Carl Bildt

2004-06-27

The Need for Software Development

Five years is a rather short time when it comes to major political evolutions of the sort that the emergence of a European common security and defence policy is. When we look at the evolution of the security policies of also larger states, qualitative changes normally take far longer time to come to fruition.

Seen against this background, it is not difficult to describe the evolution of the European security and defence policy during the last year as a rather impressive achievement. The Union has gone from something that was fairly close to nothing to a situation that starts to resemble something. To do this in a dialogue of 15 nation states busy safeguarding their core independence in these areas is an achievement that is far from negligible..

This is one way of looking at these five years. Another, which leads to a somewhat different assessment, is to compare this development with the changes we are seeing in the wider strategic environment that is influencing Europe, and that Europe has every interest in trying to influence.

With the demise of the Soviet Empire, Europe finally emerged from that long dark night that started in the summer of 1914. Finally, all of Europe had the possibility of stepping out of the shadows of Hitler and Stalin.

The necessary strategic solution to the fundamentally new situation then created was to build, step by step, a federation of nation states, eventually covering all of Europe to the West of Russia, stretching from the Arctic Sea down to the Mediterranean, eventually bridging also the Bosphorous. With no overt enemy to deter by military instruments, Europe had to confront the enemy that is its own history of conflicts and rivalry, and there was and is no other way of doing that than through the slow process of building structures of integration that gradually brings the nations and peoples of Europe closer and closer together.

During the past decade, this has been the by far most important contribution of the European Union to peace and stability in a part of the world that for nearly half a century was a powder-keg ready to explode, and that during the preceding half century had dragged most of the world into two devastating military conflicts. The 1995 enlargement more or less completed the process of enlargement in Western Europe, while the 2004 enlargement brought in the entire Baltic and Central European area.

But in parallel to the process of enlargement, the process of the development of the ESDP was meant to contribute to conflict resolution, stability and peace in the somewhat wider areas around or near the periphery of the expanding union. In particular, it's been the conflict-ridden Balkans that has been in focus.

In the coming years the process of enlargement is moving ever more decisively into the mosaic of the post-Ottoman area – already having Greece and a divided Cyprus as members – and will accordingly have to confront more difficult issues.

It is sometimes said, that the success of ESDP should be measured by its success in the area of the Balkans. While being a too limited view of the tasks of ESDP – with the European Security Strategy a far more ambitious agenda has been set - it is nevertheless true that a policy that is seen as failing here will have a hard time

making itself a success elsewhere. It is also in this area that we have seen the first rudimentary operational missions of ESDP.

The 1990's saw a succession of wars in this area that painfully illustrated the short-coming not only of Europe but also of the entire international system. From the brief war in Slovenia in 1991 to the open conflict in Macedonia in 2001, the guns were roaring, houses torched and millions fled across this entire region.

The rhetoric and the reality of these conflicts and the efforts to solve them diverge considerably. According to the prevailing mythology, it was all a failure of Europe, and things could only be sorted out by the intervention of the United States.

But the reality is more complex. While both Europeans and Americans certainly failed, it can well be argued that the European approach of trying to seek long-term political solutions to the complex issues of the region was a more appropriate one that the somewhat more quick-action and military oriented one originating in the United States.

The essential lesson of the Balkan, however, is that issues like these cannot be solved if there is seen to be dissonance in the international community, and notably across the Atlantic.

The United States de facto blocked the political efforts to seek a compromise settlement of the Bosnian conflict during 1992, 1993 and 1994, rendering the efforts of the European Union and the United Nations during those years nearly completely ineffective. It was only when the United States in the summer of 1995 had to stir down the abyss itself that it suddenly embraced compromise principles it had previously rejected and thus facilitated a settlement no better than what would have been possible some years earlier. It wasn't primarily military intervention, but political compromise, that ended the war in Bosnia.

This crucial lesson of Bosnia was forgotten when it come to the handling of the Kosovo issue a couple of years later. A compromise has yet to materialize when it comes to the solution to that great outstanding issue of the region. Five years after

the three month-war that ended without a peace, the province is boiling with dissatisfaction, frustration and animosity, and neither the European Union nor the United States have shown much willingness in tackling the fundamental political issues at the root of the conflict.

After the end of the Kosovo war, much of the discussion in Europe was centred on the discrepancy in terms of air power between the Europeans and the United States. The US had demonstrated that it could fly stealth bombers non-stop from Missouri and back and bomb buildings in Belgrade, although not always the right ones, while the Europeans were struggling to find aircrafts or ammunitions that were of any relevance in the campaign.

But this wasn't the fundamental lesson of the Kosovo war. Analysis afterwards showed that the air campaign was almost totally useless in stopping the ethnic conflict in Kosovo. It can, in fact, be argued that it made things worse on the ground. At the end of the day, it is likely that it was the political intervention of Russia, and the bringing the issue back into the United Nations, that paved the way for the ending of the war.

Nevertheless, the war forced a withdrawal of Serb power from Kosovo, and it was agreed to put the province under the administration of the United Nations, with the European Union taking on the responsibility for its economic rehabilitation and development. But this was little more than sweeping the difficult issues under the carpet while a short-term victory was proclaimed.

If there is a lesson of Kosovo so far, building on the lessons of Bosnia, it is that conflict resolution must always be seen as a primarily political process that concentrates on forging the necessary compromises between the different parties to that conflict. In Bosnia, it took far too long until also the United States was prepared to see this, and over the Kosovo issue neither the European Union nor the US has of yet been fully ready to do it.

After the conflict in Kosovo, it did not take long for Southern Serbia and Macedonia to be in the line of fire. Here, it can be argued that much too little was done to avert

these conflicts, and that the attempts to deal with them as they exploded were much too feeble in the beginning. Facing the prospect of another regional catastrophe, however, it was possible for the European Union and NATO, and thus the United States, to come together in a strategy that lead to a reasonable solution in southern Serbia and to the Ohrid Agreement in Macedonia. But it was reactive conflict management rather than proactive conflict resolution that dominated these relative success stories.

The essential issue in the region remains the conflict between the forces of integration and the forces of disintegration, and this is reflected more brutally in Kosovo than anywhere else.

Western action made it possible for more than a million Albanians that fled the country during the conflict to return, but could not prevent that up towards a quarter million minorities fled or were expelled after the United Nations and NATO had taken over responsibility. While the Albanians were a repressed minority in Serbia before 1999, since then Serbs and others have been a repressed minority in Kosovo.

While it should be argued that Bosnia is a relative although much delayed success story, it is very difficult to portrait Kosovo in that light. We did not end ethnic cleansing – we simply reversed the tables in a century-long conflict over the supremacy over this area. We did not solve the conflict – we swept it under the carpet in the hope that it would disappear.

This was amply demonstrated during the violent outbreak in March of this year. Out of 32 patrimonial sites – Orthodox churches and monasteries – that the international forces KFOR had to protect, no fewer than 28 were partially or wholly destroyed within a matter of hours. And to this should be added the economic dimension. Unemployment in Kosovo, difficult to measure as it is, is probably well over 50 %, with young men having few options but going into other types of activities.

With pressures for independence increasing, a policy more by drift than design moving in this direction, we should be aware of the risks of setting up a state destined for failure. That failure will, in that case, be ours as much as theirs.

While an essential lesson of the Balkans is that the European Union and the United States have to be in agreement to be able to show result, another lesson is that it is better if the European Union tries to exercise leadership over the political processes necessary. But during the first five years of ESDP, more effort seem to have gone into the building of the military and other instruments for conflict control than the development of the political instruments necessary for true conflict resolution.

While the European Council in Thessaloniki declared that all countries of the region – whichever they might one day be – have the option of membership in the European Union, it is much less clear how the road from here to there, which is likely to be long and difficult, should be built. As a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Balkans, I tried to arouse interest in a dialogue on how to move the Kosovo issue forward towards some sort of self-sustaining stability, but was meet with as little interest in Brussels as in Washington. The price for that might yet have to be paid.

The different issues we are confronted with in the Balkans are little different from the ones we are confronting in other parts of the post-Ottoman area. And in looking at lessons to be learnt from the past five years, one can not avoid mention the painful failure to bring about a peaceful reunification of Cyprus. Here, all of the instruments of the European Union, in harmony with the United States, and using the authority and skill of the United Nations, should have succeeded. Still, failure is a fact, and lessons must be drawn.

The failure of Cyprus was the failure to adopt a sufficiently balanced package of incentives and disincentives for both parts of the island. While there was a substantial package of both incentives and disincentives for Turkish-run Northern Cyprus as well as for Turkey itself, there wasn't anything similar for the Greek-run part of the island. The vocal nationalist forces among the Greeks could then safely attack all the compromises necessarily inherent in any effort to settle a conflict like this, while having to fear no negative consequences for their refusal to accept a settlement heavily endorsed by both the Secretary General of the United Nations and the European Union.

Now, the future of the Cyprus conflict is up in the air. So far, the painful failure and its consequences haven't been faced, and we haven't seen much debate on how to carry the issue forward. It seems likely that we will see a gradual normalisation of relations with the recently more integration-inclined Turkish Part of Cyprus, but an open question whether this will be accepted as the logical consequence of refusal to compromise by the Greek parties, and whether the Union has imported a failure that will plague it for years to come.

The failures so far of Kosovo and Cyprus could well have consequences for the entire region between Bihac in the northwest and Basra in the southeast. The issue of the position of the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq in the future constitutional arrangement of the country have not been fully resolved, but have to be so if Iraq shall survive the critical year of 2005. And one would be unwise to ignore the risk that what is done with Kosovo will have consequences, over time, for both Macedonia and Bosnia. Memories are often long in regions where history obviously present.

Much of the attention in Brussels during these years has been devoted to the setting up institutional structures and of managing the first limited operations. And it is not unnatural that the first High Representative/Secretary General has had to concentrate a large amount of his energies on just establishing the function and getting it accepted by both the member countries and the outside world.

But the lesson of these years clearly shows that far more attention needs to be given to proactive political conflict resolution if we are to avoid further failings in the near abroad of the European Union. It is certainly necessary to build up both the institutions and the instruments substantially, and I guess other contributions will focus primarily on these needs. But the hardware of institutions and instruments will achieve little if there is not the software of proper policies, and it is in these areas that I see the largest cause for concern when looking ahead.

The entire post-Ottoman area is simmering with issues that are only partly resolved. An on the periphery of Russia, which also is the near abroad of the European Union, we will be confronting challenges in Moldova as well as in the Caucasus region.

Beyond these lie, of course, all the unresolved issues of the old Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia and Palestine.

The European Security Strategy focused attention on a number of the so-called new security threats, and sought to develop a more coherent approach to these. But as this process is carried forward, it is important not to neglect the numerous old issues that are to be found in the areas on the periphery of Europe.

If we are not successful here, we are unlikely to be taken seriously elsewhere. And this will require an increased attention to the policy issues.

We have seen the beta version of the software of ESDP. As expected, there are bugs and deficiencies to be fixed. If not, the hardware will not produce what we expect it to.