

The European Security and Defence Union

European Borders

Border Security

How to secure our borders while helping those in need of protection?



Bratislava Summit – roadmap for the EU's future

Miroslav Lajčák,
Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs



Greece takes up the challenge

Albrecht Broemme,
President of the German Technical Relief Agency (THW)

The future Non combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) security conundrum

Bounding the Leviathan

by David Bond MA, Wing Commander, RAF, London

Politicians should consider the impact of emigration as well as the tragic flood of migrants arriving on the continent. Whilst globalisation has enabled vast numbers to travel and reside overseas, the phenomenon is also causing the conventional state-centric security concept to evolve. For example, citizens' expectations, across the EU at least, increasingly demand that states provide absolute security and expect it to be proffered upon them regardless of their location.

The impact of globalisation

As a direct corollary to this expectation the political response needs to change, as questions slowly emerge about Western states' continuing ability to provide an omnipresent security guarantee. NEOs are operations intended to relocate designated non-combatants threatened in a foreign country to a place of safety, but the scale of the challenge may be beyond many states already and this is significant as they are not infrequent undertakings. The UK has conducted 23 since the Second World War and 11 in the last 20 years.

Whilst NEO characteristics vary they are often limited, rapid, small-scale operations with the critical element being speed; they frequently have political, humanitarian and military implications. When expedience is aligned with aggravating factors like geographic location, scale, security environment and the availability of resources it would be understandable if states placed great emphasis on doctrine, planning and NEO execution. In reality, not all do and greater emphasis may be necessary now, as contemporary migration has presented many states with a prodigious logistical challenge.

An obligation to protect?

In 2011, during Libya's civil war 800 UK and 1000 EU citizens were rescued from danger in a celebrated UK-led NEO titled Operation DEFERENCE.¹ The Libyan security situation deteriorated so rapidly that the then German Defence Minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, had insufficient time to follow ministerial and

legal protocol in consulting the German Bundestag before providing the armed forces with authority to conduct Operation PEGASUS (the German NEO).² Guttenberg's unilateral decision to authorise the NEO was a contravention of protocol that received retrospective bi-partisan endorsement because of a consensus that the state was obligated to protect its citizens. NEOs, therefore, represent a security commitment between citizen and state, frequently reaffirmed by grandiose political statements about the first duty of government being defence of territory and protection of its people. They are an obligation many states have frequently serviced, but critically when the logistics were more favourable.

Maintaining the perception of Leviathan?

There is scant reference to NEOs in many EU security strategies, which reflects that governments are wrestling with servicing a contemporary expectation that they cannot always meet. The UK's Chair of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee outlined: "There must always be limits of practicality. It is non-discretionary in that you have got to try, but discretionary if having tried to come up with a plan and you can't, you don't then proceed."³ This implies that policy is sensibly bounded and pragmatic, with discretion retained on whether government should actually conduct NEOs; it would appear that during crises strategy is reverse-engineered with ways and means considered prior to the ends. This is not something that traditional strategists would either recognise or advocate. Such contradictions around security policy are commonplace: "Differing Department of State and Department of Defence perspectives regarding NEOs often lead to a lack of interagency cooperation."⁴ Consequently, some analysts opine that NEO planning should attract greater prominence as Human Security implies a more open society: "(...) citizens must be able to voice out to government their security concerns."⁵ The assertion the state should wrap around all components of modern life, including security, was first articulated by Thomas Hobbes in his description of the modern state as a Leviathan - the mythical sea creature from the Old Testament that grows exponentially. This description resonates and the contemporary NEO security expectation needs to be bounded, as Lewis implies, before the states' frailties in the current security landscape are laid bare.

Bounding expectations

Politicians should be bold in implementing policies, cognisant of the frictions whilst accepting states' (individually and collectively) reduced abilities to provide the omnipresence of security: "Our politicians have been in the business of giving

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HMS Westminster during her transit towards Libya as part of the humanitarian effort to support civilians and evacuees from Libya. The Portsmouth-based Type 23 Frigate embarked essential stores and ammunition in Gibraltar before continuing towards the Libyan coast

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us more of what we want – more education, more healthcare, more prisons, more pensions, more security,”⁶ but the scale of the NEO conundrum will only increase, in quantitative terms, as borders become more porous and travel made easier. The military technologies appropriated for NEOs such as strategic air-transport aircraft and troop-carrying warships are exorbitantly expensive, finite in number and oft-committed on operations, and government/military procurement policies may be compounding this conundrum further still: “Paradoxically, the expensive equipment programme the UK’s Ministry of Defence is now invested in is potentially pricing them out of being able to deal with some of the security threats that governments are going to face.”⁷ In future, a choice may be looming – operations of necessity versus wars of choice.

Realpolitik

In seeking to mitigate the burgeoning logistical challenge, some states have sought to burden share through multilateralism. The genesis of the NEO Coordination Group (NCG)⁸ was the 2006 Lebanon NEO where vessels left Beirut with significant spare capacity not utilised. The NCG meets bi-annually to evaluate potential crisis situations from a consular and military perspective and in 2015 EU states finally agreed on the level of assistance that unrepresented EU citizens could expect from those represented during crises. However, these policies created in the abstract that imagine a collegiate response may apply to permissive crisis situations only. It is highly likely that Realpolitik will ensure that states seek to secure their

own interests before considering others in a non-permissive environment. Whilst the multinational effort aspires to burden share, the provenance of this approach, when citizens and the military are taking casualties, remains unproven. A unilateral capability and doctrine therefore remains integral to states’ security strategies and if the security commitment that states can reasonably offer is important, the requirement for greater honesty about the state’s limitations on delivering it should be of significance too. To do otherwise is surely to be an architect in one’s own demise.

- 1 Craig Sutherland, “Operation DEFERENCE: The Multinational NEO Evacuation Cell Concept.” *RUSI Journal*: Jun/Jul (2012): 15.
- 2 “Karlsruhe überprüft Bundeswehreinsatz in Libyen 2011,” 2015, accessed June 19, 2015, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/bundesverfassungsgericht-in-karlsruhe-ueberprueft-bundeswehreinsatz-in-libyen-2011-13394928.html>
- 3 Julian Lewis MP (House of Commons Defence Select Committee), Personal Interview, Sep 10, 2015.
- 4 Christopher Blanchard, “Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations.” *Marine Corps Gazette*, 81, (1997): 57.
- 5 Herman Kraft, “The Human Security Imperatives.” *The New Zealand International Review*, 32, 5, (2007): 5.
- 6 Micklethwait, and Wooldridge, *The Fourth Revolution: The Global Race to Reinvent the State*, 11.
- 7 Sir Steve Smith, Personal Interview, Sep 28, 2015.
- 8 NCG Members include Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Portugal, New Zealand, Spain, USA and the United Kingdom. The EU’s External Action Service is an observer, and not a member.