

European Security Roundup

Number 34, July 2007

A new European Treaty

The successful conclusion of the new 'Reform Treaty' in the early hours of 23 June has meant that finally the proposal to combine the role of High Representative for CFSP within the European Council (currently Javier Solana) and that of European Commissioner for External Relations (currently Benita Ferrero-Waldner) can proceed. The new position will be called High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, rather than EU Foreign Minister, after objections from the UK. Backed by a new External Action Service (presumably comprising EU diplomats from both the Council and Commission), the new High Representative will play the role of permanent chair of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of EU foreign ministers. By speaking with one voice on foreign and security matters rather than two, there is a better prospect that the EU foreign and defence policy will be enunciated with greater clarity.

Having experienced the painful and misconceived experiment with a new constitution, the EU Member States now look set to adopt this treaty as quickly as possible and move on. Only Ireland is certain to put the issue to a referendum, with most states who were previously pledged to do the same, now happy to plead the case that this is no longer necessary.

A new triumvirate in Europe

On 27 June Gordon Brown replaced Tony Blair as the UK's Prime Minister, less than two months after Nicolas Sarkozy had replaced Jacques Chirac as President of France. With Angela Merkel already ensconced as German Chancellor, we now have three new leaders in the three major European powers.

However the personal chemistry works, there are hopes that the political inter-relationships will prove productive. Although Brown would identify himself as from the Centre Left, whereas Sarkozy and Merkel are of the Centre Right, in practical policy terms the distinction is far less obvious. Moreover, Merkel heads a grand coalition within Germany that includes the socialists, Sarkozy has appointed numerous politicians associated with other parties, and Brown is following suit. Sarkozy is committed to introducing a more liberal economic model, similar to the one the Blair/Brown axis has implemented over the past decade.

Whereas Merkel has successfully helped to thaw relations between the US and Germany, for Brown the challenge is to break the perception that British foreign policy is indivisible from that of the US. Brown is an avowed Transatlanticist, who also cooled Blair's ardour for Britain to join the Euro. Nevertheless, his intriguing appointment of the young and intelligent David Miliband as Foreign Secretary (who was privately sceptical about the decision to invade Iraq) offers the hope of a fresh approach to Britain's foreign policy.

Nuclear Free World

Only two days before being replaced by David Miliband, the outgoing Foreign Secretary, Margaret Beckett, delivered a speech that revealed a welcome renewed emphasis on disarmament within UK non-proliferation policy. Apparently this reflects a new determination by the incoming Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, to make nuclear disarmament a strong foreign policy priority.¹ ISIS welcomes this move.

During the recent debate on replacing the UK's Trident nuclear weapon system, ISIS said that arms control was "stuck", and that the only way to break out of the impasse was for there to be "political leadership" at the highest level, that would enable the:

"...existing nuclear powers to get around the negotiating table, thrash out their mutual commitment to such a course and set out a detailed 'road map' of how to go forward" towards a "staged process of de-nuclearisation".²

Addressing the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, Mrs Beckett said:

"The sense of stagnation is real enough. There is a dangerous absence of debate at the highest levels on disarmament and a collective inability thus far to come up with a clear plan."

"...we will need to show much more ambition and action on nuclear disarmament. Those who have nuclear weapons have to be serious — and be seen to be serious — about a world free of nuclear weapons."

ISIS has also made the point that what is needed is a philosophical change of approach:

"although actually setting the goal of trying to achieve a world without nuclear weapons is important it does not necessarily follow that the ultimate achievement of such an objective can or will be reached. The important point is the degree to which the intention is serious and sincere, and the consequent level of commitment devoted to reaching the ultimate goal".³

The Foreign Secretary echoed these sentiments when she said:

"Believing that the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons is possible can act as a spur for disarmament action. Believing, at whatever level, that it is not, is the surest path to inaction..."

Taking action does not mean setting an unrealistic timetable for the abolition of nuclear weapons...

But acknowledging that the conditions for abolition do not exist now does not mean resigning ourselves to the idea that we will never reach that point. Nor does it prevent us from taking steps to reduce the number of nuclear weapons and to start thinking about how to get rid of them completely."

¹ James Blitz, 'UK signals push for global nuclear disarmament', *Financial Times*, 25 June 2007.

² See, for example, Stephen Pullinger's oral and written evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee on 23 January for its inquiry into *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the White Paper*, Ninth Report, Session 2006-7, Q192, HC225-I and paragraph 98 of written evidence within HC-225-II.

³ *Ibid.*

To that end, Ms Beckett pledged that Britain would:

“...concentrate on the complex but pivotal challenge of creating a robust, trusted and effective system of verification that does not give away national security or proliferation sensitive information.”

In answering the charge made by some, including ISIS, that the British Government’s approach was in danger of being too complacent, Ms Beckett responded:

“If we allow our efforts on disarmament to slacken, if we allow ourselves to take the non-proliferation consensus for granted, the nuclear shadow that hangs over us all will lengthen and it will deepen. It may, one day, blot out the light for good. We cannot allow that to happen.”

If this speech heralds a gear-change towards disarmament within one of the P5 this constitutes an important advance on the road to a more secure future. The new Foreign Secretary, Mr Miliband, should now be encouraged to take up the mantle with the full backing of his new boss.

Cluster Bombs

Cluster bombs rely on the dispersal of hundreds of tiny bomblets, many of which fail to explode as intended. Instead they pose an indefinite hazard to innocent civilians as they go about their daily lives in the aftermath of conflict. Often important tracts of arable land are rendered inaccessible by this unexploded ordnance. Children are often particularly vulnerable, mistaking these bomblets for toys, and picking them up with horrific consequences. Clearing these weapons away is a dangerous, slow and costly process.

Attempts to have cluster bombs banned, or at least to have their use constrained, have floundered on resistance from the major producers and users. Hence, there was a pleasant surprise in June when the US announced that it was now prepared to strengthen the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW or ‘Inhumane Weapons Convention’) by negotiating a treaty that would regulate the use of cluster bombs. This followed the earlier decision by the British Government immediately to halt the use of “dumb” cluster munitions - although it retains the option to use “smart” cluster bombs, such as those used extensively in Lebanon last year. If the tide is finally turning against the use of these weapons that have such a devastating humanitarian impact this is really good news. Persuading Russia and China to swim in the same direction is the next major challenge.

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