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Conference report: On the Road towards European Armed Forces? Changes of National Security Cultures between Homeland Defence and Missions abroad since 1991

Summary: The Villa Vigoni-Talk “Rethinking armed forces”, organized by Bernhard CHIARI (Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam) and Nicola LABANCA (Università degli Studi di Siena) was conducted in Menaggio/ITA from 22nd – 25th April 2012. Main intention of the conference was to initiate the academic discussion about the changes of national security policies in Europe and to establish a European network of military historians, connecting institutional historical research within the Armed Forces with the academic sphere.

The End of the Cold War and the increasing number of missions abroad changed the way European nations dealt with their military. The revolution of 1990/91 caused the military itself to adapt to new tasks. For historians and archivists, the fundamental changes call for a common understanding of how to deal with the transition itself, track down the sources and conserve military data for future studies. Three days of intensive discussion broadened the view on national efforts as well as overarching coherencies. In the Villa Vigoni, Dutch, German, Italian, Norwegian, Turkish, NATO, and EU views were shared and enriched. Expertise from both military and civilian historians was linked with profound knowledge and personal experiences about the reality of military operations abroad.

A survey of current projects with regard to Contemporary Military History was essential to reflect on common research projects in the future. The participants agreed to conduct a case study on the history of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT's) in Afghanistan, reflecting the change of security policies, as well as the adaptation of armies contributing to ISAF to new surroundings. The lead will be with Militär-

geschichtliches Forschungsamt, Università degli Studi di Siena, and the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH).

The conference was organized into 8 panels. Panel 1 on Current Military History and its sources was chaired by Ineke DESERNO (NATO archivist, Brussels). DESERNO analyzed the challenges and obligations of NATO archivists after the End of the Cold War. With an increasing number of NATO missions the need for a new record policy grew. The electronic revolution inside the military made it necessary to find a strategy for systematically filing digital data, produced on an ever growing scale. A strategy for record keeping and collecting data from national armed forces, however, is still lacking in many NATO countries and just getting shape on NATO level. Looking at the NATO Libya-Operation, the challenge of documentation is still immense. DESERNO exemplified the NATO approach by presenting the paper "A new NATO record policy" (C-M (2012)0014), released February 2012. The document clarifies procedures and responsibilities inside NATO. For military historians, the need to downgrade or de-classify classified documents is vital. Different approaches on NATO, as well as on EU-levels, were discussed in detail.

How to locate sources and how to make the military decision making process transparent was also analyzed on a more general level. For understanding decisions it is incumbent to understand the structures and procedures within military organizations, in many cases not transparent to civilian historians. To cover discussions which are not necessarily (or systematically not) recorded, classical Operational Diaries have necessarily to be complemented by interviews and other sources. For the ISAF and Iraq cases, controversially discussed was the Dutch and US systems of war diarists, having historians with a military education put into staff structures and thus creating historical sources themselves. The presentation of DESERNO was welcomed as an important guideline helping research and studies on future missions. It clarified roles and responsibilities, as well as basic questions of ownership and custodianship.

Jörg HILLMANN (EU Military Mission, Brussels) and Rüdiger SCHIEL (MGFA, Potsdam), conducted Panel 2 on the Role of Armed Forces after 1991 in the national and international context. SCHIEL started the panel with a look at maritime missions in the 1990's. Based on a case study on Operation Sharp Guard (1993 – 1996), he looked deeper into the development of missions after the End of the Cold War and

the structural challenges for the German Navy that came along with the new strategic environment. After reunification, the role of Bundeswehr was not clearly defined for many years. From a political perspective, Operation Sharp Guard was a humanitarian mission and not a military one. This made it possible for the Federal Government to support the mission with military means. In the Adriatic Sea, the German Navy got a first low level opportunity to learn how to participate in international missions. Even so, neither the equipment, nor the necessary legal frame work existed at the beginning. The German Navy had to adapt step by step to the new situation.

HILLMANN analyzed Operation Sharp Guard on the political level and discussed it as a mirror of the strategic changes within NATO and EU. HILLMANN reconstructed the expectations the member states had towards Germany after reunification, and presented the thesis that the country so far has not yet learned to act as an active and responsible European leader with regard to its security and military policies after 1990. Until now, Germany seems, with regard to strategic decision making, to keep the tendency to orientate towards countries with far weaker economies. The country still lacks experience in leading missions and is – due to historical reasons – reluctant to do so.

The question of national security cultures and caveats was discussed in a broader context, stressing the different historical backgrounds and perceptions. Norway had no national security doctrine in 1990. It took 10 years to develop it. Turkey faced similar problems as Germany. As long as the Soviets and the Cold War were the major concern, huge armies were kept inside Turkey. Today, the military cannot send soldiers to missions abroad like ISAF without public concerns about losses overwhelming the political and military decision making. Outside the Turkish boundaries, losses are not accepted (current dispute with Syria), whereas the use of military force inside the country is in accordance with a national consensus on security questions (operations against Kurdish separatists).

Various contributions outlined the existence of parallel cultures within Armed Forces: As 1990 was definitely a landmark year for the Dutch as well, the Dutch Navy did not have to change its task then substantially. In their own perception, Dutch ships patrolled the Adriatic Sea as they did all over the world since the 16th century. Even if the Dutch Navy conducted NATO tasks, politicians and soldiers saw their missions as a national tool to be globally present as well. The possibility of creating European

Armed Forces and functioning European Defence Structures was examined on various examples and assessed critically.

Panel 3 dealt with the ISAF mission as a Case Study for international stabilization efforts and current historical projects (Chair: Ben SCHOENMAKER, Arthur TEN CATE and Thijs BROCADES ZAALBERG, Netherlands Military History Institute, Den Haag). SCHOENMAKER introduced the NIMH, established in 2005, as part of the Dutch Ministry of Defence. Contemporary Military History soon became the focus of the institute's work, which also evokes problems. SCHOENMAKER stated that writing about a Dutch Brigade during the Napoleonic Wars would not arouse any discussion in the Netherlands, whereas critical questions on the Dutch ISAF deployment in Afghanistan rapidly made NIMH a participant in a current political discussion, where the results of academic research and discussion would not be accepted by the political and military leadership in every case.

SCHOENMAKER presented ISAF as an example how the Dutch Army tries to overcome the trauma of Srebrenica by executing operations in a responsible position within the coalition. Secondly, the presentation dealt with how military history is organized and understood in the Netherlands. The current research projects within NIMH deal with the North and South of Afghanistan independently, as Dutch Land Forces were in PRT Baghlan until 2006, whereas the Royal Netherland Air Force deployed to Kabul from the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan. The "Project South" focuses on the Uruzgan province from 2006 on, where the majority of Dutch troops were deployed. With an Operational focus, the different authors concentrate on planning procedures, as well as on the conduct of tactics and operations, whereas inner structures of contingents, mental aspects or the interdependency with discussions and decision making in the Netherlands will follow in a second step.

In the following discussion the "Dutch Approach" of conducting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan was compared with the Norwegian understanding of Counter-Insurgency and stabilization. The historical dimension of the engagement in Afghanistan was illustrated by various national contributions, showing the slow shift of ISAF from a classical stabilization effort to a high-intensity war in several regions.

Practical questions of record keeping and the available sources were also object of discussion. The Dutch example from Uruzgan, where an implemented historian has access to the full Operational Planning Process with briefings and discussions, was

assessed as a possible model for other nations as well. Best practice and lessons learned, however, illustrated the challenges for Current Military History: In an international environment, sources are lost when one nation takes over from the other. Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations inside the UN, as well as other ministries (e.g. Foreign Affairs), present obstacles for the historian, especially if national or international security issues are concerned. High ranking military, involved in the analyzed operations, might want to see the study on “their” mission before the results are published - even if the academic independence is incumbent and historians make it crystal clear that changes due to personal sensitivities are out of questions and contradictory to academic standards.

Giuseppe CAFORIO (International Sociological Association, Pisa) introduced Panel 4 on the Experience of war and individual coping strategies of soldiers in combat. CAFORIO presented the results of current field research. Participants from nine countries, having been deployed to ISAF or ATALANTA 2010 to 2011, were questioned systematically. Research focused on the individual perceptions of both missions and the need to adapt to asymmetric warfare. CAFORIO analyzed individual coping strategies with human poverty, the situation of being surrounded by a hostile and not-understandable environment, or the results of a lack of equipment or unclear / senseless orders on the individual psyche. His results, however, made clear that a vast majority of the soldiers concentrate on their direct personal involvement and thus assess the mission experience generally in a positive way. The possibility to prove oneself as a professional soldier in an international environment, to practice military skills, or to experience functioning military collectives and military leadership, add to the picture.

The discussion comprised various national research projects, as well as the role of the veterans' in different societies. A Dutch project on UNIFIL in Lebanon, conducted 20 years after the mission had ended, brought the veterans and their individual problems into focus. The study showed that ten percent of the former soldiers within UNIFIL were suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Symptoms or similar illnesses. For many of the veterans, the war in Lebanon did not end – an experience that has gained a new dimension with regard to soldiers returning from combat missions in Iraq or Afghanistan. In Menaggio, sociological interviews were discussed as a historical source as well. A controversial debate on how the colonial past of a country might configure the individual mindset of soldiers from different nations ended the panel.

Fatima FARINA (Università di Urbino) and Burkhard KÖSTER (MGFA) chaired Panel 5 on the Corporate Identity and the self-understanding of Armed Forces. KÖSTER explained the German Approach to a military corporate identity, developed to separate the young Bundeswehr from its predecessors before 1945. The so called “Innere Führung”, meaning the rule of law for citizens in uniform, states that understanding the need for military service makes it easier to contribute to the defence of the community, even if the individual loss of freedom and self-determination has to be accepted temporarily. KÖSTER pointed out that the self-understanding of German soldiers has changed since the Cold War ended. He developed the highly political question, whether a citizen soldier can still be an effective, professional fighter dealing with the need of missions abroad. The example of the German Armoured Infantry Battalion 391, deployed several times to Afghanistan, illustrated a declining significance of “Innere Führung” in the mind of deployed personnel, being more and more replaced by the ideal of the fighter. KÖSTER discussed the dangers of soldiers turning away from society to pure soldiering.

FARINA contributed to the picture on the basis of Italian sociological research. She explained how the Italian armed forces became a “full member in the club of soldiers”, analyzing three missions abroad in the 1990’s. Step by step, an “Italian Style” of humanitarian soldiering developed and got the highest acceptance inside the Italian society. Before their engagement in international missions, the Italian Armed Forces were hardly present in the public or the media. After 9/11, peacekeeping operations began to decrease and the need for combat missions came into focus. As a result, Italy started a military reform, replacing the conscripts by volunteers, taking women into the Armed Forces, or providing new equipment for intense operations. The Italian development, however, brought similar challenges as the German case. The Armed Forces showed tendencies to become a state within the state, and blocked – as an inward looking society – attempts of the civilian sphere to accompany the transformation from Cold War armies to expeditionary forces.

The discussion put the situation in Germany and Italy in a European perspective. To various degrees, European societies show only a “friendly lack of interest” (Horst Köhler) in the Armed Forces. Italian soldiers, as well as their colleagues in other countries, often don’t feel appreciated, and that feeling is growing inside the military together with more and more unpopular missions as the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Only by sociological means the question can be answered, whether the soldiers' perception is in accordance with the real positions within different societies, and if the members of the military just have exaggerated expectations towards the public. Various national examples highlighted the different attitude of European governments towards their military. The Dutch political class seems to show a high interest in the Army, and regularly expresses its gratitude to the work done abroad. The new Belgium government even decided to draw the public attention to the involvement of Belgium Forces in the Libya campaign. Every morning the Minister of Defence announced on the radio the number of targets hit by Belgium fighter planes. The Turkish Army also had to undergo transformation from volunteers to draftees', and is still on its way doing so. Also in this more traditional environment, however, professional soldiers raise more and more concerns over missions abroad and their impact on their individual lives.

Panel 6, dealing with Armed Forces as learning Institutions, and their connection with the interventional societies, was introduced by Mesut UYAR (Turkish Military Academy, Ankara) and Wolfram JÄGER (MGFA, Potsdam). With the End of the Cold War, the type of NATO missions changed. With the first engagements abroad like in Somalia 1993/94, the military had to adapt to a new situation. Equipment, tailored for the defence of Western Europe along the Inner-German border, had to be phased out and new equipment, designed for peacekeeping missions, had to be provided. The transformation affected tactics, as well as techniques and procedures. Additionally, new actors appeared on the battlefield. Non Governmental and Governmental Organizations interacted with the military. This created a complex situation, where decision making and execution of a comprehensive stabilization strategy became more and more difficult. The Mass media projected incidents directly on the TV-screens of the troop-contributing countries.

In the so called "Three Block Warfare" soldiers had to develop skills and capabilities that could no longer be provided by the military itself, but had to be taken in from outside the system. Cultural awareness and the competence to understand foreign cultural systems, as well as highly specialized needs for infrastructure, medical competence, or logistics, put high pressure to the European Armies to adapt very fast to different and changing theatres of operations. Nowadays military is part of the "Whole Governmental Approach", and interaction with other societies is mandatory. Cultural awareness not only with regard to foreign cultures, but also as part of the "Whole

Governmental Approach” or the co-operation inside multinational military organizations is indispensable. The attempts of Armed Forces in Europe to cope with these challenges were discussed in a broad scale, connecting the way of institutional research, financed by the national MODs, with the mechanisms of learning and training on the basis of military organizations.

Panel 7 followed the links between Armed Forces and Society (Chair: Torunn Laugen HAALAND, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Oslo; Armin MÜLLER, Universität Marburg). MÜLLER introduced a research project on the Bundeswehr Reserve. The system of significant numbers of reserve troops for conventional warfare in Central Europe during the Cold War had its peak in the 1990's. After reunification, the strength of active personnel had to be reduced dramatically, whereas reserve forces took over their tasks even in fields of highly engineered, technical and intensive military fields. Within few years, the conventional defence of Germany and Central Europe, however, got out of focus. More and more missions abroad desired for skills that could only be found in the reserve. Especially within humanitarian missions served highly specialized reserve soldiers like engineers, or specialists for Civil-Military Cooperation. 9/11 created new realities for the reserve too. On the one hand, the interaction with local authorities in Germany as catastrophe relief (Heimatschutz) became a main effort. On the other hand, well trained reservists had to support the missions itself, as well as to fill the gaps in active units, whose soldiers were sent abroad. MÜLLER showed how the reform of the German reserve system tried to keep speed with the transformation of the active parts of the Bundeswehr, but that the necessary judicial, financial, and social pre-conditions to integrate reservists on a reliable and permanent basis were reached partially at best.

HAALAND looked at a similar change in Norway since the 1990s. When conscription was abandoned, the link between the armed forces and society weakened. The mission in the Balkans was so controversially looked at inside the Norwegian society that the prime minister refused to take a picture with Norwegian troops, leaving for Bosnia-Herzegovina. On the one hand, the support for the troops seems to have grown permanently, even by those who do not see any sense in a certain mission. On the other hand, the military tends more and more to separate from civil society. Mistrust towards the political leadership contributes to this development. Living a soldiers' outdoor life, getting their education inside the system and not leaving this system,

limit the Norwegian Armed Forces ability to communicate with other parts of the society, or to take part in the pluralistic discussion culture of the country.

In the debate, several nations and their armed forces were discussed. A leading role with regard to the relationship between armies and the surrounding societies seems to play the dependency on economic trends. Having abandoned conscription, the Dutch army faced up to 50% vacancies in times of economic prosperity.

Panel 8, introduced by Marco MONDINI (Università di Padova / Fondazione Bruno Kessler, Centro per gli Studi Storici Italo-Germanici, Trento), focused on Military History as connecting link between Armed Forces, Sciences, and Politics. MONDINI concentrated on the use of Military History for war, strategy and military effectiveness during missions abroad. Ben SCHOENMAKER criticised the tendency to expect concrete Lessons Learned from History. The example of Vietnam or Iraq illustrated how sometimes the wrong lessons were learned, because the complexity of a mission was reduced to merely military and technical aspects. The debate highlighted the various levels of learning, and the institutional and academic structures for research, information, and the political decision making process. Military History can contribute to all three fields. Disciplines like strategic studies or international law use historical data for their internal discourses. Dealing with current military history put the historian into a challenging situation, as the media will already cover a conflict, before the political sciences and sociology will analyse it. Only when an opinion is already settled, the historian will be able to reconstruct the passed events.

The concluding remarks by CHIARI and LABANCA outlined the levels and tasks of current military history. Following a structural history approach, the focus of projects should lie on military topics. It is, however, impossible to study armed forces in a modern political system without making analytical references to society as a whole or to the international system.

Firstly, current research has to cover the military dimension. With the help of selected examples, the interaction between alliance and national interests as well as military policy, the development of strategy and the conduct of operations have to be studied. In addition, changes in the military in terms of its personnel, organization, institutions, communication and structure ("Transformation") have to be described, which are reflected in modified images of war and the soldier.

A second important condition is the political dimension. The change in the threat situation after the end of the Cold War yielded a new mission, a new structure and a new top-level military structure within all European armies. The primacy of politics over the military took on a new meaning. In this context, questions of strategy, the reorientation in foreign affairs and the basic discussion on out-of-area operations or operations abroad must be covered. Political decision-making in the media and party democracies, civilian and military cooperation in the theaters of operations as well as implications of operations abroad regarding international and constitutional law complete the picture.

Thirdly, current military history has to explore the social dimension. Service personnel of the Bundeswehr have always been political soldiers in accordance with the concept of Innere Führung. They on the one hand serve parliament and on the other represent the “open” civilian society. The terms recruitment, conscript army and equity in conscription outline the conflicts involved in this subject all over Europe. In comparison with how Innere Führung has proved its worth in operational environments, or how the local cultures of other armies have developed similarly, current military history has to study mechanisms governing the formation of public opinion as well as the role of the media in the perception of European Armies.

Fourthly, the common approach makes the economic dimension of the transformation comprehensible. It includes national and international defense projects and cooperation activities and the importance of the Armed Forces for the national economies, cooperation in supranational organizations and institutions, infrastructure measures or technical innovations and defense research of the Ministries of Defense.

As a fifth element, the transformation includes a cultural dimension. It refers not only to tradition and customs within the armed forces, but also to the soldier as a “hero” or postmodern “anti-hero” in literature or art and the media. Military subcultures among units in their home bases and forces on operations reflect a change in the self-image of the military as well as new forms of commemorating the dead, hero cult and military music. Motivation, consequences of operations and gender formation are a part and an expression of the transformation.

The Villa Vigoni-talk widened the view from the national to the comparative perspective. A case study on different national approaches in Afghanistan might bring to-

gether NATO- and different European contributions, as well as ways to organize and interpret Military History and its position between the Armed Forces, the Academic sphere, and the troop contributing societies.

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