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The European Union Battlegroups Concept in the Framework of Crisis Management and Military Rapid Reaction Capabilities Theories

Az Európai Unió Harccsoportjai a válságmenedzsment és a katonai gyorsreagálású képességek elméleti rendszerében

Absztrakt

Az európai uniós Harccsoportok koncepció létrehozása és bevezetése az Európai Unió (EU) válaszában tekinthető a megváltozott biztonsági környezetre, és a 21. század elején megjelenő krízisekre. Az előkészítési és tervezési fázisban már nyilvánvaló volt, hogy az új, nemzetközi erőnek gyorsreagálásúnak kell lennie, amely rövid időn belül bevethető válsághelyzetekben. Ezen kitételek megvalósulásához a Harccsoport koncepciónak illeszkednie kell a válságmenedzsment és a gyorsreagálású képességek elméleteinek rendszerébe.

Kulcsszavak: EU Harccsoportok, válságmenedzsment, gyorsreagálás, EU közös kül- és biztonságpolitika, EU közös biztonság- és védelempolitika,

Abstract

The creation and implementation of the European Union (EU) Battlegroups Concept can be considered as an answer of the European Union to the changing security environment and to the newly emerging crises at the beginning of the 21th century. During the project development it was clear, that the new multinational force must be a rapid reaction force with the ability to response crises in a short time frame. To fulfill these requirements the Battlegroups Concept should fit to the crisis management and rapid response theories framework.

Keywords: EU Battlegroups, crisis management, rapid response, Common Security and Defence Policy, Common Foreign and Security Policy

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INTRODUCTION

The rapidly changing security and political environment in the late 1980s and the early 1990s created new challenges for the EU. Together with the newly emerging crises, this led to the need for the creation of new rapid reaction capabilities. The EU Battlegroups Concept was not only a rapid reaction capability building project, but also an initiation of the EU's deeper defense cooperation with fair burden sharing, and an instrument to express the Union's global actorness and responsibility.

The EU Battlegroups became fully operational eleven years ago in 2007, giving the EU a rapid reaction tool to deal with crises. Even though during these eleven years, many serious crises emerged, the Battlegroups have never been deployed. Hence the concept could not prove its ability on the field. During the history of the Battlegroups, several critics emerged on the usability of the Battlegroups, while some of them foresaw the failure of the project without revision. Although the fundamental principles and the general structure of the concept followed the requirements and characteristics of the rapid reaction forces theory, the most significant issues were and are still visible on political and financial levels.

THE EU BATTLEGROUPS

The EU Battlegroups present the eagerness and ability of the Member States on closer defense cooperation.² Moreover, "they represent a pro-foundly European project and demonstrate how to successfully establish standing military formations".³ Although these Battlegroups have never been used in real operations, theoretically, the structure gives the EU a significant capability to conduct crisis management operations and to pursue the EU's interests in its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), as defined by the Union's Global Strategy⁴. These forces can also be considered as a tool to fulfill the EU's ambitions as a global actor and reinforce the global reputation of the Union. Although the positive aspects of the initiative are plenty, there are also significant shortfalls in the fields of collective willingness, capabilities, and finance that are blocking the deployment of the Battlegroups.⁵

After the great transformations, political and ideological changes during the last two decades of the 20th century, the European countries were under pressure to convert their armed forces. In the new security environment, the significance of the traditional territorial

² Claudia Major – Christian Mölling, EU Battlegroups: What Contribution to European Defence? Progress and Prospects Of European Rapid Response Forces, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, RP8, Berlin, 2011, 6. Available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2011_RP08_mjr_mlg_ks.pdf (consulted on 03.01.2018)

³ Claudia Major – Christian Mölling, 6.

⁴ European Union, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy: "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe", EU HRFSP, Brussels, 2016, 19-20. Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (consulted on 02.16.2018)

⁵ Claudia Major – Christian Mölling, 22-23.

HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE

2018. XI. évfolyam 2. szám

defence objectives decreased, while the new crisis management and peacekeeping missions became new priorities.⁶ The development of the military forces that can react to emerging crises in a short activation period came into prominence not just in the EU, but also in NATO and the UN. During the implementation process of the Battlegroups Concept there are three main aspects that fundamentally characterize the planned system: the rapid reaction capability to make the forces available to intervene in the first stage of crisis management operations; availability for individual operations, but also for UN requests; and finally, compatibility with NATO forces without duplications. It can be stated, that if these requirements are satisfied, the Battlegroup system may become a success not just in political terms, but also in operational ones. Other critical aspects are the multinationality and the interoperability of the project in the context of structure, compatibility, and cooperation. The ability to cooperate on the ground is crucial for the Member States because this is a significant indicator of national contributions regarding manpower and assets. Nevertheless, the size of national forces, capabilities, and budgets widely differ among the Member States, and this may generate tensions.

The Battlegroups have never been activated until today. Thus, there are no measures on their successfulness, but their success is assumed based on training experiences. Since the initiation of the EU Battlegroups Concept, many lessons have been learned even before the full capability was reached in 2007, and then efforts and numerous proposals for further development were made.

CRISIS, CRISIS PREVENTION, AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

For the correct definition of the Battlegroups, it is very important to clarify the terms of crisis, crisis prevention and crisis management⁷. The term 'crisis', has been defined by many scholars, and most of them have expressed some disturbance in the way of normalcy, as Arjen Boin stated: "in academic discourse, a crisis marks a phase of disorder in the seemingly normal development of a system"⁸. Another definition of crisis refers to the context of security, conceptualized by Steven Blockmans and Ramses A. Wessel as "the word 'crisis' is widely understood as an acute situation in which armed force is (likely to be) used."⁹ Crisis prevention and crisis management are among the most important targets for the EU from the beginning. Crisis prevention itself covers the development and the adopti-

⁶ Jolyon Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in The European Union* (2nd edition), Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2014, 73.

⁷ The terminology 'crisis response' refers to 'crisis management'.

⁸ Arjen Boin – Paul't Hart – Eric Stern – Bengt Sundelius: *The Politics of Crisis Management. Public Leadership Under Pressure* (1st edition), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, 2.

⁹ Steven Blockmans – Ramses A. Wessel: *The European Union and Crisis Management: Will the Lisbon Treaty Make the EU More Effective?* Cleer Working Papers 2009/1, T.M.C. Asser Institute, The Hague, 2009, 10. Available at: <http://doc.utwente.nl/77157/1/Blockmans09eu.pdf> (consulted on 03. 01. 2018)

on of actions and efforts (in general a soft power toolbox) to prevent the crisis, whereas once the breakout occurred, crisis management is the response that is given. Crisis management “refers to the organization, regulation, procedural frameworks and arrangements to contain a crisis and shape its future course while resolution is sought.”¹⁰ Crisis management can be considerable as immediate/short, medium, or long-term activity, while according to the nature of the act, the levels can be distinguishable as political, strategic, and operational. In the EU, the political level refers to the policy and decision-making by the Council of the EU or the European Council, the strategic level deals with the planning of civilian or military responses and operations, and finally, the operational one covers the on-field activities and executions.¹¹ Regarding the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon, General Patrick de Rousiers, Chairman of the EU Military Committee (former) stated on the method of crisis response, that “[...] crisis response especially requires a timely, visible and coordinated action, bringing together of representatives of the EEAS¹², the Council, the Commission, civil and military experts and the representatives of the EU in the various international bodies [...]”¹³. The Battlegroups’ role in the crisis management cycle refers to the on-field activities and executions, and with the 5-10 days deployment ability, the Battlegroups can act in a fast way if it is necessary. The rapid intervention of the forces can have a key importance in protecting human lives and preventing economic losses.

RAPID REACTION, MILITARY RAPID REACTION, AND THE EU BATTLEGROUPS

To define the rapid reaction forces, it is necessary to understand their position in a complex, modern military structure, and for this, the most suitable option is the implementation of these forces by NATO. After the end of the Cold War, NATO was under pressure for reforms. One of these reforms was rethinking of the military structure of the organization to provide better responses for the new security environment and challenges. The new flexible structure was based on three main sections: reaction forces, main forces, and augmentation forces.¹⁴ The essential differences between these forces are the purpose of the operation, the reaction timeframe, and the size. The reaction forces were designed to act quickly in crisis situations, the main forces in early military operations and crisis mana-

¹⁰ Steven Blockmans – Ramses A. Wessel: *The European Union and Crisis Management. Will the Lisbon Treaty Make the EU More Effective?*, 10.

¹¹ Nicole Koenig: *EU Security Policy and Crisis Management. A Quest for Coherence*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2016, 13–14.

¹² European External Action Service.

¹³ Patrick de Rousiers: *The EU Security and Defence Policy. The State of Play*, *Impetus*, vol. 10., no. 20., 2015, 4.

¹⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The Alliance’s New Strategic Concept*, NATO, Rome, 07-08 November 1991, Art. 47. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm (consulted on 03. 05. 2018)

HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE

2018. XI. évfolyam 2. szám

gement, while the augmentation forces are available for full spectrum war operations.¹⁵ The reaction forces are further divided into two groups: immediate and rapid reaction forces. Immediate reaction forces can respond in a very short time, while their capabilities are limited to short period operations. The rapid reaction forces contain more joint elements than the immediate ones. Hence their capabilities are higher and represent more armed power, but their activation period is longer.¹⁶

The EU Military Committee defined 'rapid response' in a report on EU Military Rapid Response Concept published in 2015 as "a process that delivers the required effects, in a particular crisis, quicker than a standard response (within 30 days or whichever timelines set by the political authorities, depending on the EU level of ambition)"¹⁷. It also defined the term 'military rapid response': "the acceleration of the overall military approach which encompasses all interrelated measures and actions in the field of Intelligence collection, decision-making, planning, force generation and deployment, together with the availability of assets and capabilities, and potential Command and Control (C2) options, in order to enable a decisive military response to a crisis within 30 days, as a part of the EU multidimensional response"¹⁸. Bowyer defined the rapid reaction force in 1999 as the following: "combined-arms force which is ready to deploy to an area of operations in a very short notice."¹⁹ His definition contains the two most important elements including combined-arms (two or more arms working together, such as land force, air force and navy) and a short activation period.

On the other hand, NATO explains its Response Forces (NRF) as the following: "The NATO Response Force (NRF) is a highly ready and technologically advanced, multinational force made up of land, air, maritime and Special Operations Forces (SOF) components that the Alliance can deploy quickly, wherever needed"²⁰. This explanation mirrors the above mentioned general definition and indicates the participating arms, supplemented with special capabilities and the fast deploying capability. The term of technologically advanced represents the highlighted role of the force. Naming the force 'multinational' comes from the organization's international nature.

¹⁵ Martin A. Smith: NATO in the First Decade after the Cold War. Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 2000, 74.

¹⁶ US General Accounting Office: National Security and Internal Affairs Division, Force Structure: Basis for Future Army Forces in Europe. US GAO, Washington, 1994, 23–24.

¹⁷ EEAS European Union Military Committee: European Union Military Rapid Response Concept (02168/4/14 REV 4.). EEAS EUMC, Brussels, 2015, 12.

¹⁸ EEAS European Union Military Committee: European Union Military Rapid Response Concept, 12.

¹⁹ Richard Bowyer: Dictionary of Military Terms. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Chicago, 1999, 158.

²⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization: NATO Response Force. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49755.htm (consulted on 06. 02. 2018)

CONCLUSION

The features of the EU Battlegroups Concept, explained by the EU Council Secretariat in 2006, describe the following key elements: rapidly deployable, coherent force package, which is capable for stand-alone operations or for the initial phase of larger operations; composed of combined arms; and based on the principle of multinationality.²¹ This description completely satisfies the definition of Bowyer as it contains the combined-arms and the high readiness criteria, and at the same time, it is very similar to the NATO's on its own Response Force. As a conclusion, it can be stated, that the EU Battlegroups system follows the general principles of the rapid reaction forces and fulfills the theoretical and structural requirements, and with these features it fits to the immediate/short term stages of crisis management operations.

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HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE

2018. XI. évfolyam 2. szám

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