

Britain and the OSCE¹

Since the late 1940s, the dominant feature of British security policy has been Atlanticism. Britain played a central role in the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and sought to retain a "special relationship" with the United States. During the Cold War, successive British governments viewed NATO and a continued US commitment to European security as vital to countering Soviet power. British governments tended to be sceptical about proposals for closer West European security and defence cooperation and for new pan-European security structures - fearing that such developments might undermine NATO and the US role in Europe.

British support for containment and NATO was, however, balanced by a pragmatic pursuit of *détente* with the Soviet Union. In the 1970s, despite fears that it might become a vehicle for underwriting Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe or be a Soviet attempt to divide the Western Alliance, Britain was willing to support the development of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE - now the OSCE). Despite scepticism about how much progress could be made within the CSCE framework, British governments viewed it as a useful body for raising human rights issues and negotiating military confidence-building measures.²

Britain and the New European Security Architecture

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union clearly called for a re-assessment of British security policy and the CSCE's/OSCE's role within that broader policy. The process of German unification in 1990 played a central role in shaping British policy. British leaders rapidly came to the conclusion that continued membership of NATO and the European Community (EC) were the best ways to ensure that a united Germany would remain integrated in European and trans-Atlantic security structures. A reformed NATO, in particular, would remain vital to British security:

¹ The author is grateful to Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff and members of the United Kingdom delegation to the OSCE for discussions on British policy towards the OSCE. The views expressed in this chapter, however, are the author's own.

² Cf. Brian White, *Britain, Détente and Changing East-West Relations*, London 1992, pp. 120-143.

NATO is the only security organization with the military means to back up its security guarantees. It secures the vital link between Europe and North America (...) the Alliance remains the best vehicle through which to ensure that, were a strategic threat to the United Kingdom to re-emerge, our interests could be effectively defended.³

At the same time, other institutions - the EC, the Western European Union (WEU), the United Nations (UN) and the CSCE - also had important roles to play in the new multi-institutional European security framework. Since 1990, these basic ideas have underpinned British government thinking about European security.

At least initially, British leaders were wary of strengthening the CSCE in case this should undermine NATO. Early in 1990, then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher outlined her views on what role the CSCE should play in the new Europe:

Alongside NATO - but *not* as an alternative to it - we need to find a way to reinforce democracy and human rights throughout Europe, while at the same time involving the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries fully in the debate on Europe's future.

(...) I do *not* believe that the CSCE can in any way take on a defence role. That must remain the task of NATO and WEU. What it *can* and *should* do is strengthen democracy, the rule of law and human rights. If we can get to a stage when they are practised and observed throughout Europe, that in itself will be an enormous contribution to Europe's security.⁴

Towards this goal, the CSCE should establish agreed standards for democracy, human rights, market economics and international behaviour. It should also extend political consultations among its members and establish procedures for emergency meetings and conciliation in cases of conflict. These proposals helped to shape the November 1990 CSCE Charter of Paris.

From the British perspective, the OSCE has a number of advantages which make it suited for particular roles. The OSCE's central advantage is that it "remains the European security structure with the broadest membership" providing it with a "unique perspective for promoting peace and stability in Europe".⁵ In this context, and especially against the background of likely NATO enlargement, the OSCE is a key body for integrating East European countries and the successor states of the former Soviet Union into European security structures, "providing reassurance for nations who are not, or are not

³ Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994, Cm 2550, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, April 1994, p. 9.

⁴ Prime Minister's speech to the Anglo-German Königswinter conference, Cambridge, 29 March 1990, in: Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review 17/1990, pp. 28-30.

⁵ Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994, cited above (Note 3), p. 17.

yet, members of regional or other security organizations".⁶ The OSCE's history and broad membership also make it the key framework for agreements of pan-European norms and standards for states' domestic and international behaviour and for conventional arms control negotiations. The OSCE's pan-European membership and agreed norms also give it a legitimacy and authority which other institutions, such as NATO and the European Union (EU), lack - allowing it to discuss the internal affairs of states and legitimise actions. The OSCE's legitimacy, further, makes it "the instrument of choice in early warning, conflict prevention and resolution".⁷ In short, for the British government, the OSCE "has a special contribution to make to the construction of a wider Europe. It defines the standards and values and norms of behaviour for a broad community. It embodies an equal right and opportunity for each member (...) to participate in building security (...) it is in a unique position to promote peace and stability in Europe".⁸

While supporting the OSCE's role in norm-setting, arms control and conflict prevention and management, however, Britain has been cautious about how much can be expected of the OSCE and in which directions it should develop. While arguing that the OSCE's broad membership is one of its main strengths, British officials also note that, combined with largely consensus decision-making, this inevitably limits the OSCE's ability to take decisive action in a crisis. Thus, British policy-makers emphasize that the OSCE cannot be seen as an alternative to NATO. Further, British policy-makers argue that steps in the direction of collective security would only undermine the OSCE's achievements to date, without making the Organization more effective. An OSCE Security Council would duplicate the work of the UN Security Council, would not in itself guarantee effective action and would likely be rejected by those small and medium powers excluded from membership. The provision of hard security guarantees to all OSCE States is seen as unrealistic. The OSCE, it is also argued, should not take on roles, such as peacekeeping, which other organizations (such as NATO and the WEU) are better suited for. British policy-makers have also been wary of introducing new OSCE institutions or structures which they argue might be costly and bureaucratic and undermine the Organization's ability to act effectively. According to Prime Minister John Major, the OSCE "does not require a large new level of officialdom. The CSCE's administrative corps needs to remain small and the CSCE should not take on tasks tackled satisfactorily elsewhere".⁹

⁶ Stable Forces in a Strong Britain: Statement on the Defence Estimates 1995, Cm 2800, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, May 1995, p. 23.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Speech given by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, at the CSCE on "CSCE - An Effective Response to Conflict", Helsinki, 10 July 1992, in: Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review 27/1992, p. 16.

For the British government, the OSCE plays a central role in setting the norms and standards for European states' behaviour, both internationally and domestically. Strong British support for the OSCE's role in setting European norms can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s. British governments at the time accepted that the CSCE should confirm the inviolability of existing international borders. In particular, however, they pressed for binding commitments on human rights and strongly criticised the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe when they failed to live up to those commitments.¹⁰

With the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989, the British government viewed the consolidation of democracy, respect for human rights and the development of market economies in Eastern Europe as a central objective. In this context, the CSCE should play a key role. Prime Minister Thatcher argued that the forthcoming Paris CSCE Summit should agree a "European Magna Carta" entrenching the basic rights of individuals, democracy and market economics. This should include specific commitments to free elections, the rule of law, respect for human rights (including freedom of speech, worship and national identity), the right to own private property and the inviolability of international borders.¹¹ These ideas helped to shape the commitments contained in the Charter of Paris and the agreement to create the Office for Free Elections, which later became the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

In significant part, the British approach reflected the government's (in particular Prime Minister Thatcher's) commitment to individual freedom and market economics. British support for CSCE norms, however, was also underpinned by the belief that common political values and democratic standards would contribute to European peace. At the Paris Summit, Prime Minister Thatcher argued that the CSCE should become "a great alliance for democracy (...) that would be the best guarantee of all our security. Democracies do not go to war with each other. They have too high a regard for freedom and justice, not only for those in their own country but in each other's countries as well".¹²

¹⁰ Cf. White, cited above (Note 2), pp. 123-141.

¹¹ Mrs. Thatcher on "Shaping a New Global Community", Colorado, 5 August 1990, in: Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review 19/1990, pp. 12-13; and, Prime Minister's speech to the Anglo-German Königswinter conference, cited above (Note 4), p. 29.

¹² Mrs. Thatcher at the CSCE Summit in Paris, 19 November 1990, in: Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review 20/1991, p. 16.

Since the signing of the Charter of Paris, the British government has largely taken the view that the basic norms of European behaviour have been agreed. The challenge now is to ensure full implementation of those norms. In this context, Britain has been a strong supporter of the activities of the ODIHR. While supporting new norms (such as the 1994 Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security), Britain has been cautious about how much they can really contribute to European security, given that they are largely refinements of existing norms and the key issue is the implementation of OSCE norms not their further refinement.

Arms Control: The Centrality of the CFE Treaty

Britain views the OSCE as an important framework for arms control negotiations. Britain supported the negotiation of Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBM) in the 1970s, tabling the original paper on the issue.¹³ When Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced unilateral Warsaw Pact force reductions and began to press for negotiations on conventional force reductions in the late 1980s, however, Britain responded very cautiously. Prime Minister Thatcher feared that the Soviet moves were simply an attempt to undermine NATO's unity, the US commitment to European security and NATO's nuclear strategy of flexible response.¹⁴ The British government argued that "the Warsaw Pact can afford to promise unilateral cuts because it has weapons to spare (...) The West's forces, by contrast, are kept at the lowest level we need for our defence".¹⁵

Once it became clear that the negotiations would result in very substantial cuts in Soviet forces, however, Britain became a strong supporter of a Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. By early 1990, the British government was recognizing that (once implemented) a CFE Treaty would "remove for all practical purposes the threat of a Soviet surprise attack on Western Europe. The Soviet Union (...) would no longer have (and could not without breaching the Treaty recreate) the option (...) of mounting large-scale offensive action against Western Europe along several axes at the same time". As such, it would be a "dramatic contribution" to improving East-West relations.¹⁶

¹³ Cf. White, cited above (Note 2), p. 124.

¹⁴ Cf. Mark Hoffman, *From Conformity to Confrontation: Arms Control*, in: Stuart Croft, *British Security Policy: The Thatcher Years and the End of the Cold War*, London 1991, pp. 82-84.

¹⁵ Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989, Vol. 1, Cm 675-I, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, May 1989, p. 1.

¹⁶ Statement on the Defence Estimates 1990, Vol. 1, Cm 1022-I, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, April 1990, pp. 9-10 and p. 18.

Despite the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union, Britain continues to regard the CFE Treaty as central to European security. From the British perspective, the CFE Treaty constrains Russia's capability to mount large-scale offensive military operations or expand its forces, provides significant military transparency and imposes a degree of military order in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. As a result, the focus of British arms control policy within the OSCE has been to ensure "effective implementation of the CFE Treaty".¹⁷ The British government recognizes that the likely enlargement of NATO will require changes to the CFE Treaty, but argues that the priority is to ensure that the central elements of the Treaty remain intact. By early 1996, no clear British position on exactly how the CFE Treaty should be adapted to reflect NATO enlargement had yet emerged.

While supporting the various additional confidence-building measures agreed since 1990, Britain has been less enthusiastic about the value of further post-CFE conventional arms control agreements. British officials argue that the priority should be to implement existing agreements, particularly the CFE Treaty. Whilst supporting the work of the Forum for Security Cooperation and the possibility of sub-regional arms control tables, British officials are sceptical about how much can be achieved in this area given the limited political support for such agreements in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Britain has also shown little interest in any further conventional force *reduction* agreement. The British government argues that Britain's armed forces have already been significantly reduced in response to the end of the Cold War and further reductions would only undermine Britain's ability to contribute to peacekeeping and other "out-of-area" operations in the future.

Conflict Prevention and Management

The British government argues that "the field of conflict prevention and management is where the OSCE makes its most distinctive contribution to European security". The High Commissioner on National Minorities, the ODIHR and the various OSCE missions to areas of potential and actual conflict are regarded as some of the OSCE's main "successes" to date.¹⁸ The OSCE's combination of relative political neutrality, comprehensiveness and the right of intrusion into the internal affairs of states make it particularly suited to conflict prevention and management efforts which require a broad

¹⁷ Defending Our Future: Statement on the Defence Estimates 1993, Cm 2270, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, July 1993, p. 56.

¹⁸ OSCE: A Security Model for the Twenty-First Century, Intervention by Sir N. Bonsor, Minister of State, FCO, at the OSCE Ministerial meeting on 7 December 1995, p. 4 and p. 2.

approach and involve engagement with the domestic affairs of participating States. The OSCE also has the potential to provide an over-arching framework, legitimizing action by other international organizations, such as the EU and NATO.¹⁹

Since 1990, Britain has actively supported the development of the OSCE's conflict prevention and management role. In the run up to the 1990 Paris Summit, Britain proposed that the OSCE develop conciliation mechanisms to address ethnic conflicts.²⁰ At the July 1992 Helsinki Summit, Prime Minister Major argued that "the CSCE should not be a watching by-stander, a hand-wringing on-looker to Europe's quarrels. The CSCE must develop the means and the will to act before the fighting begins." He also suggested that EU governments might press for action within the CSCE against participating States violating their commitments to respect human and minority rights and democratic standards, that EU governments could link economic aid to respect for CSCE commitments and that there was a need for better monitoring of respect for such commitments.²¹

In terms of future developments in this area, the British government appears to have two priorities. First, enhancing the OSCE's operational capabilities in terms of support for democratization and conflict prevention and management. Second, improving cooperation with other international organizations, particularly the EU and NATO, so that the OSCE can utilize their resources. The OSCE's role in implementing the Dayton Peace Agreement in the former Yugoslavia - where it is providing a forum for arms control discussions, will supervise elections and promote human rights, in cooperation with the EU and NATO - is seen as a potential model for the Organization's future development. British officials, however, acknowledge that the OSCE's greatest need in this area is for more resources (particularly well qualified personnel) to support its work. Existing demands on resources are likely to limit future British support for the OSCE. Officials suggest that the EU may be best placed to provide further financial, material and personnel support for OSCE conflict prevention and management activities.

The British government also argues that the OSCE has a potentially important role to play in peacekeeping. The OSCE might play a role in mandating peacekeeping operations undertaken by NATO or the WEU.²² The OSCE may also be a forum for developing guidelines for peacekeeping operations

¹⁹ Cf. Alyson J.K. Bailes, *European Defence and Security: The Role of NATO, WEU and EU*, in: *Security Dialogue* 1/1996, p. 62.

²⁰ Mr. Hurd at the Open Skies Conference, Ottawa, 12 February 1990, in: *Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review* 17/1990, pp. 6-7.

²¹ Speech given by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, at the CSCE, cited above (Note 9), pp. 14-16.

²² Cf. Bailes, cited above (Note 19), p. 57; and, *Defending Our Future*, cited above (Note 17) p. 10, para 115.

by other organizations and states, particularly Russian actions in the former Soviet Union.²³ Further, although the OSCE "lacks the resources to deploy large-scale peacekeeping forces itself, it can enhance transparency and monitor peace processes (... and) should elaborate provisions under which the OSCE could consider on a case-by-case basis co-operative arrangements to monitor military operations by third parties in areas of regional conflict".²⁴ Britain is, however, reluctant to support larger-scale OSCE peacekeeping operations, arguing that NATO and WEU are militarily better suited to undertake such operations. To the extent that the OSCE may engage in peacekeeping in the future, the British government appears to believe that these should be limited to more traditional (and by implication relatively small) "blue helmet" type operations: "Operations will be impartial, and will be conducted with the consent of the parties directly concerned, under an effective and durable ceasefire, and in support of a political and diplomatic process to establish a lasting settlement of the dispute. They will not however entail enforcement action".²⁵

The Security Model

While opposing Russian suggestions that the Security Model could assert OSCE authority over NATO or give Russia a veto over NATO enlargement (fearing that any steps in this direction would undermine NATO's independence and ability to act), Britain has become a relatively active supporter of the concept. The British government sees the Security Model as a potentially useful way of defining the OSCE's specific contribution to European security, developing its role in conflict prevention and management, strengthening implementation of OSCE commitments, improving the OSCE's cooperation with other international organizations and helping to address Russian concerns over NATO enlargement. The aim of the Security Model should "not be to create a *hierarchy* of institutions, but to develop efficient *cooperation* between them". This should be achieved by increased openness and transparency, exploration of the ways in which organizations may cooperate and enhanced contacts between them.²⁶

Britain has proposed a politically binding "Platform for Cooperative Security" as part of the Security Model. This would involve: commitments by each

²³ Cf. Text of a Speech by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Douglas Hurd, to Annual Diplomatic Banquet, Durbar Court, Whitehall, London, 15 June 1994, in: Arms Control and Disarmament Quarterly Review 34/1994, p. 46.

²⁴ Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994, cited above (Note 3), p. 17.

²⁵ Defending Our Future, cited above (Note 17), p. 17.

²⁶ OSCE: A Security Model for the Twenty-First Century, Intervention by Sir N. Bonsor, cited above (Note 18), pp. 1-2 and pp. 5-6.

State not only to respect but to enhance the security of other States; provisions confirming responsibility of all security organizations as well as States to respect OSCE principles; commitments by members of organizations to transparency in any changes in those organizations affecting European security; and a commitment in principle by those organizations to offer support for peacekeeping, humanitarian relief and conflict prevention/management missions within the OSCE area.²⁷ These proposals are designed, in part, to try to reassure Russia that NATO/WEU/EU enlargement will not undermine Russian security, that the enlargement processes will be transparent and open, and that NATO will not use its strength to threaten Russia.

The British government also argues that the Security Model can play a useful role in clarifying "the proper role of peacekeeping operations". In this context, all States should reaffirm that when undertaking peacekeeping in the OSCE area they will respect all relevant provisions of the UN Charter and OSCE provisions, that they will act in pursuit of a clear mandate directed at conflict resolution and the early withdrawal of peacekeeping forces and that they will support parallel efforts for political solutions.²⁸ These proposals appear to have two aims. First, to reduce the risk that future peacekeeping operations will result in prolonged and open-ended commitments of forces which only police cease-fires rather than facilitating the resolution of conflicts. Second, to establish principles for peacekeeping which may help to shape Russian peacekeeping activities in the former Soviet Union.

The British government, therefore, sees the Security Model as a useful way of defining the OSCE's role in European security, strengthening cooperation with other international organizations, defining principles for peacekeeping in the OSCE area and helping to address Russian concerns over NATO enlargement. From this perspective, the Security Model should be a flexible, politically binding agreement, progress on which might be reviewed annually. At the same time, Britain is clearly cautious about how much the Security Model can really achieve and wary of any proposals which might give the OSCE a veto over NATO decision-making or attempt to turn the OSCE into a collective security organization.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, Britain has supported the development of a multi-institutional European security framework in which NATO remains central, but other institutions, including the OSCE, have significant roles. In the immediate post-Cold War period, the British government was somewhat

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

wary of strengthening the OSCE, fearing that this might undermine NATO. As it has become clear that there is little prospect that the OSCE will replace NATO and as the OSCE's particular strengths have become more apparent, Britain has become more supportive of the OSCE. The British government sees the OSCE as the primary body for setting pan-European norms and standards, as the main framework for conventional arms control agreements, as a central focus for conflict prevention and management activities and as a way of helping to address the security concerns of those countries (particularly Russia) not likely to be included in an enlarged NATO. Britain has, however, opposed proposals to turn the OSCE into a collective security organization involving formal security guarantees, a Security Council or OSCE armed forces. British officials argue that such ideas are unrealistic, would threaten the OSCE's character as an inclusive, cooperative security organization and could undermine NATO.

Within the United Kingdom, there is little political debate over European security or the OSCE. Since the deep divisions over nuclear weapons in the 1980s, a relative consensus on security policy has re-emerged. Despite differences over the future of the EU, the current Conservative government and the opposition Labour and Liberal Democrat parties all support a continuing role for NATO, the development of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and the gradual strengthening of the OSCE. Although some researchers and peace movement activists argue for a more central role for the OSCE and see it as an alternative to NATO, such ideas have had relatively little impact on mainstream thinking. British policy towards European security in general and the OSCE in particular, therefore, appears unlikely to change fundamentally in the near future.

British foreign and security policy is sometimes criticised for lacking long term strategic vision. To some extent, this criticism holds true for British policy towards European security and the OSCE. The British government has been implicitly criticised by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee for taking a "minimalist view" of the OSCE.²⁹ The arguments against attempting to turn the OSCE into a collective security organization or seeing it as an alternative to NATO, however, are powerful. The reluctance of the major powers to intervene militarily in the Yugoslav conflict certainly suggests that hopes for the provision of mutual security guarantees to all OSCE States or widespread use of OSCE peacekeeping or enforcement forces are unrealistic. There is similarly little reason to believe that an OSCE Security Council would be any more effective than the UN Security Council, while moving in such a direction could risk undermining the comprehensive

²⁹ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Central and Eastern Europe: Problems of the Post-Communist Era*, Volume I, First Report, Session 1991-92, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1992, p. xxviii.

and cooperative character of the OSCE. The challenge for Britain and the other participating States of the OSCE lies in strengthening and supporting the implementation of OSCE norms and standards, adapting and developing arms control frameworks appropriate to the new European security situation and developing the Organization's capability to play a proactive role in conflict prevention and management.