



# Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing No. 21: The Eurocorps: A Fresh Start in Europe

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## Executive Summary

The demise of the Soviet Union creates the opportunity for new U.S. thinking to break through the permafrost that has overlain European security structures since the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. Some imaginative ideas have emerged, notably the North Atlantic Co-operation Council, formed in December 1990 to promote cooperation between the former NATO and Warsaw Pact adversaries, and overtures to Russia about sharing early warning technology for anti-ballistic missile systems.

But Bush administration officials balked at the vital fence--NATO itself--and the incoming Clinton administration is unlikely to adopt a different approach. The fact that the threat envisaged in articles 5 and 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty, a massive attack on the territory of a NATO member, is now universally acknowledged to be dead (even NATO's most committed supporters such as the United Kingdom share that view),[1] presents a unique opportunity to rethink radically the whole question of American forward deployment in Europe. The unthinkable becomes thinkable: if NATO did not already exist, would we invent it?

Instead of confronting that fundamental issue, the United States prefers to tinker. Rather than open the discussion to all ideas, policymakers have become bogged down in minutiae: Does a hypothetical floor of 150,000 U.S. troops, proposed by the Bush administration, or of 100,000, adumbrated by President-elect Clinton, constitute an adequate deterrent?[2] (Against whom?) Does the North Atlantic Treaty allow NATO deployment outside the treaty area? (Perhaps.) Can NATO accept peace-keeping commissions from regional bodies such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe? (Yes, if certain conditions are met.) Can NATO take on humanitarian or civil projects? All those notions smack of self-serving job preservation rather than a serious attempt to provide a credible rationale for the presence in the contemporary European security landscape of massively armored U.S. tank and infantry divisions.

By taking such a timorous approach, the United States may lose an exceptional opportunity to transcend NATO and simultaneously reinvigorate U.S. long-term interests in Europe along lines likely to command bipartisan support. Early signs are that the administration of Clinton, whose statements to date emphasize an orthodox continuity in foreign policy,[3] will also fail to think boldly. Although there is a general consensus that the new administration will accelerate the rate of drawdown of American troops from Europe,[4] there is no indication that it will give any truly creative thought to the future of NATO.

Opportunity for more significant change lies in the innovative French and German ideas for a "Eurocorps," a fledgling European force that, when fully developed, would allow the Europeans to assume responsibility for their own defense. The Europeans are looking forward to discussing their ideas with the incoming administration. In his remarks after Clinton's victory, Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel of Germany said he hoped that the change of administration would give new impetus to the Eurocorps concept.[5]

## **The Eurocorps Concept**

On May 22, 1992, President François Mitterrand of France and Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany, drawing on the agreements reached at the NATO and European Community summits, respectively, in late 1991 to develop a "European pillar" to NATO and to construct a European defense identity, announced the formation of a "Eurocorps."

The Eurocorps, which will initially consist of between 35,000 and 40,000 troops, will be ready for action by 1995. It will undertake three missions:

- \* action within the joint defense framework of the allies in accordance with article 5 of the NATO treaty or in accordance with the Western European Union (WEU) treaty;
- \* action aimed at preserving peace; and
- \* action aimed at providing humanitarian assistance.

The Eurocorps walks a delicate line between the position agreed to at the NATO summit ("We welcome the perspective of a reinforcement of the role of the WEU, both as the defense component of the process of European unification and as a means of strengthening the European pillar of the Alliance") and the EC decision ("the eventual framing of a common defense policy which might in time lead to a common defense").[6] Stripped of their bureaucratic code, those formulations represent a tension between those, such as the British, who wish the WEU, an organization completely autonomous from the structures of the European Community, to be responsible for the European pillar and those, first and foremost the French, who wish to move responsibility for European defense closer to the European Community's political organs.

In an attempt to bridge that gap, the Eurocorps is to be open to all members of the WEU. However, the Eurocorps will not draw on the WEU as an institution for headquarters or other planning or staff functions. Those will be located separately in France. As other countries join the European Community, they will be encouraged to join both the WEU and the Eurocorps.

Defense Minister Volker Ruehe of Germany has made it clear that the underlying premise of the Eurocorps is to establish a European force that is capable of carrying out military missions in situations in which NATO would be "neither willing nor able to intervene." [7] European commentators were quick to draw attention to the fact that the Eurocorps implied that "the future EC is not only a common market but also a political union and a security alliance." [8] With the positive French vote on the Maastricht treaty on September 20, planning for the Eurocorps can now proceed unhindered as part of what Kohl and Mitterrand describe as "the process of building European unity which will include eventually a policy of common defense." [9]

## **Washington's Myopic Hostility**

A detached observer who had witnessed the bitter burden-sharing rows between the United States and its NATO allies in the 1980s might have expected the Bush administration to hail those proposals as being in harmony with Chancellor Kohl's declaration: "The Americans often tell us we must do more for our own security. This corps should be a reason to celebrate." [10] There were several grounds for endorsing that view.

First, the proposed Eurocorps was evidence that, after a series of false starts beginning with the failure of the European Defense Community in 1954, the Europeans were finally prepared to shoulder their own defense responsibilities. The Eurocorps was the logical consequence of President Bush's confirmation at the 1991 NATO summit that the number of U.S. troops in Europe would continue on a downward trajectory in the search for major savings from NATO. [11] That thought was clearly uppermost in President Mitterrand's mind when he commented, "We don't want to see American troops leave, but who knows what decisions will be made because of the economic difficulties facing the American leadership?" [12] He might have been anticipating the Democratic party's platform adopted in New York.

Second, the Eurocorps represented a chance to encourage the formation of an alternative European security

architecture that would reduce U.S. commitments in Europe and reflect today's rather than yesterday's needs.[13]

Third, the Eurocorps opened the prospect of huge cost savings overseas to balance requests to Congress to accept unwelcome base closings at home. The precise amounts are subject to debate. The Pentagon acknowledges only \$7 billion as the direct extra cost of maintaining U.S. troops in Europe, but a more realistic figure for the potential savings may be well over \$100 billion, based on the fact that nearly 50 percent of the American defense budget is predicated on European defense.[14]

Fourth, the Eurocorps afforded an opportunity to shift the focus of Washington's European policy away from the security field, in which the need for collective action had evaporated, to economic issues over which storm clouds were gathering in alarming formations.

Instead, the administration reacted with icy scorn, saying that the Eurocorps "undercut the whole American *raison d'être* in Europe." [15] The U.S. government's lobbying machine went into overdrive. National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft despatched a "strongly worded" letter to the Germans demanding that they use their influence with the French to abort the agreement.[16] Unfortunately, the fact that Secretary of State James A. Baker III was barely on speaking terms with his French counterpart, Roland Dumas, ruled out constructive dialogue with the French.[17] A U.S. official was quoted as dismissing the French ideas with the words, "The French have a second-rate nuclear deterrent, a third-rate real time intelligence capability and a third-rate conventional army." [18]

Administration objections included the following:

First, the proposals emanated from the French with whom Washington had been feuding over NATO since its foundation. French authorship damned the Eurocorps proposal as deliberately anti-American in the view of American officials. That attitude was reinforced because the British and the Dutch, both of whom had substantial stakes in an unchanged NATO structure as a result of their involvement in the Rapid Reaction Corps and the Amphibious Force, encouraged the United States to see the ideas as a dagger pointed at the heart of the alliance. London and The Hague also lost no opportunity to dissuade potential adherents from deciding to join the Eurocorps.[19]

Second, it was clear that, at least in the short term, the Eurocorps had little military credibility. The Persian Gulf War had exposed and the Yugoslav crisis continues to expose painful inadequacies in European capabilities to meet strategic military challenges. Even in the face of a threat of instability in a theater as close as Yugoslavia, the Europeans are too deficient in such crucial areas as heavy- lift (air-lift and sea-lift) capacity and satellite imagery, to say nothing of political cohesiveness, to be able to make a militarily significant response independent of the United States. Pentagon planners, viewing the Eurocorps plan in context, could be forgiven for asking, "Can you be serious?"

Third, the proposals were full of loose ends involving the Eurocorps' relationship with NATO, the WEU, and the European Community. For example, there was initial confusion about whether, in view of France's absence from NATO's integrated military structure, its troops assigned to the Euro-corps would become available for other missions under the NATO or WEU umbrella and, if so, what the command structure would be. Despite the statement of French defense minister Pierre Joxe on September 29, 1992, that in the event of a European crisis the corps would come "under the authority of a NATO command," [20] practical details await the results of discussions between NATO commanders and the French and German chiefs of staff.[21] There were also uncertainties about the Eurocorps' geographic reach. (Germany's constitutional restrictions, for example, can be interpreted to inhibit the ability of German forces to operate outside Western Europe. A meeting in Bonn on June 19, 1992, failed to settle that uncertainty.) French and German statements were sometimes contradictory. For example, French officials dismissed the German claim that the Eurocorps would draw France closer to NATO.[22]

But the key, albeit unarticulated, reason for the Bush administration's distaste for the Eurocorps was that Washington identifies NATO as the key to its half century of undisputed leadership in Europe. Former NATO supreme commander Gen. John R. Galvin described his post as "America's seat at the table in Europe," [23] and former secretary of defense James Schlesinger recently expressed a similar view. "NATO provides the only place for a continued American seat at the European table; it provides the only vehicle through which American leadership can be institutionally expressed". [24] German officials acknowledge the depth of U.S. concern. An aide to Kinkel noted, "America is worried about being left out." [25] With its links to the European Community troubled and underdeveloped, the United

States fears that the radical change to NATO implicit in the Eurocorps threatens to marginalize Washington's influence in Europe. It is precisely on that point that the U.S. attitude most needs surgery.

### **Toward a More Constructive U.S. Policy**

In seeking the most appropriate U.S. response to the Eurocorps, let us concede that its critics are justified in thinking that the concept still needs much clarification. Indeed, that point is acknowledged by the Eurocorps' French and German progenitors. Klaus Kinkel has said that "the relationship the Eurocorps will have to NATO and to the WEU or what the inter-relationship of these three elements will be is something that has still not been clarified." [26] In other words, the Eurocorps is still at the gestation stage. With careful diplomacy there is much that the United States can do to influence its final shape. In addition, let us accept that the Eurocorps foreshadows major long-run changes in the Atlantic alliance and a substantial reduction in Washington's political and military influence in Europe.

Even so, U.S. hostility is misplaced for four important reasons. First, the Eurocorps idea will be of lasting political significance. The history of postwar European politics is built on Franco-German cooperation, most notably the European Community itself. Eventually, the other European nations will accept the Eurocorps. The key countries engaged in that process are Spain, Belgium, and Italy. Even the British, while vociferously asserting that they will not join the Eurocorps, have been forced to moderate their outright opposition and are now seeking to wrap the Eurocorps in a "NATO-friendly" WEU embrace. Time will tell whether that ploy will be successful or whether the British will continue the tradition of, to paraphrase Abba Eban's description of the Palestine Liberation Organization, never missing an opportunity to miss an opportunity in Europe. Washington earned significant benefit in Europe from its constructive approach to German reunification. A similarly welcoming approach to Eurocorps by the incoming Clinton administration would redouble that benefit and thus advance rather than marginalize U.S. interests. By working with the grain of European politics, Washington would have a far greater chance of exerting constructive influence over the evolution of a new European-directed security arrangement than it would were it to cling to an attitude of blanket hostility.

Second, the Eurocorps presents the United States with a unique opportunity to pass the responsibility for European security to the people whom it most concerns, who can most afford it, and who are already manifesting a commendable readiness to accept it--the Europeans themselves. By announcing its intention to withdraw its NATO personnel from Europe by 1994, Canada has already accepted the logic of the situation without any reduction in its influence in Europe or in its ability to become involved in European peace-keeping, if it so chooses.

Given the immensely improved European security landscape (warning time of a land-based attack on Western Europe is now measured in years rather than days), there would be no security risk to the United States in following a similar course. Washington would retain its ability to intervene in Europe if it deemed that its interests were at stake. It is therefore invalid to argue that a loosening or even the termination of the NATO alliance--much less supporting the Eurocorps initiative--is per se connected with neoisolationist or "Fortress America" thinking.

In any case, NATO is not likely to be very relevant to the kinds of security problems post-Cold War Europe will face. Yugoslavia provides instructive proof of that. Despite agreement in principle at the June 1992 NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Oslo that the alliance should become involved in peace-keeping operations on behalf of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the establishment of a planning cell at NATO headquarters for that purpose, NATO as a collective institution has played a peripheral role in the Yugoslav crisis. Its role has been confined to naval and air monitoring of the trade embargo and provision of headquarters' staff to the United Nations' presence in Yugoslavia. NATO secretary general Manfred Woerner has stated that "we are not ready to handle this kind of post-Cold War crisis in a satisfactory way." [27] The Eurocorps would provide a useful alternative mechanism for the European nations to use in dealing with potential security threats in their region.

Third, European security issues are about to become a subset of EC politics. As the European Community expands, new members will seek to join NATO or the WEU, or both, for reasons independent of NATO but connected with the European Community, an economic structure from which the United States is barred. Increasingly, the Europeans will caucus in the WEU and thereby bring precooked, take-it-or-leave-it European positions to NATO meetings. [28] As the vehicle for U.S. interests, NATO will become less and less appropriate (in the military sphere it already has--ask any

commander in Germany trying to arrange tank maneuvers or low-flying exercises). Long-term U.S. interests will be better served by allowing the Eurocorps to assume responsibility for collective European security.

Most important, by welcoming the Eurocorps, the United States would be signaling that, rather than cling to the past, it intends to embark on the far more pressing mission of focusing its relationship with Europe on today's economic challenges. That is where the future U.S. *raison d'être* in Europe lies. It is also the area in which institutional ties and the habit of consultation are least developed. In welcoming the North American Free Trade Area Agreement (NAFTA) on August 13, 1992, President Bush said: "The cold war is over. The principal challenge now facing the U.S. is to compete in a rapidly changing global market place." [29] He was quite right. The same sentiments apply to NATO. With the Eurocorps, the Europeans are demonstrating that they are ready to begin shouldering their own defense burden. By encouraging them wholeheartedly, the United States can move its institutional relationship with Europe away from security issues to economic matters on which it is absolutely critical that the United States try to create relationships of institutional intimacy. The current impasse on European-U.S. trade provides abundant proof that improvement in that area is urgently needed. If the European Community and the NAFTA countries were to develop into antagonistic trading blocs, the consequences for global prosperity would be catastrophic. Conservative estimates of a failure to conclude the present Uruguay round of talks on the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade are that, between them, the United States and the European Community would lose \$65 billion annually. [30]

For all the above reasons, the Eurocorps is a development that coincides rather than conflicts with long-term U.S. interests. It is not perfect, but it points in the right direction. There is no need for Washington to look this gift horse in the mouth.

## Notes

[1] "We no longer face a clear and quantifiable threat from a single dominant adversary." British Defense Estimates, London, 1992, paragraph 103.

[2] In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April 1992, the outgoing NATO supreme commander, Gen. John R. Galvin, maintained that a corps-level presence of 150,000 is necessary to maintain a credible deterrent. William Drozdiak, "NATO Chief Stands Down," Washington Post, May 2, 1992, p. A22. However, in the presidential campaign debate of October 11, 1992, Governor Clinton spoke in terms of a level of 100,000 or fewer. The full transcript of the debate appeared in the Washington Post, October 12, 1992, p. A16.

[3] See the transcript of President-elect Clinton's statement in the New York Times, November 7, 1992, p. B1.

[4] Jim Hoagland, "Range of Issues Expected to Pose Early Challenges," Washington Post, November 8, 1992, p. A1.

[5] Kinkel's remarks appear in "Bonn dankt Bush fuer die Hilfe bei der Vollendung der deutschen Einheit," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, November 5, 1992, p. 2.

[6] See David White, "Europe's New Muddle Army," Financial Times, May 21, 1992, p. 20.

[7] "Eurocorps Will Strengthen European Pillar of NATO," Press release of (German) Federal Press Office, July 22, 1992, p. 15.

[8] Christoph Bertram, "Dann waren nur noch elf," Die Zeit, June 5, 1992, p. 1.

[9] Quentin Peel, "Germans Back Call for EC Growth Plan," Financial Times, December 6, 1992, p. 2.

[10] William Drozdiak, "France, Germany Unveil Corps: A Step towards European Defense," Washington Post, May 23, 1992, p. A15.

[11] William Drozdiak, "President Challenges Europeans to Define US, NATO Role," Washington Post, November 8, 1991, p. A1.

[12] Drozdiak, "France, Germany Unveil Corps."

[13] Such a move on the part of the new administration would accord with the requirements for a post-NATO structure set out by Rep. James A. Leach (R-Iowa) in "A Republican Looks at Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 17-31.

[14] See William Kaufmann and John Steinbruner, *Decisions for Defense: Prospects for a New Order* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1991), p. 14.

[15] David Lawday, "Making the Pieces Fit," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 1, 1992, p. 38.

[16] Frederick Kempe, "US, Bonn Clash over Pact with France," *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 1992, p. A9.

[17] Rone Tempest, "Franco-American Rivalry Brings a Chill in Relations," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1992, p. A5.

[18] Kempe.

[19] British defence minister Malcolm Rifkind made a hurried visit to Belgium on May 19 when it seemed that the Belgians might agree to join the Eurocorps.

[20] "Joxe in Box," *The Economist*, October 3, 1992, p. 56.

[21] Alan Riding, "Paris and Bonn Seek to End Unease on New Joint Force," *New York Times*, December 1, 1992, p. A8.

[22] Riding.

[23] White.

[24] James A. Schlesinger, "An American Assessment: Hands across the Sea Less Firmly Clapsed" in *In Search of a New World Order: The Future of U.S.-European Relations*, ed. Henry Brandon (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1992), p. 147.

[25] Quoted in Marc Fisher, "Germans Caught in U.S.-French Rift," *Washington Post*, June 27, 1992, p. A15.

[26] Quoted in "Eurocorps Will Strengthen European Pillar of NATO," Press release of (German) Federal Press Office, July 22, 1992, p.15.

[27] William Drozdiak, "NATO Agrees to Impose Blockade of Serbia," *Washington Post*, November 19, 1992, p. A31.

[28] See paragraph 116 of *British Defense Estimates, 1992*: "The WEU will become the principal European forum for consultation and co-operation on defense issues for all European members of NATO."

[29] Keith Bradshaw, "Economic Accord Reached," *New York Times*, August 13, 1992, p. A1.

[30] "Freer Trade, with Luck," *The Economist*, October 17, 1992, p. 14.