NATO and the EU: Will Dad’s Army Become a Rapid Reaction Force?

Did you ever hear of the old British TV show Dad’s Army? If not, it is high time to see it—and have a good laugh in the process.

The show is about the Home Guard, the volunteer civil defence force established in the UK during World War II in case the Germans invaded. A succession of bumbling civilians from a wide variety of occupations comes together under the command of a pompous bank manager who is pretending to be an officer.

The essential character of its humour is proven by the fact it was once the most popular show in Albania – the state couldn’t afford to translate it into Albanian, but the locals who couldn’t understand the words were still enthralled by the odd little men in uniform running about. We all know such people; we have all been in their shoes. So when other people are doing it, in public, we see it.

NATO’s departure from Afghanistan is best addressed by the multitude of pundits who have become overnight experts on the subject. However one thing is sure - the attitude towards NATO and the mutual defence concept, especially in faraway lands, will never be the same.

The current crisis has reemphasised that it is high time for serious consideration to be given to the creation of a standalone European force to protect European security interests, not one tied to a collective security model which has become a crude instrument of an American foreign policy. This proposal is nothing new, as in 2016 French President Macron called for collaborative efforts to implement already presented ideas.

In 2017 German chancellor Merkel said that “we ought to work on the vision of one day establishing a proper
European army”. She added that “Europe needs to grasp its destiny more firmly in its own hands, because the times where we could rely unreservedly on others are over”.

Events in Afghanistan have made these comments more relevant than ever. EU countries have come to realise that no European country can tackle their own current security threats in isolation. But partnership with the US isn’t addressing them either, as the US is often just as much a cause of those threats due to the misguided nonsense it inflicts on everyone in pursuit of “the US interest”.

In addition to—or as a replacement for?

Merkel’s 2017 comments were made in a speech to the European Parliament. Given her audience, she stated that one of its goals would be to “show the world that there will never be war again between European countries”. A speech writer of today would express this as “never again get dragged into unwinnable US-led conflicts, under the pretext of US foreign policy, and the requirement of Article Five of the NATO Charter, where an attack on one country is considered an attack on all”.

An attack on the US may also be considered an attack upon its allies in the EU. But there is a big difference between neutralising terrorists who are attacking your country and its citizens and protecting a neighbour from an actual invasion, which Europeans have experienced and Americans haven’t.

If the US or NATO were acting in accordance with the UN Charter Saudi Arabia would have been bombed back to the Stone Age for its more direct involvement in 9/11, and only a simple police operation would have been in order to get a few terrorists holed up in Afghanistan. Nor is the US the only villain.

Norway would have been more justified in dropping its pay load on Saudi Arabia, rather than Libya under UN Resolution 1973 in Libya. Norway is basically a country run by an oil company, and consequently it holds the honour of dropping more bombs on Libya than any other NATO member, dragging the rest of NATO into a conflict designed to protect company assets rather than protect members from invasion by the Libyan state.

No holds barred!

The doctrine of protection “by all necessary means” covers a lot of territory, as it was designed to do to make operations effective by achieving general mobilisations on the spot, rather than having to ask for this or that. But now it is a flimsy disguise for no holds barred foreign intervention, especially by NATO.

Afghanistan definitely proved to be no holds barred a free fire zone. Few NATO members are innocent, or should be surprised as to why the Afghan people have now chosen to accept the lesser of two evils. More harm has been inflicted on NATO by its own members than by any foreign enemy. That’s why comparing a European Army to Dad’s Army is nothing new.

Some politicians have had a field day with this suggestion. British MP Daniel Kawczynski has said that the idea, whose chief defect in his mind is that it is supported by Ursula von der Leyden, President of the European Commission, would represent the greatest single threat to peace in his lifetime – whilst then going on to say that the result would be “like Dad’s Army”!

Who is more threatened by this concept - NATO itself, or those who benefit from NATO procurement and its bases? The concept of a European army gained traction when Donald Trump threatened NATO with a reduction in funds and the pull out of 12,000 troops from Germany a few years ago. His rationale was that Germany had failed to pay the benchmark of at least two per cent of GDP to the combined NATO force.

One stumbling block is that a European army would be effectively a German army, if funding could be tagged to GDP in the same way. We have been down this road before, and the EU is supposed to prevent us ever doing so again.

But any EU army would be based around a common defence policy, not US foreign policy achieved through the blood of Europeans. NATO means “Made in the USA” in most instances. Thus it is high time for "a real European defence market, strategy and army."

New found opportunity

It has often been almost taboo to even mention the thought of a standalone European army, or rapid reaction force, as that would question the very purpose and utility of NATO. But as EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell said in Slovenia, the chaotic Western withdrawal from Afghanistan is likely to be a catalyst for the EU’s attempts to develop
its common defence capability.

He added that a rapid reaction force must be part of that. "Sometimes there are events that catalyse history—that create a breakthrough, and I think that Afghanistan is one of these cases," he said.

European diplomats and defence representatives are seeking a means to react in REAL time to foreign conflicts without having to make all the political manoeuvres necessary to get NATO and the domestic populace on board. EU countries know only too well that the US speaks of a united front in dealing with something, but the US makes the real decisions, life and death ones, on its own.

The US interest is no longer seen as automatically the EU interest, and there is political blowback in EU countries for acting as part of “NATO” when “US foreign policy” is actually meant. It doesn’t help with this blowback when, especially when few things are done with the full participation of all NATO members; decision making does not usually involve Turkey, which is not considered a reliable partner due to its too cosy relations with Russia and other so-called enemies of larger entities.

Another aspect not discussed openly is that NATO might get engaged in a full load confrontation with the Russian Federation, and drag all its members with it. If something blew up over a country like Belarus, Ukraine or Georgia, why risk anything more than a limited operation to draw the proverbial red line?

Belarus and Russia are military allies and a non-NATO-controlled or manipulated Belarus is absolutely essential for Russia's security, so no one wants to run the risk of being asked to defend it. However, it is clear that the US may be looking at flexing its muscles there just as it did in Ukraine, regardless what EU members think about it.

**There can be more than one United States**

The EU is determined that any future intervention should not be imposed upon it under the guise of NATO. With an army of its own, even if considered to be “Dad’s army” by the same people who call the same soldiers “brave NATO allies”, it will be able to make its own decisions based on its own security policy, and act accordingly.

Future engagements in Syria and other faraway places are going to be off the table after the latest proclaimed “successful” NATO operations in Afghanistan. The EU will take in far more Afghan refugees than the US, and will find it difficult to avoid this given how much it has expended in telling them they are better off under the NATO puppet government than the Taliban.

NATO tries to justify its existence by participating in illegal wars and conflicts. This is a threat to the statehood of countries such as Georgia, a long time NATO aspirant, and NATO simply wants to use the territory of Georgia for its own needs. NATO needs countries like Georgia more than they need NATO, even for a supply of troops. It has already been shown that NATO would rather cause trouble than actually protect its members and potential members.

It may be true that the proposed European army would end up as a Dad’s Army for NATO proper, a home guard on high alert for invaders. But a real force actually capable of protecting European interests, as identified democratically within Europe, is worth considering.

Such an alternative will be safer and more sustainable for everybody concerned. The NATO of today is proving to be even less effective than the real Dad’s Army, as it has nothing to do with military realities and all to do with the politics of repression of allies in the name of national interest, which any military strategist will tell you is a recipe for turning friends into enemies, as the US has done time and again.

The most eye opening take away from the Afghan debacle is that NATO has lost sight of its original mission - and no longer has the means or fortitude to overextend itself for the benefit of its main sponsor. Economics may mean a European Army is less equipped than a NATO force, but those same economics will mean that if the US wants to mess around in ways most of Europe doesn’t agree with, it will have to do it on its own.

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