

Building Intelligence at Fifteen: The Problems and Dynamics of Informing European Defense Decisions

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During the Helsinki summit meeting of the European Union members last December, the Fifteen decided that they would enhance the political and military instruments available to them in order to be able to manage a crisis when NATO as a whole is not engaged.

European defense has been around for some time. What is new is that the Europeans have collectively pledged that they would back up their political resolution with real capabilities. That is further down the road, but the achievements to date are already significant: today, Europe speaks with one voice, and common security and defense coordinating institutions are building up rapidly.

The existing EU's Political Committee has been given permanent standing with resident ambassadors. It is now able to rely on the advice of a military committee. Of the fifteen EU member states, eleven plan to have the same military representatives sitting in both military committees. Finally, a European military staff is being set up.

The intelligence implications of this dynamic are unprecedented. As outlined in the Petersburg mission statement, and in coordination with NATO, these structures must have the capacity to anticipate a crisis (early warning), inform the decision (crisis monitoring), and to act and enable the military to strike decisively (battlefield awareness).

There are huge challenges ahead: this European intelligence structure must avoid getting bogged down in interagency bickering; it must have the capacity to verify information; and it must ensure complete security.

Most of all, however, the new European intelligence structure will need a new spirit of cooperation, a redefinition of intelligence as a national function. By enabling analysts and intelligence officers to share information openly and create a truly integrated database, open source intelligence will be the foundation for this cultural revolution.

¹ The author's views should not be construed as being representative of official positions.

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