

International Relations Networking of the Austrian Armed Forces

Address given by
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Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests,

The Austrian Blue Helmet Association has kindly asked me for speaking about the international relations of our armed forces and the philosophy which stands behind that networking.

Truly, armed forces today maintain many liaison links and I certainly will not succeed to list and introduce all crossing points of our “web” which are increasing by number persistently. Therefore I will restrain myself to elaborate on the corner stones of our international relationships and present a typical example later on.

First, a few basic considerations:

The purpose of international military relations is trust building as a part of the national security policy. In this context the diplomatic mission of defense attaches is the most well-known example due to their already historical functions. Yet, their role is very important today and increasingly important is the role of military advisors at permanent missions to international organizations.

The dimension of the network of Austrian defense attachés and military advisors as of today has developed over decades. In the past this military diplomatic

platform was shaped by the traditional Austrian profile of being a small and neutral country. The changes of 1989 and their consequential political developments gave way to a further expansion of the network.

The international attaché system is characterized by the principles of bilateral balance and reciprocity. Attaches are the carriers of bilateral relations in foreign countries; multilateral issues have increasingly become the causes of their interactions, however.

As a norm, any bilateral cooperation with foreign forces is planned on an annual basis. Depending on volume and intensity, the intended common activities are determined by an agreed cooperation program. It contains expert talks, common projects and the exchange of personnel for training and liaison.

As mentioned, the importance of the advisors' functions at the offices of the Austrian representatives to international organizations such as UN, EU, NATO und OSZE has gained greatly. Their multilateral tasks are shaped by the character of the respective organization and cover any coordination requirements for multinational operations and projects, up to our contribution to the further development of the European security system.

In addition any participation in field operations by troops requires also a representation at the respective command levels. This requirement led to a number of staff officers being integrated or attached to multinational staffs or operational headquarters. Thus, from an Austrian point of

view, a third category of actors in the international web has been established.

Based on the security interests of the Austrian Republic the priorities of international relations could be categorized as follows:

- a) First, according to the “constellation” and the specific emphasis of a respective organization. Of course, these organizations are the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the OSCE. Needless to say, the UN is of utmost importance as the instrument of global security and representing the highest authority. Whereas the EU is our highest priority, the importance of NATO and PfP lies in its transatlantic dimensions and role as standardization provider. The OSCE carries its significance in its regional dimensions. For the purpose of being brief in that introduction this all is a simplified explanation; in reality the relationship to all these organizations is certainly more multifaceted and wide-ranging.

- b) Second, according to regions:
Our first priority is the Western Balkan currently because of the geographical proximity and the related security interests defined by our foreign policy and economic interests. Besides the KOSOVO, BOSNIA-HERZEGOWINA (BIH) is a special Austrian focus.

Our second priority is the Middle East, Northern Africa and the Caucasus due to the security and energy related significance of these regions as well

as the effects of the Israeli and Arab conflict. The Mediterranean must not be neglected as peripheral area of importance for the EU, either.

Africa requires a growing attention as well. The developments on this continent are going to gain an increasing impact on Europe. Central Asia is a similar case. The role of the NATO PfP program is a framework for Austria to contribute and support countries of this region.

- c) Finally, our priorities are defined by our current participation in operations and their operational topics and focus. Our contributions to PSOs should be seen in the light of peacebuilding and assistance for the development of countries (e.g. EUFOR – BiH) as well as for our own enhancement for further contributions to the entire spectrum of Petersberg tasks. The latter is particularly true for training, equipment and technical as well as procedural standardization. These lessons learned, also by the PfP/OCC process and the EU battlegroup preparations help to succeed in our ambition of setting up a framework brigade for international operations in the future. Belonging to these ambitions is the fostering of our relations to important partners (e.g. Germany and the Nordic countries) and our attention to the regional cooperation CENCOOP and SHIRBRIG as UN-supporter.

As you can see, an essential aspect of our international relations can be found in the area of our contribution to international crisis management. Multinationality,

interoperability and rapid reaction capacities are the driving criteria and network standards in NATO/PfP and EU today. A few years ago the UN was the only instrument of international crisis management; today the so-called “regional arrangements” as mentioned in the UN Charter, are the major carriers.

Without established links to these organizations such as the EU, NATO, the OSCE and also the African Union, a successful networking and contribution to activities of international solidarity would not be possible anymore. Moreover, the success of any multinational activities is truly depending on the liaison quality of this network.

Now I would like to present the announced example explaining the complexity of our military relations. Please imagine there is a crisis anywhere related to the security interest of the European Union which requires an international engagement.

Our links would function as follows:

- In the case of a UN request to the EU, our military advisors in New York and Brussels are to be involved on a constant basis, and close considerations will be held with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, supported by our policy department, operational planning branch and our intelligence sources.
- Then it should come to a discussion in the EU Council which is the authority for mandating a possible mission („common action“). Other discussions within the EU under participation and involvement of our permanent representatives within

the EU Mil Staff and the EU-Military Committee (EUMC) as well as in the Security Political Committee at the level of our EU ambassador would take place.

- In the case of an initial decision a fact finding mission might be dispatched, at which a participation of Austrian military experts could occur.
- The next phase would be the Force Generation Planning, e.g. by a designated lead nation, just as in the case of Congo being Germany. This could evolve further multinational negotiations and conferences as well as special bilateral arrangements in the case of forming a multinational unit.

At the same time a national analysis and the national decision making process takes place. Hence, the political network of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs with its global network of embassies cooperates closely with the military network of established links.

These mechanisms are very similar in all international organizations. The channels, procedures and the quality of integration may vary, however. Many other examples of networking could be mentioned here. For humanitarian operations slightly different considerations apply, partly because of the direct involvement of UN agencies and other humanitarian players. Having given that example I am confident that it became very obvious how essential a network of international military relationships is.

Last but not least I would like to mention the importance of seminars, conferences and academic events which also belong to the field of international networking. Among them there are associations closely connected to the Austrian Armed Forces like the „Blue Helmets” with their international links. This Blue Helmet Forum 2006 represents to be a carrier of international communication, too, for what I wish to express my gratitude at this point.