THE LEVEL OF AMBITION
IN THE CONTEXT OF
MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF DEFENSE*

Furthermore, EU Global Security Strategy (EUGS) brought new clarifications regarding the general process of defining the level of ambition in the classical operational formulas. Under this approach, it was assumed that the objective of concurrency of several operations require functional command and control arrangements. Regarding the spectrum of the anticipated missions, EUGS advanced a more comprehensive perspective. In addition to those assumed by EU, following the integration of WEU's roles and responsibilities, there were new ones related to: disarmament, support for third states in combating terrorism and security sector reform. It is worth highlighting the importance of connecting the LoA with the requirements of rapid response that could not be ensured under HLG2003 which was conceptually designed as a robust formula for providing follow-on forces on a more flexible timeline for deployment. To a similar extent, using the HLG as a reservoir for rapid reaction forces needed in smaller operations was not the ideal choice. At the same time, the challenge of rapid deployment encompassed the decision making process, at EU and national level. Both were unprepared to provide the answers to ensure the proper integration of the decision-making process within a demanding timeframe while ensuring a rapid deployment in a more distant and complex theatre of operations. By adopting the HLG2010 the LoA was changed fundamentally, mainly as a result of the EU Battle Group implementation process. The priorities shifted towards the preventive engagement of EU in order to avoid the deterioration of security situation, underpinned through an efficient command and control capability for concurrent operations at different levels of commitment. Similar attention was paid to increasing the deployment capability for rapid reaction forces, being employed as stand-alone unit (e.g. Battle Groups) or as maneuver forces, through HLG2003. In this regard, the main parameters for deployment of forces were 5-10 days after the decision to launch the operation had been made at EU level.

The anticipated level for a Battle Group structure was based on an enhanced battalion (minimum 1500 personnel) with the possibility of integrating air and naval elements. In generating the structure of a BG the preferred option was the multinational one, involving more interested

with TEU. *Military Capabilities Commitment Declaration, 20 November 2000*, in Chaillot Paper no. 47, p.158-164.

member states. The coordination role was assumed by a single country (framework nation) which would provide the main combat forces in order to preserve the desired degree of interoperability. Moreover, the parameters of the BG concept envisaged the timeframe for being maintained in theater between 30 and 120 days, at maximum 6,000 km from Brussels. The main planning assumption was the capacity to maintain two fully operational Battle Groups for a six months stand-by period, to perform the tasks included in the Security Strategy. Obviously, implementation of EU BG concept brought new granularity for LoA, both from the perspective of the number of operations, as well as from the perspective of the type of commitments and the duration envisaged. EU Global Strategy (EUGS), introduced a more concrete perspective regarding the elements of LoA, under the CSDP. The main focus was placed on enhancing the link between operational commitments and level of ambition, in support of a more consolidated role for EU for: providing efficient responses to external conflicts and crisis situations; contributing to the development of partners capabilities; ensuring protection of the Union and its citizens¹⁰.

Based on the new strategic guidance, implementation of EUGS encompassed a new set of missions that EU could undertake for CSDP development. Obviously, these were defined in accordance with the EU Treaty provisions in the field of security and defense, including the spectrum of crisis management tasks encapsulated in it. The main planning assumption was that EU has to conduct concurrent civilian and military operations outside Europe, in different employment scenarios. The option of a global response, under CSDP, was taken into consideration, also, in case of a natural calamities or pandemics. From this perspective, the spectrum of military operations envisaged to be undertaken by EU included:

- joint crisis management operations in high-risk situations, which can be deployed in the EU vicinity;
- joint stabilization operations, including air and special forces operations;
- rapid military response, including the employment of BGs, both as stand-alone units, as well as components of a force package;

¹⁰ Document 14149, Council Conclusions on implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of Security and Defense, 14 November 2016.

*OPTIONS FOR STRUCTURING THE LEVEL OF AMBITION
IN THE CONTEXT OF
MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF DEFENSE*

- air security operations, including support and surveillance;
- maritime security operations or maritime surveillance, with the possibility of a long-term commitment in the Europe's neighborhood¹¹.

**Command and control arrangements in the operational domain
– new approaches in structuring the level of ambitions**

The adoption of a new LoA, by creating the rapid reaction capabilities, required the creation of the necessary command and control arrangements for crisis management operations. In the absence of this component, the options that could be used for EU autonomous operations were based on the capabilities made available by member states (Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy and France). For the operations requiring NATO support, the arrangements were provided, according with “Berlin+”¹² Agreements, through SHAPE. In the overall context of implementing the Headline Goals, the command and control aspects were constantly high on the agenda, seen also in the relation with development of Battle Groups. At the beginning of December 2004, new guidance was adopted for developing the institutional framework of EU in the field of operational command and control. The main aspect taken into consideration was the establishment within EU Military Staff of a civilian and military cell with a view to consolidate the overall potential for conducting crisis management operations. The main responsibilities of this entity were: supporting the planning and coordination process in the field of civilian operations; development of EU expertise in managing the civ-mil relations in the context of CSDP operations; development of advanced strategic planning for civil-military common operations; augmenting the national HQs personnel made available by member states for conducting autonomous EU operations¹³.

¹¹ Proposed by High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. By European Council decision, in November 2016, they were integrated in the process of EU Global Strategy implementation (Doc. 12149, 14 November 2016).

¹² Signed at the end of 2002, it represents the framework for EU operations with recourse to NATO planning assets.

¹³ European Defense: NATO/EU Consultation, Planning and Operations - Doc. 13990/1/04, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8798-2019-INIT/en/pdf> [25.01.2020].

It was agreed that the civilian – military cell will have the capability to plan and conduct EU autonomous operations. Pending on political decision, the level of ambition was to generate an operation center which would provide command and control capabilities for a robust military operation. In order to maintain the appropriate level of readiness it was decided to preserve, at the EUMS level, a nucleus which supposed to be augmented through national contributions in case of launching an operation. By the activation of Operation Centre was intended to consolidate the practical aspects of LoA. From the perspective of EU operational engagements deployed in the Southern neighborhood, in March 23, 2012 it was decided to activate this structure. The rationale of this decision was to provide an integrated formula in planning and conducting the EU missions in Horn of Africa region, namely: naval operation Atalanta (combating piracy on the shores of Somalia); training mission of military forces in Somalia (focused on combating terrorism); civilian mission for consolidation of regional maritime capacities (training of Somalia's police forces; strengthening the maritime capabilities of the countries in the region)¹⁴. The mandate was further geographically extended towards Sahel region¹⁵.

The implementation process of EUGS generated the conditions for deepening the debate on moving towards of a new development stage in the field of EU command and control. The main topic was related to the option of having permanent institutional set-up for providing planning and conducting capabilities for military operations. This undertaking was derived from the reality of an increased number of EU operations as well as of an extended spectrum of tasks and objectives. In this vein, at the

¹⁴ COUNCIL DECISION 2012/173/CFSP of 23 March 2012 on the activation of the EU Operations Centre for the Common Security and Defense Policy missions and operation in the Horn of Africa <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012D0173> [25.01.2020].

¹⁵ COUNCIL DECISION 2014/860/CFSP of 1 December 2014 amending and extending Decision 2012/173/CFSP on the activation of the EU Operations Centre for the Common Security and Defense Policy missions and operations in the Horn of Africa <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/26a4079b-7bd2-11e4-97c9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> [25.01.2020].

*OPTIONS FOR STRUCTURING THE LEVEL OF AMBITION
IN THE CONTEXT OF
MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF DEFENSE*

beginning of June 2017, the EU Council adopted the decision¹⁶ to establish, within EU Military Staff, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). The new structure was designed to fulfill the tasks of operational planning and conducting for non-executive missions¹⁷. In the event of deploying an EU operation, MPCC director is to become automatically its commander. From the institutional interaction, MPCC is functioning under the political control and strategic coordination of Political and Security Committee, working together in the operational planning with the similar structure developed for civilian missions (Civilian Planning and Conducting Capability - CPCC).

Obviously, the adoption of this decision generated positive effects in management of missions and operations conducted by the EU. These were more visible by consolidating the institutional infrastructure and strengthening the overall manning in the field of operational planning. The same was available as regards the civil-military synergy in operations with positive impact both at the strategic level as well as in the operational environment between military and civilian operations deployed in the same area. In the same vein, the European Council adopted, in November 2018, new conclusions regarding the optimization of planning and conducting system, bringing more clarity to the LoA. These were reflected more on the institutional interaction, by integration of Operations Center in MPCC. The objective assumed for this process was that by the end of 2020, MPCC will reach the capability for planning and conducting all non-executive operations and one BG level executive operation.

Conclusions

As it can be seen, defining the military level of ambition is one of the main instruments that consolidate the perception on the overall undertakings assumed by a state and multinational organizations in the field of defense. It goes beyond the classical remits of being just the result of operational

¹⁶ COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2017/971, of 8 June 2017 determining the planning and conduct arrangements for EU non-executive military CSDP, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32017D0971>, [26.01.2020].

¹⁷ At that moment, the military non-executive missions conducted by EU were: EUTM Somalia, EUTM Centrafrican Republic; EUTM Mali.

planning process. The added value can be depicted in the interconnection with capability and resources which can be employed through the political decision in support of the operational commitments.

From this perspective, the political determinism in defining the LoA must be underlined, which can contribute to the practical synergies within the defense planning process. To a similar extent, LoA is a relevant indicator for the overall capability of a country and organization to adapt their objectives in accordance with relevant evolutions of the security environment. From this perspective, it is worth mentioning here the ambivalent relations which are developing between defense planning guidance and structural parameters of LoA that require a constant revising process.

From the LoA constituency point of view, the developments of the last decade emphasize the conceptual convergence in applying a common denominator for defining the components of this instrument. The most affordable model which becomes the norm is underpinned by a simple quantification in terms of number and types of operations assumed as the main targets of LoA. From this perspective, we can observe a certain trend in developing specific typologies for defining the military level of ambitions. These are based both on the individual experience of countries in generation operations, as well as on military cooperation in various formats. In spite of this, classical quantification has not been the most efficient method so far in providing a comprehensive picture of the level of commitments under LoA.

At the same time, there is an additional challenge regarding the relevance of using this approach in a more complex and comprehensive development of defense component. From this perspective, it is worth underlining the fact that the constant increase of operations is increasingly approached from a multidisciplinary perspective with consistent reflections on the defense capability development process. The main challenge lies in finding the right paradigm for defining the level of ambition, taking into account the complexity of the defense environment, including the extended spectrum of capabilities required for operations.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BEBLER A. - *NATO at 60: The Post-Cold War Enlargement and the Alliance's Future*, IOS Press, Amsterdam, 2010.
- BISCOP S., COELMONT J. - *Europe, Strategy and Armed Forces: The Making of a Distinctive Power*, Routledge, Londra-New York, 2012.
- RYNNING S. (ed.) - *NATO's New Strategic Concept. A Comprehensive Assesment*, DIIS Report 2011:02, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhaga.
- Chaillot Papers - *European defense: core documents*, Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union, Paris, 2001 -2007.

