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THE DEPLOYMENT OF MULTINATIONAL MILITARY FORMATIONS:

TAKING POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS INTO ACCOUNT

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Introduction

Multinational military formations exist in many forms, shapes and colours. Their size varies; their *raison d'être* varies; the type of military units involved varies; and the countries involved vary. In most cases governments take into consideration the economic, military-technical and operational arguments for participation in a multinational formation. They participate because it will save them money for example, or it enables them to maintain a critical capability, such as F-16 fighter planes. States thus usually take care to shape the units in a way that contributions complement each in technical terms and that the whole unit pays off in economic terms. Not often, however, is the compatibility of the political systems of the participating countries taken into account when a multinational unit is formed. Our contention is that more attention should be paid to the political/institutional compatibility of participating states when creating multinational units. Some political systems are more compatible than others and this fact has consequences for the effectiveness of jointly owned multinational units.

We develop our argument in two steps. First, we demonstrate that the successful deployment of multinational units requires the synchronisation[1] of national decision-making procedures. Generals may call for technical 'interoperability' of the forces; yet if the political processes behind multinational participation are not adequately coordinated, states may come to regret their participation in a multinational military unit. Thus, although it is very difficult to harmonise national decision-making processes in a structural fashion, some form of synchronisation is required and necessary in the short term. Secondly, we will show that, in order to achieve synchronisation, the character of national decision-making processes of the participating states has to be taken into account. Only if one recognises the importance of similarities and differences in these processes can adequate instruments for synchronising political decision-making be devised. And only if these instruments are put into practice can multinational units become truly effective instruments.

Basic features of multinational military formations

The number of bi-national and multinational military formations has grown steadily in Europe over the past decades. Particularly after the end of the Cold War, a host of new multinational units were formed, e.g. the Eurocorps, EURMARFOR, the Spanish-Italian Amphibious Force, the German-Dutch Army Corps to name but a few. The unit most recently added to this list is

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[1] A word on terminology: the issue at stake is policy coordination, but as the time element in that process is quite important, we prefer to use the term 'synchronisation' (which includes coordination).

the NATO Response Force (NRF), which was created at NATO's Prague Summit in November 2002. The deployment of multinational units into crisis management operations is likewise increasing. Recent examples are the deployment of the Eurocorps headquarters to the SFOR and KFOR operations and the deployment of the headquarters of the German-Dutch army corps to the ISAF operation in Afghanistan.

A crucial feature of any multinational military formation is that it is a policy instrument that is jointly owned by a number of governments. The Eurocorps, for instance, is 'owned' by five European states (albeit many more countries participate); the German-Dutch army corps, obviously, by only two. These jointly owned policy instruments can take different shapes. The most important distinction is between temporary units, which are created by countries pooling their resources on an ad-hoc basis for a single operation, and standing multinational units. We only address the latter in this paper because that is where the problem of coordinating national decision-making processes is most pressing.

Multinational units can also be distinguished along a second dimension, their level of integration. Broadly speaking, there are two forms: integrated and un-integrated multinational units. A unit is integrated if it does not consist of separate national modules. It has a single structure in which officials from all owner countries work in a 'mixed' fashion. It is impossible to deploy only the national modules of the unit: it is to be deployed in full or not at all. Un-integrated multinational units consist of national elements, which can be taken out (and deployed) at a moment's notice. The German-Dutch Headquarters is an integrated military unit, whereas the UK/NL amphibious force is an example of an un-integrated unit. We point out below how the level of integration may affect coordination problems between the participating countries.

Table 1. A taxonomy of multinational military formations

	Integrated	**Un-integrated**
Bi-national	HQ Ge-NL Army Corps HQ Franco-German Brigade	Ge-Nl Army Corps elements Franco-German Brigade elements ISAF* UK/NL AF
Multinational	Admiral BENELUX HQ Eurocorps HQ ARRC HQ NRF	EUROFOR EUROMARFOR STANAVFORLANT STANAVFORMED NORDCAPS Danish-Polish-German Corps Eurocorps elements ARRC elements NRF elements

*Italian-Spanish Amphibious Force.

Source:EU-ISS 2000, non-exhaustive.

A few words concerning the national motives for the creation of or participation in multinational military formations. We already pointed to the fact that the arguments tabled to advance the creation of multinational military units are mainly of an economic, political and military-technical nature. Saving money and/or maintaining a critical capability. Participation also enhances the visibility of a country and a particular unit. Embedding national units in international formations may be perceives as enhancing their (political) utility and hence

legitimise defence spending. In many cases the amalgamation of national units into a multinational works better than previously expected. Whether it is also cheaper remains to be seen. The proof of the pudding, however, is in the eating: the deployment of the entire unit into an operation. To create a truly effective multinational unit, one has to look at the conditions that must be met in order to use such a joint instrument, i.e. to deploy it successfully.

Requirements for deployment

Our proposition is that for the successful deployment of a multinational unit, three conditions must be met:

- owners must hold common views on the situations in which the instrument is to be used (shared sense of instrumentation);
- once a situation arises, in which the instrument could be used, owners must synchronise their decision-making (synchronised political decision-making); and
- once the unit is deployed, its different national elements must work together seamlessly and function as a coherent unit (interoperability).

Let's briefly look at each of these requirements in turn.

1) A shared sense of instrumentation among the owners. It is obvious that it will be difficult for the participating states to deploy a jointly owned unit successfully if they cannot agree in abstract terms as to what kind of situations require military action and which situations can or must be addressed by other means. They must share a vision as to the application of certain instruments to certain states of affairs. The situation is akin to one of two people owning a common toolkit: They need to agree as to when to use a hammer and when a screwdriver if they want to work together effectively.

Such a shared sense of instrumentation is most easiest achieved among states that share certain basic values and hold common views about how the world should be ordered (*cultural compatibility*). It is against the background of his/her views about a good world order that an actor decides whether a situation so fundamentally runs counter to this order that (re-)action is required. Only if actors share these ideas can they come to a common conclusion that common action is needed.

2) Synchronised political decision-making. Multinational units have to be deployed as one. Hence, the owners have to come to a common deployment decision. This may seem easy as long as only national governments are involved in the decision. Government delegates can meet and come to a joint decision on the international level, but in some countries it is not only the executive that has a say in decisions on the deployment of military forces. Other actors, such as parliament, come in or consensus has to be built in public opinion before a deployment decision can be made. Decision-making in these cases is further complicated by the fact that it will be difficult for one state, having made its deployment decision, to wait for another one to build domestic consensus, to bring in parliament and eventually to reach its decision. Such a situation could generate a host of problems for both sides.[2] These may be muted somewhat if the multinational unit is not fully integrated and a country can, in an important case, pull its forces out from the unit. Yet if they want to deploy the unit as one (which indeed they must in the case of an integrated unit), participating states must aim not only at arriving at a common decision, but need also to make sure that they synchronise their

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[2] For an elaboration and an example, see Houben (2003: 334).

decision-making processes in order to include all actors required and to avoid problematic lags between individual national decisions.

Synchronous decisions require some sort of institutional arrangement on the international and/or national level. Through appropriate institutions, the synchronicity of decision-making can be enhanced if not guaranteed (*institutional compatibility*). We will elaborate on this point in detail below.

3) Interoperable units. Interoperability appears to be the most obvious prerequisite for common deployment of different national units. If units were not technically compatible, they could not effectively achieve their goal in common. Hence, there must be compatibility with respect to certain technical standards *(operational compatibility)*.

Figure 1 represents an hourglass. Although its prime function is a time measurement instrument, here it conveys the idea that values are articulated in the concept of interoperability, but only after being mediated by and through institutions. Moreover, an hourglass can be turned over. That important move signals that interoperability (or the lack of) feeds back into the value-level. The flow from values to institutions to interoperability is a two-way street: values must be re-calibrated and re-acknowledged regularly to ensure that they do not lose their vitality.

Figure 1. Values, institutions and interoperability
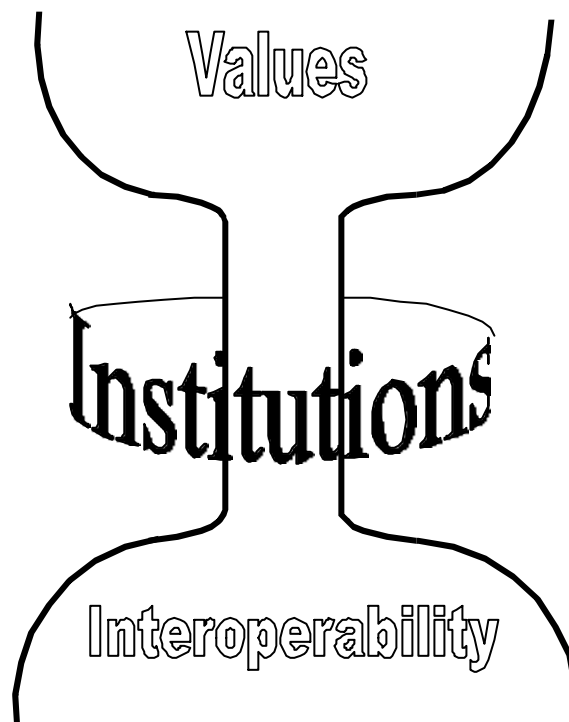
If one looks at the actual creation of multinational units, it becomes clear that not all of these requirements are appropriately taken into account when units are created. Most effort usually is put into the bottom end, the creation of interoperability. The top requirement, a shared sense of instrumentation based on cultural compatibility, appears to be heeded usually 'by default'. It is highly unlikely that two countries holding fundamentally differing world views

will actually decide to create a jointly owned military instrument. Cultural compatibility thus appears to be not only a requirement for the successful deployment of a multinational unit but already for its creation. What remains is the intermediate requirement: synchronising political decisions. When designing decision-making mechanisms for deploying multinational units, not much effort is usually put into the actual synchronisation of national decision-making processes. In what follows we therefore look more closely at this requirement and argue that, in the post-cold war world, this is a requirement of increasing importance and failure to address it is a crucial shortcoming.

The importance and difficulty of synchronising decision-making

Owners of a multinational unit have to come to a joint decision when they want to deploy the unit. However, if they want to use the unit in a crisis management operation, which by now has become the dominant form of the use of military force, a joint decision will not be enough. Crisis management requires not only decisions, it requires instantaneous decisions. This further complicates the need for joint decisions in multinational units.

Why is there a need for instantaneous decisions in crisis management? The root of the problem lies in the fact that crisis management is a mode of action that fundamentally differs from earlier ways of using force or preparing for it. Peace and war used to be two separate states of the world to which fundamentally different 'logics' of action and decision applied in the politico-military realm. The 'peace logic' focused on short-term objectives and implications of action, and on local politics. It highlighted economic and socio-economic effects of decisions. War, on the other hand, used to constitute a fundamentally different state of the world, in which long-term consequences of action stood out and grand strategy was asked for. For the sake of grand strategy, short-time considerations and the impact of action on local socio-economic conditions had to stand aside.

Today, this situation has changed. Crisis management, the now dominant mode of action in the politico-military realm, is a situation *'jenseits von Krieg und Frieden*' – a situation in which the distinction between war and peace has been blurred. The use of military force is no longer confined to some extreme situation to which a clearly distinct set of rules apply. On the contrary, military action has become a part of peace. The military may be used for 'peace-keeping', 'peace enforcement', and only in worst cases in 'peace-making'. This implies that military action in crisis management cannot simply follow the logic of war. Nor can simply the rules of peace apply, since it remains distinctly *military* action. Consequently, crisis management requires a combination of both peace and war logics. Everything has to be taken into account at once – there must be grand strategy, focusing on long-term goals, but short-term effects and implications for the economic and socio-economic realm as well as for local politics cannot simply be disregarded.

This new mode produces some fundamental problems not only for military strategists but also for political decision-makers. It is not only that they have to make more demanding decisions taking into account a host of possibly contradictory demands. They also may be forced to make their decisions in a much tighter timeframe. In this respect, the distinct quality of 'crisis management' as opposed to 'war' becomes clear if one looks at the process of mobilisation. As long as peace and war were clearly separated, resources would be mobilised as war approached. This remained a rather clearly structured and step-by-step process. As the differentiation between war and peace recedes, mobilisation has become more of a permanent requirement. Since crises do not constitute a distinct state of the world fundamentally different from peacetime, they do not evolve in a clearly structured process but they may appear out of the blue. More importantly, they require a quick reaction in order to prevent

them from escalating into a situation that may indeed become clearly distinct from peace. The creation of 'fast', 'rapid' or 'immediate reaction forces' gives testimony to this need for fast reaction to crises.

Hence, the disappearance of the distinction between states of war and peace translates into the need for quick political decisions in order to be able to react rapidly to an emerging crisis. In crisis management, the best deployment decision is quick, indeed instantaneous. Yet in democracies, such decisions are difficult to make. And if they are difficult to make in a single state, they are even more difficult when made jointly among a group of states. The particular requirements of crisis management thus put additional strain on decision-making in multinational undertakings. Political processes not only have to be coordinated. They have to be truly synchronised in order to come not only to a joint decision but to do so immediately.

Joint and immediate decision-making is further complicated by the fact that it is not only a simple yes/no decision ('to deploy or not to deploy') that has to be made. A whole range of other issues has to be resolved before a multinational unit can be deployed on the ground. The most important issue is the status of the participating countries: Are they equal and will they have the same rights in decision-making during the operational phase? Besides, a host of other issues has to be addressed as well. The table below presents a non-exhaustive list of problems that are likely to arise. A major problem is that the willingness of governments 'to see things through' is to a large extent determined by issues such as threat perception, the perceived and accepted (maximum) risk level and the urgency of an issue. If national views start to diverge on these issues, the entire undertaking may fall apart.

Table 2. Issues to be coordinated before, during and after the operation (non-exhaustive)

Before	During	After
-When to participate/deploy? -Agreement on the objective of the operation and participation -Agreement on the operating modalities -Agreement on the financial accommodation -Agreement on the mandate, RoEs, exit strategy, financial burden sharing, chain of command and operational control -Who signs the contracts for host-nation support?	-Who has operational control? -What flanking policy is to be pursued? -Who decides how to respond to changing situations on the ground? -Who decides when to pull out? -The issue of criminal liability of commanding officers.	-Which body will evaluate the operation? -Which government is accountable where and to whom, for what?

Thus, the synchronisation of political decision-making by participating states is not only a necessary condition for effective crisis management by multinational units, it is also a very demanding and complicated task. What is the more surprising is the remarkably little attention this requirement has received up to now. This may be due to the fact that multinational units, and especially integrated multinational units, have not been deployed very often in a rapid reaction to a crisis and that thus the need for synchronisation has not yet become obvious to decision-makers. Yet where such a deployment actually took place in the past, the difficulties arising from the need to synchronise political processes have become obvious.

The recent deployment of the Headquarters of the German-Dutch army corps in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan provides a case in point.[3] The bi-national political consultations preparing the deployment started in the summer of 2002 and took a full four months to complete. The bi-national HQ was deployed in January/February 2003. After the initial consultations on the political desirability of the entire undertaking where concluded in the affirmative, both countries conducted early in the process a feasibility study and agreed on the feasibility of the undertaking. From then on, after answering both questions of the desirability and feasibility of the operation affirmatively, the preparations began in earnest. From the preparatory talks, five a priori preconditions emerged:

(1) to engage NATO's interest in the short term in order to have recourse to NATO assets (communications facilities and intelligence);

(2) to stimulate a NATO role for the future (a longer term institutional interest of both the Netherlands and Germany);

(3) to keep the mandates of ISAF and Enduring Freedom (EF) strictly separated;

(4) to limit the mandate from a geographical point of view (i.e. not extending the ISAF mandate beyond Kabul); and

(5) to limit the duration of the mission to six months.

For the Germans the precondition of the separate mandates was the overriding concern, whereas for the Dutch it was the duration of the mission. In both cases there were clear domestic reasons why the two countries put an emphasis on these particular preconditions. Regarding the separated mandate, there were rumours that ISAF and EF should merge. The problem was these two mandates differed substantially, although the *Bundestag* had agreed both the EF mandate as well as the ISAF mandate; a merger of the two was out of the question. With regards to the limited duration of the mission, this consideration is related to the exit strategy. The original meaning of an exit strategy is 'how' a unit is to exit an area of operations, the tactical plan for ensuring that a unit is physically able to exit an area of operations. In the Dutch parliamentary practice, this 'how' has been translated into 'when' the unit is to leave.[4] As a consequence, there is some political pressure (at least on a Dutch politician) to have the successor unit lined up before committing a unit. Both countries understood the domestic concerns behind the other's precondition. Both countries understood that they could not press their national precondition too much because it would endanger the feasibility of the whole undertaking. The consequence was that both countries 'took over' each other's preconditions and merged them into a common framework of reference. Thus, the full set of preconditions was presented to external parties as a single set of preconditions.

What had to be coordinated and synchronised? First, two parliamentary processes had to be synchronised. The Dutch system is open and allows for public meetings, whereas the German system is closed and permits parliamentary commissions to meet behind closed doors. Moreover, the timing of relevant Cabinet decisions had to be synchronised and the content and release of statements to the press had to be coordinated – as did furthermore joint letters to the UN, joint *démarches* on behalf of the unit, military technical agreements, etc. Both countries took a pragmatic stance and liaised and coordinated on an ad hoc basis. A bilateral

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[3] The following information is derived from conversations with both Dutch and German officials involved in the process. Although they remain unnamed, their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

[4] This issue originates from the Srebrenica experience, which presented to Dutch politicians the enormous technical and political difficulties surrounding a viable exit strategy. In order to exert some influence over the issue, Dutch parliamentarians have tended to concentrate on the duration of the deployment (the 'when') and generally demand from government that it specify the duration of the deployment beforehand.

Security Policy Steering Group was instituted as a frame for bi-national consultation. No agreements were made regarding the evaluation of the deployment. The relations between the respective Parliaments did not develop in step during this process of close bi-national consultation. There were no visits of the respective Parliamentary Committees for Defence or for Foreign Affairs and there was no consultation as to the parliamentary control of the political process. From the viewpoint of an official involved in the process, the learning aspect was 'hugely important' and it 'enormously strengthened' bilateral relations.

The national decision-making processes have remained separate throughout. The *Bundestag* approved the deployment of German soldiers, but it did not approve the deployment of the Headquarters of the German-Dutch army corps. The Dutch Parliament approved the participation of Dutch soldiers.

We have seen that the synchronisation of national decision-making processes may be a crucial factor in the success of effective deployment of multinational units. We have also seen that synchronisation usually is not taken into account when multinational units are created. Our contention is that, in addressing the problems of synchronisation, the political compatibility of the participating states has to be taken into account from the outset. Only by recognising the importance of differences in the political systems of the participating states can one successfully devise instruments to address the problem of synchronisation.

The 'compatibility' of political systems

Although the criteria for creating effective multinational forces have become an object of study, political compatibility between participating states has not yet been addressed in the literature. In the work edited by Heisbourg (2000), for instance, a distinction is made between 'input' and 'output' criteria of multinational forces. On the input side, national capabilities are measured, reviewed and compared, the national planning process is taken into consideration and intelligence requirements are identified (Heisbourg 2000: 73-91). Yet the political systems of the collaborating countries and their respective political cultures are not discussed. Although this question is too complex to be addressed comprehensively here, we want to discuss at least some issues in order to develop a basic understanding of the problems involved.

Countries do not only organise their military forces in vastly differing ways. Each country also organises the way in which it decides about the deployment of these military forces in a distinct manner. The way the UK goes about the decision to deploy military units (and indeed the control and management of the deployment itself) is entirely different from countries like Denmark, Belgium or Norway. There are countries with a strong executive or a presidential system in which parliament hardly plays any role in the deployment decision; while in other countries parliament is heavily involved or decision-making authority is dispersed over a coalition government. When bound together in a single multinational unit – will these countries be able to synchronise their decisions in order to come to a joint and quick decision regarding the deployment of the multinational unit? Do the political systems of the countries involved matter and does it complicate joint decisions when different political systems are involved?

To illustrate the problems that might emerge from differences in national decision-making procedures, imagine a military formation comprising two Western European countries, one (country A) with a coalition-type government and strong parliamentary involvement in the decision-making process and the other (country B) with a presidential (or semi/quasi-presidential) system in which the executive plays a dominant role and parliament is virtually not involved. The two countries share the ownership of a bi-national unit in the sense that

each of them pays 50% of the costs related to this unit. When a request from the US is received for deployment of this unit in a major international crisis management operation, both governments will engage in a frantic process of coordinating their positions. Government A is required to inform its parliament as quickly as possible, Government B is not required to do so. While government B may be able to reach a relatively quick decision on deployment, because it is only marginally constrained in its decision-making competence by other domestic actors, it cannot act as long as state A has not yet reached a decision. Parliament A is concerned about a possible political 'adventure' and conducts independent hearings (as it always does) in order to inform itself of the matter. This may now spill over into decision-making in B. The results of the hearings can be made available to parliament B. Parliamentarians of country B now put informed questions to their government which is prevented from going ahead with its deployment decision as long as A has not yet arrived at a decision. Government B will press for a quick decision by government A, but government A cannot keep up with the rapid pace set by government B. In lieu of awaiting the final decision of government A, government B decides to deploy its own elements of the unit at once. In order to prevent any misunderstanding and misperception (and being drawn into the wrong crisis), government A withdraws its liaison and exchange officers seconded to the units of country B.

This hypothetical scenario highlights two problems that occur when countries with highly different decision-making mechanisms attempt to come to a rapid deployment decision. First, the 'slower' country will set the pace. Second, there are feedback and spillovers between the two national decision-making procedures that may have unintended consequences. Taken together this implies that a government that usually plays a strong role in national deployment decisions may be forced to give up the benefits of this strong position once it engages in a multinational undertaking. Second, this also has repercussions on the effectiveness of the multinational unit itself. If a multinational unit is designed as a rapid reaction force but in only one participating country do the decision-making mechanisms give priority to consensus-building and broad involvement of domestic actors over the rapidity of the political decision, the whole multinational unit may have to be put on hold and lose some of its effectiveness – or possibly even be dismantled for one mission or for good.

A case that could illustrate our hypothesis can be found in the Netherlands. This country takes part in the Dutch-German army corps as well as in the UK/NL Amphibious Force. The UK/NL AF stands out as a prime example of successful military integration dating back as many as 30 years, but it has never been deployed into an operation in its entirety. The operational and military compatibility between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and between the Netherlands and Germany is equally excellent. The differences of the political systems between the countries, however, are huge (cf. Lijphart, 1992). Germany and the Netherlands have firm traditions of coalition-type governments and the extent of involvement by parliament in the decision to participate in an international crisis management operation is roughly the same. The political and institutional differences between the Netherlands and the UK are great. The deployment of the headquarters of the GE-NL army corps illustrates that the Dutch-German political systems and processes can be successfully synchronised. Deployment of the UK/NL AF in its entirety – as a jointly owned instrument – would be an interesting test case to see whether the Dutch and the British political systems can be synchronised successfully.[5]

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[5] An interesting case from a different domain is the merger of British Steel and the Dutch Koninklijke Hoogovens into a joint venture called Corus. After an exuberant honeymoon the two parties have become deeply disenchanted with each other and cite cultural differences as the reason for a possible break-up. Other Anglo-

Does this imply that only countries with similar or comparable political systems should engage in a multinational military unit? We do not necessarily think so, yet we are convinced that the type of political system does play a significant role and is an aspect that should be included as a factor in contemplating cooperation with other countries. Yet countries could also attempt to capitalise on differences in their political decision-making processes. There are at least two ways in which this could work. First, countries can learn from each other, a process that may result in changing domestic political practice. The second effect is that the political differences may strengthen the leverage over a single country; such peer pressure could make a country go 'the extra mile' (which it otherwise would not have done). To enable countries to take advantage of these effects, however, there needs to be an awareness of the differences and their importance and possible impact from the outset.

Options to synchronise intergovernmental decision-making

Should multinational European military formations therefore be organised around similarities in political systems rather than around countries that are neighbours or have economic reasons for collaborating? As already indicated, this is not what we want to suggest. But questions of political compatibility must be taken into account from the outset. Countries participating in a multinational unit should be aware that differences in their political practices and cultures may have a negative effect on the deployability of a unit if they find no way of successfully synchronising the political processes behind the deployment. And the greater the differences between the political systems, the more difficult it will be to successfully synchronise the national political processes.

Once the similarities and differences in the national decision-making processes have been established, one can look for instruments to address the problems of synchronisation. The ultimate question politicians face is whether procedures and preconditions for international cooperation should be formalised. We will briefly explore four broad options for synchronising the national decision-making processes of the countries participating in a multinational unit: 1) ad hoc coordination and liaison (bi-national/unformalised); 2) using the co-called 'Open Method of Coordination' (OMC) as promoted by the European Commission (multinational/unformalised); 3) a formal agreement between the governments outlining the preconditions and constraints that determine the participation of the unit in an international crisis management operation (i.e. a common deployment policy) (bi-national/formalised); and 4) creating a forum for mutual consultation and policy coordination (multinational/formalised).

1) Ad hoc coordination and liaison. This approach is straightforward: issues will be sorted out and coordinated as the need arises. The countries involved will usually have exchanged liaison officers already and have a dense network of officials in place in their respective countries, for example, via their respective diplomatic and military missions. Formal procedures are not established, but habits and practices of cooperation are developing. These are based on trust, face-to-face contact and a shared task. In case of conflict, issues go to the top of the administration and may require the personal involvement of cabinet ministers to solve disputes. This method may work well if there is a joint or shared ownership of the unit and the owners 'own' equal portions of the unit. However, this option may work best when there exists a good compatibility between the political systems of the participating states. If decision-making procedures are highly different, however, leaving coordination to ad hoc

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Dutch examples illustrating the exact opposite experience are of course Unilever and Royal Dutch/Shell Group of Companies.

processes (as is currently done in most multinational formations), the exercise may encounter exactly the problems outlined in our hypothetical scenario above.

2) The Open Method of Coordination. This method is a form of 'soft' governance.[6] It is a non-binding form of cooperation and comprises a number of mechanisms aimed at enhancing and ensuring coordination. These might include, for example, the common evaluation of an economic, political, strategic, etc. situation; a mutual agreement on benchmarking and best practices; peer pressure (including the 'naming and shaming' of countries that fall short in honouring the agreement); or voluntary adaptation of national policies (mutual learning) (cf. WRR, 2003: 38). Evidence suggests that this method works well in larger groups, but is less useful to coordinate the cooperation of two or three countries. Moreover, the WRR asserts that 'the mechanism of *naming and shaming* (…) may, especially in situations of conflict, favour larger countries that can withstand the political pressure better than a small country like the Netherlands' (WRR, 2003: 14, my translation). Evidence from the Justice and Home Affairs domain suggests that the OMC works better when the size of the group increases. It remains to be explored, however, whether this method can yield satisfactory results in the security realm.

3) A mutual agreement outlining the key preconditions for deployment and a structure for decision-making. In this option some procedures are formalised and binding on the participating governments. This agreement serves predominantly to structure the relation between the governments before and during the operation and possibly after the operation as well. It takes into consideration the national stakeholders as well as the distribution of power in the respective political systems, for example, whether deployment requires the consent of Parliament or not. A possible template for such a procedure already exists in the national domain: the Review Frameworks established by the Belgian and Dutch governments, respectively. These procedures can be considered as 'best practice'. These Review Frameworks can be used as a basic template for addressing additional issues that present themselves, for example, whether the countries agree to the principle of a 'lead-nation' during the deployment; or whether a common evaluation of the deployment will be carried out and which body will be tasked to do that. The good point about such a mutual agreement is that it enhances the thoroughness of the decision and the transparency of the decision-making process and also makes the issue of accountability manifest. These three functions could in turn have a confidence-building effect on the nations involved.

4) The creation of an organisation (a general secretariat). In some cases it may be necessary to create a standing organisation facilitating the cooperation of the countries involved. Examples of this type of organisations are NATO and the OSCE. Both organisations provide a platform for consultations among its members. Clear channels of communication and information-sharing have been established. This would work if the group is rather large. The organisation functions primarily as a 'consensus engine'. General Wesley Clark was thinking along similar lines when he stated that 'NATO provided a structured consultation and consensus-shaping process, allied support took the form of a 'floating' or 'flexible' coalition (Clark, 2002: 1). While the costs for creating and maintaining an organisation may be prohibitively high for small groups, an organisation may well be a suitable solution for larger groups of states.

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[6] This section draws on the Communication from the [European] Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on an open method of coordination for the community immigration policy (COM/2001/0387 final), and a Report by the Dutch Advisory Council on Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid – WRR) (2003), *Slagvaardigheid in de Europabrede Unie*, Den Haag: SdU uitgevers.

Although options 1 and 4 may be perceived as the ones with the most practical utility, we believe that options 2 and 3 are equally important. This is especially true if deployments of multinational military frameworks become more frequent, i.e. the deployment decision is not regarded as 'a single shot' affair but a string of repetitive collaborations.

Implications

We have outlined the options for synchronisation ordered from less to more permanently binding arrangements. If countries with similar political decision-making procedures engage in a multinational unit, they may well be able to do with ad hoc mechanisms for synchronising their decisions. If, however, countries with vastly different political systems combine, they will most likely have to go for binding permanent arrangements.

Yet these binding arrangements may come at a cost. If they are not appropriately designed, they may weaken accountability. A government that is domestically constrained by a strong parliament may employ them to mute parliamentary opposition. By pointing out that 'we are bound by international commitments', the executive can try to circumvent parliamentary scrutiny or overcome domestic opposition. In an extreme case, this could result in forced synchronisation by shortcutting national decision-making procedures and thus sacrifice accountability for effectiveness. Permanent arrangements for the deployment of multinational units must therefore always contain provisions to ensure that the accountability of the executive is not weakened in order to enhance effectiveness.

Taking into account differences between the political systems of the participating countries may not only help to devise more effective instruments for the synchronisation of decision-making. It may also entail a form of specialisation among countries. This specialisation would be based on the tasks that a country can support in terms of politics, not the tasks that its military is capable of performing (in theory) but which are very hard to sustain in view of the political culture and practices of the country. Countries that are good at making quick decisions may have to assume responsibility for making the first move in deploying forces; whereas countries that are better at building broad domestic consensus before sending forces out could be better suited for maintaining forces in a region in support of long-term peace-building efforts.

Concluding remarks

A multinational, jointly owned force needs more than just technical compatibility so that it can be deployed effectively and efficiently. In fact, there are three layers on which compatibility needs to be achieved. Most widely recognised is *operational compatibility* (comprising issues such as doctrine, management, command and control, interoperability). There is also a very fundamental issue of *cultural compatibility*, however, which usually is not explicitly addressed by decision-makers but taken into account 'by default'. A sense that it is necessary to deploy military units is much more likely to be shared by two states that are culturally similar, i.e. by countries that share some basic values and ideas about what constitutes a well ordered world.

In between these two layers lie the institutions of the political process whose importance has up to now largely gone unnoticed when multinational units were created. When a *shared* sense of instrumentation produces the need for *common* action on the ground (via a jointly owned multinational unit), obviously the workings of the political institutions need to be *synchronised* to ensure an orderly progression from the shared sense of instrumentation to a joint deployment decision that can then be carried out by interoperable forces.

For a multinational unit to be deployed effectively, instantly and *jenseits von Krieg und Frieden*, compatibility needs to be achieved on all three levels:

- Culture (compatible or common values provide the basis for a shared sense of instrumentation)
- Institutions (compatible or common institutions provide the basis for synchronised decisions)
- Interoperability (compatible or common technical standards provide the basis for common action on the ground).

We have illustrated the point that the issue of institutional compatibility is a determining factor in the deployability and hence the political utility of a unit. It is our recommendation that decision-makers give this matter the highest attention when creating or engaging in multinational military formations.

We identified four mechanisms to achieve synchronisation of political processes: 1) ad hoc coordination, which seems to work well in a bi-national setting in which the compatibility of political systems of participating states is relatively high; 2) the open method of coordination, which could be used in a relatively homogeneous group; 3) a mutual agreement formalising procedures and preconditions that could be applied if the differences between political systems are relatively great; and 4) a standing organisation – a very costly mechanism – which works relatively well to facilitate cooperation among a group of rather diverse countries.

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