

European Union Defense Policy An American Perspective

by Leslie S. Lebl

Executive Summary

For almost 50 years, proposals by the European Union to develop a common foreign and security policy for all member states failed. Since the late 1990s, however, the situation has changed. Despite, or perhaps because of, member states' disagreements over Iraq, the EU probably will continue to develop common foreign and security policies, and the European Commission may begin to play a role in developing new European military capabilities.

In the military sphere, the EU may well improve its own operational and long-term defense planning and perhaps develop new joint capabilities. On the one hand, that will provide further impetus for EU military missions independent of NATO. On the other hand, the emergence of a common EU foreign and security policy will likely lead to an informal "EU caucus" in NATO, a dynamic that may grow with the dual enlargements of both NATO and the EU. Within 5 to 10 years, the question may be whether the EU will undertake a role as guarantor of European defense and how that will mesh, if at all, with NATO's role.

If the United States is facing a fundamental shift in how the Europeans approach security and defense issues, how should U.S. policymakers react? In the larger picture, are they likely to per-

ceive the EU as a partner, a troublesome obstacle, a potential "counterweight," or an opponent? And what about our transatlantic security arrangements? For example, what impact would the proposed EU policies and capabilities have on NATO? What will be the impact of the enlarged membership of NATO and the EU on NATO's response to those changes? How might EU capabilities affect the U.S. role in Europe, or our security interests elsewhere in the world?

NATO will have to change as the EU develops its common foreign and security policy; it will have to adjust to a growing EU military capability for conducting operations outside Europe. And, in 5 to 10 years, the EU may decide that it wants to assume responsibility for the defense of Europe. In that case, the United States should negotiate a new security relationship with Europe. Under the new treaty arrangements, the United States would be responsible for the territorial defense of the United States, and Europe for the territorial defense of Europe. Both could cooperate on out-of-area operations of common vital interest, using current NATO political structures and the NATO integrated command as a foundation for future cooperation.

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European Political Integration

The European Union is in a constant state of flux. Although this transitory condition makes it hard to measure the degree of European integration accurately, there has been definite progress toward that goal. It's a bit like watching a flock of birds, swirling in apparently aimless movement. An hour later, they're still swirling—half a mile down the road. Several years ago the European Union was little more than a free-trade area. Now it has dismantled many of the internal barriers to trade and investment; adopted a single currency for most of its member states; agreed to common policies governing external trade, environmental protection, agriculture, and antitrust; and is developing common border security policies and unprecedented police and judicial cooperation. With so much concerted activity, pressure has grown to complete the package by adding a common foreign and security policy, as well as a military force.

Last spring's very public disarray within the EU over Iraq, while usually cited as visible proof that the EU lacks a common foreign policy, may in fact draw the Europeans closer together. If so, it will be only one in a series of embarrassments that catapulted the Europeans toward greater cohesion.

In the 1990s, Balkan policy was the source of tremendous disarray and humiliation, with the Dayton Peace Accords and the NATO mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina signaling the key role of the United States, not Europe, in stopping that conflict. Since then, the EU has devised a common approach to regional issues including eventual EU membership for the Balkan countries—a remarkable change in policy toward a region most Europeans viewed as a remote, primitive backwater that was best ignored.

The impact of the later Kosovo air campaign was also a strong stimulus for change. It revealed, in humiliating fashion, the yawning gap in military capabilities between the United States and its European allies. The Europeans disagreed with the American

approach yet were unable to alter it. They felt they had been involved in a campaign that they could not control and did not want to find themselves in that situation again.¹

Solutions to the problem of relative military weakness could be found because French, British, and German defense policies converged gradually after the end of the Cold War. The French sought a closer relationship with NATO, making it easier for other nations to cooperate with France; the Germans finally began to develop a foreign and defense policy after reunification; and the British for the first time agreed to participate in the development of EU military capabilities at the French-UK summit in St. Malo in late 1998.² The so-called big three (France, Germany, and the UK) and other EU member state governments have also come slowly to a common understanding of the need to reexamine the threats they face and to reorganize their armed forces in the post-Cold War environment, even if they have yet to implement many of the changes.³

Key elements of this common understanding have been affirmed at senior political levels in the EU, with the stated intent of strengthening and developing EU institutions. The two trilateral summits held in September and November 2003 by the big three in the wake of the split over Iraq only reaffirm the importance they ascribe to working together on defense and foreign policy.

This trend has been accompanied by the growth of new institutional structures, in what could be called the "Brusselization" of EU foreign policy. In October 1999 former NATO secretary general Javier Solana was the first person appointed as EU high representative for the common foreign and security policy.⁴ In addition, a new body, the Political and Security Committee, was set up in Brussels, staffed by ambassadors from EU member states who were charged with developing common policies.

Solana's activities and effectiveness have varied, depending on the issues of the day and on the latitude afforded him by the member state holding the six-month rotat-

ing presidency of the council, but overall he has done a remarkable job of establishing the EU as a player in international politics. For its part, the PSC has created conditions for greater cooperation among EU member states. While key decisions continue to be made in EU capitals, common policies in many other areas are increasingly forged by consensus in Brussels.

European Security and Defense Policy

As an integral part of the development of a common foreign and security policy, the EU committed itself to engage in crisis prevention and management beyond its borders. That initiative was captured under the title ESDP, or European Security and Defense Policy, even though for much of the policy's existence it has been difficult to define what "European" means. There has been no overarching security policy, as it was considered too difficult to reach agreement on one among EU member states; nor was ESDP designed to "defend" Europe. That task was explicitly left to NATO; ESDP aimed instead at developing capabilities for handling crises outside Europe.

After the St. Malo summit in December 1998, this process moved ahead quickly, with an initial commitment of 60,000 troops from the 15 EU member states, deployable within 60 days and able to sustain operations for at least one year, to handle a range of crisis management tasks from humanitarian interventions to peacemaking (war fighting, while not specifically prohibited, was not included). In addition, the EU pledged to establish a similar institutional capability in the form of 5,000 policemen. The EU has subsequently moved toward the goal of developing rapidly deployable battle groups of 1,500 men by 2007.⁵ As with NATO, these were national capabilities that could be assigned to the EU as required, not a standing force of the EU central authorities.

Establishing new structures, such as a military committee and a military staff, along

with a 24-hour situation center and a staff coordinating the civilian functions, was relatively easy. The next step, which proved more difficult, was to work out the terms of a framework agreement with NATO—a step that is necessary inasmuch as the EU would to a great degree call on the same pool of soldiers as would NATO. The EU also hoped to gain access to NATO and U.S. assets that it lacked, such as heavy transport, intelligence, reconnaissance, logistics, or strike capabilities.⁶ Those arrangements were finally in place by March 2003.

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A European Security Strategy

The durability and effectiveness of the EU's resolve was tested last spring by the open dissension over Iraq. After the relative euphoria of reaching agreement with NATO on framework arrangements, and the important practical step of deploying an EU force to Macedonia, the open split over Iraq was particularly painful and humiliating. For several months both insiders and outside observers speculated that the EU's common foreign and security policy was dead.⁸

Above all, it was clear that the Europeans would never be able to act jointly if they disagreed on the threats they faced. To solve that problem, Solana was asked to prepare a paper on a common EU security strategy. The EU had previously avoided that task assiduously, fearing it would be too difficult to bridge the differences between member

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states. In the wake of the Iraq crisis, though, it suddenly became essential. As Solana subsequently put it: “The Security Strategy was born when Europeans acknowledged that we are stronger when we have a common perception of the threats we face and how to deal with them. Threats are never more dangerous than when we are divided.”⁹

Solana’s paper, now titled the European Security Strategy, received a very warm reception and, after some modifications, was adopted by the European Council (heads of state and government) in Brussels in December 2003.¹⁰ EU documents are well-known for their bureaucratic density and lack of public appeal, but this text is clear and direct and provides for the first time a “vision” of EU strategic policy. It identifies terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failed states (e.g., Afghanistan, Sudan, or Somalia), and organized crime as the key security threats facing all the member states.

As principal security objectives, the ESS cites building security around Europe and a stronger international order based on “effective multilateralism.” Among the policy implications for Europe, the ESS lists the need to become more active, more capable, and more coherent. And it views its common foreign and security policy, along with its crisis management capabilities (both civilian and military), as the means by which it will become strong enough to perform this new role.

The key security threats and principal security objectives defined in the ESS show the similarities between EU and U.S. policy priorities; in fact, the apparent convergence marks a significant evolution from the situation just a few years ago, when Europe appeared most concerned about environmental issues such as food safety while the United States was preoccupied by terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and the nexus between the two. The new EU strategy calls for a pro-active Europe; for example, with regard to multilateralism, it states, “We want international organizations, regimes and treaties to be effective in con-

fronting threats to international peace and security, and must therefore be ready to act when their rules are broken.”¹¹ It also specifically calls for cooperation with the United States: “Acting together, the European Union and the United States can be a formidable force for good in the world. Our aim should be an effective and balanced partnership with the USA. This is an additional reason for the EU to build up further its capabilities and increase its coherence.”¹² Thus, while NATO is still seen as important, the EU is signaling its strong preference for a new security relationship with the United States.

The United States should find much to welcome in the European Security Strategy. While the European perspective has differed historically from that of the United States with regard to problems outside Europe, the yawning gap reported by some observers may be closing, at least somewhat.¹³ Not only does the paper share a similar analysis of emerging threats; it also commits the EU to play an active role in ensuring European security and global stability. The ESS may have been born of a European desire for a separate, autonomous foreign policy, one that by definition is not American. Although the initiative may have been driven by a desire for greater independence and autonomy, the final result has made the EU a more suitable strategic partner of the United States than it was before.

The “Chocolate Summit” and Beyond

In March 2003 the EU, to great fanfare, launched its first-ever military mission as, operating within the framework of the just-concluded NATO-EU agreements, it replaced a NATO force in Macedonia. Several weeks later, Belgium invited other EU member states to a summit to discuss several defense proposals. Those included the establishment of a separate EU operational headquarters in the Brussels suburb of Tervuren. That proposal competed with the plan, embedded in

the NATO-EU agreements, for SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, NATO's military headquarters in Mons, Belgium) to perform that function. Because the meeting was conducted at a time of high tension and disagreement over Iraq, critics in the United States dismissed it as the "Chocolate Summit" (so named because it took place in Brussels) and portrayed it as a provocative statement of anti-American sentiment; in the end, only France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Belgium participated in the April 29 summit, where they endorsed the Tervuren proposal.¹⁴

The idea of a separate EU operational headquarters remained in the air through the remainder of 2003. The Tervuren proposal was modified after subsequent three-way summits between the UK, France, and Germany last fall. The venue of Tervuren was abandoned, and the EU and NATO agreed to set up an EU planning cell at SHAPE. NATO will provide liaison officers to the EU Military Staff, which will set up a civil/military unit to help with early warning, the evaluation of crisis situations, and strategic planning.¹⁵ U.S. officials were not easily reassured, but in the end they accepted the compromise.¹⁶

How will this issue of EU-NATO cooperation play out? How independent will EU military forces be? And what impact will such independence, if it evolves, have on NATO? There is no doubt that some people, particularly in France, are keen to develop Europe as a counterweight to the United States. But what is striking is the relative weakness of the three major players. Following the Iraq controversy British prime minister Tony Blair's position, domestically and in the EU, is quite weak, and it will take a great deal of work to restore his European credentials. French president Jacques Chirac's landslide election in May 2003 was largely due to the victory, in the first round, of a far-right party opposing greater European integration. The regional elections in March 2004 reveal the underlying weakness of Chirac's governing mandate. German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's party, the SPD, is at its lowest rating since

World War II, and Schroeder does not have a sturdy, articulated foreign policy on which to rely (on the contrary, he has a void to fill). Following the French lead to fill this void is as likely to lead him into trouble as it is to advance Germany's interests; French policy has failed to adjust either to the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, which nullified the political advantages France formerly enjoyed as an "independent nuclear power" behind the NATO shield, or to the loss of its great power status.¹⁷

This domestic political weakness and instability make it more likely that the three countries will seek to work together, rather than to operate separately. But this same weakness also makes it more difficult to predict what political positions they may take in the future (except that the French are sure to find ways to infuriate Americans). It does, however, make it unlikely that the EU will emerge as a military power capable of "counterbalancing" the United States in the foreseeable future.

The Constitutional Treaty

The European Convention, created in late 2000 as a body tasked to revamp EU institutions and procedures in advance of EU expansion to 25 member states, also completed its work in the shadow of the Iraq crisis. The net effect of that coincident timing was to reinforce certain foreign policy and defense proposals and to embed them in a draft Constitutional Treaty.¹⁸ The treaty was not approved by the December 2003 European Council, so its fate at the moment is uncertain. However, it is worth reviewing some of its provisions, as they may well be approved in the future.

The treaty proposes to enhance the EU's foreign policy capabilities by establishing a permanent president of the European Council (that role currently rotates every six months) and a first-ever position of EU foreign minister, as well as an EU diplomatic corps.¹⁹ These changes, if enacted, would

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make the EU a much stronger international political player. The EU would develop and execute its foreign policy with much more continuity and strategic direction. That could make the EU a much better partner for the United States where U.S. and European interests align, but also better able to counterbalance us, or to provide an alternative vision where interests diverge.

The treaty contains several specific defense proposals:

- The common defense clause included in earlier treaties, with a proviso about respecting NATO obligations, is repeated and strengthened; it would require EU member states to come to one another's defense in case of external attack.²⁰
- EU military tasks are expanded to include joint disarmament operations (such as weapons destruction), military advice and assistance, and postconflict stabilization, as well as supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories.²¹
- A European Armaments, Research and Military Capabilities Agency would be created to coordinate research and arms procurement procedures and promote interoperability throughout the EU.²²
- "Structured cooperation" involving subgroups of member states is allowed, as is "enhanced cooperation." The idea here is to allow the stronger nations to work together more closely, within overall EU policy direction.²³
- Under a solidarity clause, EU members are to come to one another's aid in case of a terrorist attack, using all appropriate tools.²⁴

None of those proposals is, in and of itself, a radical departure from existing EU treaties or previous practice. In today's changed circumstances, however, when the EU has achieved some foreign policy convergence, adopted a common strategy (at least on paper), and mounted military operations (no matter how small), those measures may add

up to something quite new. A mutual defense clause, for example, looks less improbable (even if still quite remote) once people have become accustomed to seeing military uniforms in EU buildings and to having the EU maintain regular contacts with NATO—five years ago, the EU and NATO could have been on separate planets, given the limited contact between them. In recent years, the EU has adopted new procedures for handling classified materials (to NATO standards), set up a 24/7 situation center, and collectively called for better intelligence to support military missions. Those are all practical steps that in turn transform the EU's vision of itself.

The ESS says the EU's new capabilities "might include joint disarmament operations, support for third countries in combating terrorism and security sector reform."²⁵ EU defense ministers have already agreed to establish a European Defense Agency to coordinate arms procurement policies, and reportedly the European Commission has proposed common funding for defense-related research.²⁶ So far the amount of money proposed is modest, \$76 million, but this is a key development to watch, as it may provide a way forward for developing EU joint programs.

A mutual defense statement was taken off the table, following objections from neutral countries, but "structured cooperation" remains.²⁷ In February 2004 the UK, France, and Germany reportedly reached agreement on a proposal to develop a force consistent with that principle: units of 1,500 troops that could be deployed within 15 days. Other nations could participate if their forces were sufficiently advanced to be "interoperable" with British, French, and German forces. Pending EU approval, the troops would be available by 2007 and could be particularly useful in UN operations, such as the one conducted in Bunia in the summer of 2003.²⁸

A Glimpse of the Future

So what might EU defense capabilities look like in the next decade? Assuming that

current plans are not delayed or derailed by public opposition, the EU will have a union minister for foreign affairs with authority over any military activities; under him, the Political and Security Committee will, like NATO's North Atlantic Council, provide oversight and political guidance. In addition, the PSC will have political control over and provide strategic direction for any EU operations.

The EU Military Committee will parallel NATO's Military Committee; the EU Military Staff will be expanded to include operational planning as well as strategic guidance to the PSC, the union minister of foreign affairs, and the EU Council of Ministers. (Note that, to date, EU defense ministers have been given no formal role, nor is there any talk of an EU defense minister.) In principle, this operational planning capability will be used only for missions that do not involve NATO, such as the recent EU mission in Africa. Certainly, the planning staff will maintain close ties with UN peacekeeping headquarters in New York. In practice, however, there may be a preference for using this headquarters rather than SHAPE, even for missions involving NATO assets. There will be an established relationship with NATO, but there will always be a degree of tension between the two organizations, for example, when questions arise about the relationship between the NATO Reaction Force and the EU forces.

In addition to the tasks suggested in the ESS, EU military forces will be involved in exercises in support of the new "solidarity clause" promising mutual support, civilian and/or military, to a member state facing either a natural or man-made disaster. Those tasks will increase in number and importance as the EU shores up essential elements of its internal security: better police and judicial cooperation and control of its external borders, particularly in the south and east.

The new armaments agency and the mechanism of "structured cooperation" will be important vehicles for seeking to increase defense spending and to improve military

capabilities. Politically, further unification will continue to derive impetus from the well-honed "shame and blame" technique that has served EU member states well in the past.²⁹

The EU's new capabilities will be a mix of those, common to both NATO and EU wish lists, that are necessary for "low-end" operations and some very expensive, high-tech initiatives such as the Galileo global satellite positioning system.³⁰ Common programs and multinational units will be reinforced by common training and doctrine. EU doctrine will emphasize the importance of properly handling postconflict environments by deploying a mix of military peacekeeping and civilian reconstruction instruments.

Those activities will contribute to continuing political pressure for a mutual defense clause, particularly as the European sense of unity is strengthened by common border policies and EU political direction of border police. However, there will be no serious effort either for a major planning exercise for the territorial defense of Europe or for the development of sufficient capabilities to deter a potential external aggressor, in part because of the sensitivities of neutral EU states such as Finland and Ireland.³¹

The French desire to create an autonomous European defense force will continue to drive the process, as it has since the end of the Cold War. However, French influence will wane as the EU expands, and the importance of Germany as the central player will increase. The British will seek to play a leading role, while maintaining transatlantic ties, but will be at a constant disadvantage as long as the Franco-German link remains strong.³² Players such as Poland will continue to stress the importance of NATO, but they will also want to "play with the big guys" in the EU context by participating in any "structured cooperation."³³ And the EU structures will be patterned on NATO ones, reflecting the years of multilateral cooperation. English, not French, will be the EU working language (as it already is). To the degree that the EU needs recourse to NATO (and U.S.) assets and capabilities, it

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will continue to be dependent on NATO, but there will be a natural tendency to seek autonomy. And the United States will have to choose between promoting continued European dependence and encouraging European self-sufficiency, between fearing European independence and viewing it as a fundamental success of U.S. policy since World War II.

A European Defense Union?

Given the potential scope of the EU's foreign and defense policy initiatives, and the progress in the last five years, it appears that those who believe that NATO will continue to occupy the central, uncontested position in European security do so because they believe that the EU will fail to meet its proposed goals. Though there is frequently a gulf between European pronouncements and reality, the EU has a strong track record of achieving its political objectives over time—usually much more time than originally stated. That certainly was true for the creation of a single market and ultimately monetary union; it may also be true for foreign and defense policy.

Indeed, the relative pace of developments in the security realm may force observers to revise the conventional wisdom that says that it is much more difficult to relinquish national control over foreign and defense policy than over economic policy. For many EU member states, foreign and defense policy are relatively unimportant, compared with agriculture, industry, or communications—areas with large sums of money to be apportioned and a direct impact on the public. By contrast, given how difficult it is for a small country to affect developments beyond its borders, it is hardly surprising if the public is not particularly interested. Smaller countries, provided they get a say in what goes on, are much more likely to have an impact if they act together.

The importance of defense policy even in larger EU states should not be overstated. In

May 2003, when it looked as if the conservative CDU/CSU coalition in Germany would win the elections, one of the party's staffers explained that no one particularly wanted the job of defense minister, that it was not a key portfolio. After all, who would want to preside over large and painful budget cuts?³⁴ So, while foreign policy and defense are sensitive areas, they are not sacrosanct. The stiffest resistance to common foreign and defense policy will likely come from France and the UK, the two member states with permanent UN Security Council seats—and with the most autonomy to lose.

Skeptics cite the continuing low level of European defense spending and European military capabilities as evidence that a common EU defense and foreign policy is nothing more than a pipe dream. By both measures, the Europeans are obviously no match for the United States. The problem comes, though, in defining what the Europeans ought to be doing. The combined defense expenditures of EU member states in 2002 were almost \$178 billion, or just over half the U.S. level.³⁵ That amount is hardly insignificant, particularly as few European states have global missions that take them far abroad. Meanwhile, much of their defense money is misspent; while European governments and elites have come to understand the need to transform their Cold War forces, the political will to do so has been lacking. Germany, the key country in this regard, has only recently announced significant changes.³⁶ Many European officials argue that they must do a better job with what they have before they request significant increases from their publics.

It is equally misleading simply to compare U.S. and European military capabilities in order to identify European shortfalls. Any such comparison implies that the Americans and Europeans would fight the same wars in the same ways, but Europeans may be content to operate with less technology than do the Americans, for example, in order to achieve acceptable results.³⁷ Perhaps the best example of this is Operation Alba, the Italian

intervention to stabilize Albania in 1997. Alba may not have been “up to NATO standards,” but it did the trick; Albania today is not viewed as a critical source of instability that threatens its neighbors. The EU will have a better idea of what it most urgently requires for out-of-area operations after it gains experience conducting real operations such as those in Bunia or Bosnia; it is unlikely to be able to reach those decisions as long as the discussion remains at a theoretical level.

So will the EU develop the necessary political will to improve its military capabilities to a higher level, enabling Europe to finally break its dependence on the United States? It is too soon to say. Although EU member states may not have agreed on a constitutional treaty last December, they did manage to agree on new military provisions and appear to be moving ahead on defense issues. In the immediate future, they will likely need to find a formula that accommodates both big and small countries. A French-German-British “directoire” will be opposed by the others, but the big countries must take the lead in developing any significant initiatives. The military project clearly has the support of the EU leadership, but only time will tell whether that support will translate into political approval for new structures, greater defense expenditures, or improved military capabilities.

The Near Term—Crisis Management

In the next few years we can expect to see the growing EU role in foreign and security policy have a direct impact on NATO. The PSC and the working groups that support it meet almost daily and are constantly seeking to reach common policies on a broad range of issues. In the Balkans, for example, that has been highly beneficial to the United States. Initially, NATO gained a political partner; then, the political partner transformed into a military partner offering

NATO an exit strategy for its peacekeeping operations. That, in turn, opens the door for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region.

However, EU common policies have also constrained U.S. policy at NATO. For example, the EU commitment to tight fiscal policies in support of the common currency meant that simultaneous hortatory commitments by European allies to increased military spending were meaningless. And U.S. policymakers failed to anticipate the strength of the EU’s common policy in support of the International Criminal Court when the Bush administration sought ways to protect U.S. military forces overseas from possible indictments by the court.

Both of those cases were affected by an important difference between the way NATO and the EU function. NATO is a political-military organization, where most decisions are made at the ministerial level. EU decisions are made slowly, through a hierarchical system, but key ones are confirmed at the level of heads of state and government—and once that is done, they cannot be changed. In practice, EU summit decisions can leave ministers with little maneuvering room at NATO.

As the EU gains confidence in foreign and security policy, more common decisions will likely be reached in downtown Brussels. And, as EU member states are obliged by treaty to promote common policies in all other forums, with increasing frequency a decision may be postponed in NATO until a common position is reached in the EU. In fact, at one point in late 2001 a military official attached to one of the EU permanent representations told the author that his government was doing exactly that on an issue of interest to the United States. Once a consensus is reached at the EU, NATO-EU dual members, who will soon enjoy an even larger majority in NATO, will be under great pressure to adhere to the common EU position. At a minimum, that suggests strongly that current NATO decisionmaking procedures will have to be changed. That should be done sooner rather than later; the longer U.S. offi-

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cials cling to the old ways, the less influence they will have, and the more likely that they will be seen as obstructing European nations' legitimate efforts to provide for their own security.

The EU may also have an impact, in the near to medium term, on NATO's ability to conduct various operations. For the moment, a compromise has been reached on EU operational planning that is designed to avoid conflict with NATO. How that will work in practice remains to be seen; the difficulty, of course, is that both organizations are drawing on largely the same pool of European soldiers and military assets.

The same holds true for other functions the EU would like to assume: will EU common training and doctrine reinforce what NATO does, for example, or will it conflict? Will the EU succeed in increasing its defense spending and developing joint long-term defense planning and head in directions that conflict with the goals established in NATO or that conflict with U.S. national objectives? Today, it is not clear whether the two organizations will in fact find a workable way to cooperate, or whether they will take divergent paths.

So What Does This Mean for the United States?

Secretary of State Colin Powell believes that the transatlantic security relationship is in good shape and requires no major alterations. For him: "Not only has NATO survived, but its membership and its mission have expanded. . . . The transatlantic partnership is based so firmly on common interests and values that neither feuding personalities nor occasional divergent perceptions can derail it." He sees the EU as an important partner across a wide range of issues, "from advancing free trade to joint efforts in counterproliferation."³⁸ Powell does not mention defense or broader security policy in this context.

Defense and foreign policy expert Stanley Sloan, on the other hand, argues that NATO

in its present configuration is a "necessary but insufficient foundation" for transatlantic relations and that the United States and Europe need a new, broader treaty arrangement.³⁹ And British journalist Gerard Baker argues that a united Europe is not in the interest of the United States, as its security policy will increasingly be driven by a Franco-German desire to counterbalance the United States.⁴⁰

What would it mean for the United States if, in 10 to 15 years, the EU announced that it wished to provide for the common European defense? What would that entail? Would NATO cease to exist? After all, NATO was not the obvious solution to the security problems after World War II; another alternative might have been a European defense organization with a treaty relationship with the United States.⁴¹ U.S. administrations and the U.S. Congress have repeatedly called for the Europeans to do more to provide for their own defense; if they prefer to do so through the EU rather than NATO, will America oppose that? On what basis?

The benefits of a European defense union would be felt on both sides of the Atlantic. American policy, with its open declaration that Russia is no longer an enemy and its new emphasis on moving troops to the periphery of Europe for possible use in the Middle East or Central Asia, is already evolving in new directions. The question of security for Eastern Europe will remain sensitive, but as those countries will soon be members of both the EU and NATO, they will be able to participate in any planning for new security arrangements.

On the other side of the Atlantic, among the advantages that would accrue from a defense of Europe by Europeans is the psychological boost that would come from reduced dependence on the United States. Certainly the sense of continuing European impotence and dependence vis-à-vis the United States has generated much of the momentum behind the EU's defense initiative. Today, only a portion of Europe's motivation arises from a desire to counterbalance

or compete with the United States, but that portion is likely to rise unless the Europeans assume more responsibility.⁴² There is a danger that today's high levels of anti-Americanism, resentment, and jealousy in Europe may spur the Europeans to adopt positions contrary to those of the United States, regardless of underlying common interests. That danger is likely to become even more acute the longer Europeans remain dependent on the United States for their security.

In its 2002 National Security Strategy, the Bush administration reaffirmed the importance of NATO as an alliance that has "been the fulcrum of transatlantic and inter-European security" but measured the alliance's value in terms of its participation in out-of-area operations, rather than the defense of Europe.⁴³ In identifying the key actions that NATO needs to take, the NSS focused on practical, technical steps to make it a more effective force in such operations. The U.S. role as guarantor of European security may have been implicit to the drafters, but it was not identified as a key element.

But should we try to separate NATO from the defense of Europe?⁴⁴ As long as there is no significant territorial threat to Europe, questions about the EU and the collective defense of Europe remain fairly theoretical—and the EU can afford to move ahead via its typical "Monnet method," in which seemingly small technical changes lead to larger political ones.⁴⁵ Typically, those advances come without securing public support for the EU's new role. That technique has worked well in the economic sphere but may not when vital security issues are involved.

One striking feature of the current discussion of a collective defense role for the EU is the absence of any discussion of direct external threats. Yet, without that assessment, it is impossible to determine what capabilities would be required. So how would the EU, whose member states have so far done very little to increase defense spending, develop significant new capabilities if they were needed?

If the EU does pursue the path of collective defense, the solution may be a division of responsibilities between NATO and the EU, rather than an "either-or" choice. Up to now, the EU has been careful to include a reference to NATO in any passage dealing with the defense of Europe. Current assessments view Russia as no longer posing a threat to Europe. But what if Russia in 10 years is no longer as benign as it has been for the last 10 years? What if President Putin or his successors seek to re-assert Russian influence in former Soviet areas, including the Baltics? The Europeans should be empowered, and encouraged, to consider precisely those kinds of questions in crafting their defense and foreign policy. That will of necessity involve developing options for a potential attempt by Russia to use its nuclear arsenal for political blackmail. That will not be an easy exercise for the Europeans; but it is, of course, essential, given the high stakes.

On the American side, the temptation will be to continue business as usual at NATO, constantly seeking to maintain NATO's pre-eminence by constraining successive EU initiatives. Many people in the United States will continue to see NATO as the primary vehicle for conducting transatlantic security relations. On the other hand, as one perceptive observer has noted, while the Europeans may continue to cite the importance of NATO, they will increasingly view the EU as a career, and NATO as an insurance policy.⁴⁶ We should not base our transatlantic policy on an institution that matters less and less to our European allies.

The growing European focus on the EU, rather than NATO, is unlikely to change significantly with NATO and EU enlargement. The East Europeans will continue to want the United States to protect them from Russia, but they will also want to be active participants in EU institutions—and they will look to the EU for a host of other benefits (they have been included in all the recent EU discussions on collective defense). Moreover, they will be subjected to pressure at every turn from the French and Germans if they

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are seen as siding with the United States: witness the pressure on Poland for its decision to back U.S. policy in Iraq.

So, if the status quo is not likely to last, what should we do? If the Europeans are serious, we should reach new arrangements in which the Europeans and the EU assume greater responsibility for European defense issues. That is what the current head of the EU Military Committee, Gen. Gustav Hagglund, recently proposed, as he looked at the coming decade: "The American and the European pillars (of NATO) would be responsible for their respective territorial defenses, and would together engage in crisis management outside their own territories."⁴⁷

The EU is a far-from-perfect organization, and all the long-standing questions of European political will and military capabilities remain on the table. It is not clear that the EU will be able to meet the challenge of defending itself, but it makes no sense not to see if it can do so. To encourage continued progress toward European self-sufficiency, as well as to meet its own strategic objectives, the United States should seek the "lightest footprint" possible, including substantial troop reductions throughout Europe. Such changes will also require significant institutional changes to NATO.

Conclusion

As the EU's common security and defense policies continue to evolve over the next 5 to 10 years, the United States will have to revisit its approach to both the EU and NATO. In the case of U.S.-EU relations, the choice is relatively clear: those relations should be developed, as they offer numerous benefits, and closer relations are probably the best way to minimize future policy disagreements. The EU is likely to continue expanding the range of issues covered by its common foreign policy. If the new European Security Strategy is any guide, growing European cohesion in the security sphere may help, rather than impede, transatlantic cooperation.

As for defense policy, Europe's heads of state have committed themselves to a European military force and have not excluded the possibility that the EU might one day take responsibility for the collective defense of Europe. They are not likely to back down from their commitments, nor should we want them to do so. Given the European states' relative wealth and the lack of an immediate conventional threat, we should encourage them to assume responsibility for their own defense.

Now that NATO is no longer the only defense organization in Europe, EU actions have the potential to affect everything from NATO's decisionmaking procedures to its ability to develop common doctrine, training, and interoperability. Both organizations have separate military staffs, but one includes Americans and is under American command and the other does not and is not. Both the EU and NATO draw from the same pool of European soldiers; both will want to engage in planning regarding those soldiers and other military assets. Both will want to engage in long-term defense planning.

In this environment, changes at NATO are inevitable. The United States is already moving to reposition its forces in Europe to the south and east to perform tasks unrelated to the territorial defense of Europe; in a short time, America's military presence in most of Europe will greatly diminish.⁴⁸ The primary long-term goals for the United States should be to ensure continued political support within Europe for the planning and execution of out-of-area operations that pose a mutual threat to U.S. and European security. The United States should seek to maintain an integrated command as an effective instrument to carry out those operations.

The EU already faces numerous questions about its seriousness in developing a real crisis intervention capability; it will face even more probing questions if it pursues the goal of collective European defense. The key issue will be the EU's political will, most clearly measured by its defense expenditures and military capabilities. If Europe demonstrates

a serious commitment to enhanced defensive and military capabilities, the United States should respond positively. On no account should we cling to current NATO structures simply because we are used to them, or because we are accustomed to seeing transatlantic security issues through a NATO lens. We should not be left speaking of the primary and overwhelming importance of NATO while our allies quietly transfer their attention and resources to the EU.

The United States should expect that the first step toward the Europeans assuming responsibility for their own security will be an initial political declaration, without any concrete undertakings to back it up. That at least has been the nature of EU decisionmaking thus far, and the process is unlikely to change. It is highly improbable that the issue would be framed without considerable ambiguity and uncertainty, at least at the start.

The Europeans for the next few years will have some leeway for ambiguity and uncertainty, given the lack of an external military threat to Europe. However, they are unlikely to face a completely unthreatening environment. If, for example, Russia attempts to bully them with nuclear weapons, perhaps in order to reassert its role in the Baltics or Kaliningrad, the Europeans could find themselves in a position of weakness.

Clearly, a Europe subject to Russian political blackmail would not be in the U.S. interest in the future, any more than it was when NATO was set up. Will the EU develop the political coherence, and the political will, to resist such pressures? Should it seek sufficient nuclear capabilities of its own to counter any threat, or is retaining a treaty relationship between the United States and Europe covering nuclear contingencies a better option? A temporary extension of the American security guarantee would keep Europe from being threatened by another power. Such an agreement should not, however, be used as a pretext for perpetual European dependence on American protection.

Those changes, taken together, would represent a significant change in the transatlantic

relationship. The United States can view them either as a step away from the close relationship of the Cold War or as a step forward, a recognition of the strides Europe has taken to make itself strong, free, and prosperous—in short, as an expansion of our success in the last 50 years. And while some observers in Europe want the EU to be a “counterweight” to the United States, many others want Europe to become a partner of the United States instead. Keeping Europe dependent on the United States indefinitely will only strengthen the former and undermine the latter.

Notes

1. See Frederic Bozo, “The Effects of Kosovo and the Danger of Decoupling,” and David S. Yost, “The U.S.-European Capabilities Gap and the Prospects for ESDP” both in *Defending Europe: The EU, NATO and the Quest for European Autonomy*, ed. Jolyon Howorth and John T. S. Keeler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 65 and p. 94, respectively.
2. Bozo, p. 74.
3. Gilles Andreani, Christoph Bertram, and Charles Grant, “Europe’s Military Revolution,” Centre for European Reform, March 2001, pp. 13–14. See www.cer.org.uk/publications/22x.html.
4. See the council website, www.consilium.eu.int/pesc/default.asp?lang=en, for further background and details on the development of CFSP and Solana’s role.
5. Javier Solana, “Summary of Remarks at the Informal Meeting of Defence Ministers,” Brussels, April 5–6, 2004, <http://ue.eu.int/solana>.
6. Antonio Missiroli, “Counting Capabilities: What For?” in *The EU’s Search for a Strategic Role: ESDP and Its Implications for Transatlantic Relations*, ed. Esther Brimmer (Washington: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2002), p. 57.
7. See the council website for background on these missions.
8. Many observers noted that Solana seemed quite depressed, and rumors floated that he might no longer be a player. The atmosphere was similarly bleak in the PSC.
9. Javier Solana, “Address,” Dublin Castle, January

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- 8, 2004. Available at http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/78348.pdf.
10. "A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy," adopted by the European Council, Brussels, December 12, 2003. Available at <http://www.iss-eu.org/solana/solanae.pdf>.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
13. For the best-known recent argument, see Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).
14. For a good summary of the summit and its aftermath, see Charles Grant, "Resolving the Rows over ESDP," Centre for European Reform, October 2003, http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/briefing_cg_esdp.pdf.
15. EU Council of Ministers, "European Defence: NATO/EU Consultation, Planning and Operations," news release, Brussels, December 15, 2003, <http://www.consilium.eu.int/newsroom/NewMain.asp?Lang=1>.
16. For more background on European intentions, see Jolyon Howorth, "France, Britain and the Euro-Atlantic Crisis," *Survival* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2003-04): 173-92. See also Laurent Zecchini, "Paris, Londres et Berlin sont parvenus a un compromis sur la defense europeenne," *Le Monde*, November 29, 2003.
17. For a critical review of French defense policy, see Anand Menon, *France, NATO and the Limits of Independence 1981-97: The Politics of Ambivalence* (New York: St Martin's, 2000).
18. Text available at <http://european-convention.eu.int/bienvenue.asp?lang=EN>. For an analysis, see Steven Everts and Daniel Keohane, "The European Convention and EU Foreign Policy: Learning from Failure," *Survival* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 167-84.
19. Constitutional Treaty, Article I (21), p. 17; Article I (27), p. 23; Article III-197, p. 157; and "Declaration on the Creation of a European External Action Service," p. 239.
20. *Ibid.*, Art. I(11), para 4, p. 11; Art. I(15), para 1, p. 13; Art. I(40), paras 1 and 2, p. 33; Art. I(40), para 7, p. 35; and Art. III-214, p. 164.
21. *Ibid.*, Para III-210, p. 162. For a more detailed description of what was under discussion regarding the EU's military tasks, see the report of the Working Group on Defence from the convention that produced the draft Constitutional Treaty. It recommended the following: "Conflict prevention (early warning, confidence and security building measures, etc.); Joint disarmament operations (weapons destruction and arms control programmes); Military advice and assistance ("*defence outreach*"; cooperation with the military forces of a third country or of a regional/subregional organisation on developing democratically accountable armed forces, by the exchange of good practices, eg. through training measures); Post-conflict stabilisation; Support for a third country's authorities, at their request, in combating terrorism." "Final Report of Working Group VIII-Defence," Brussels, December 16, 2002, CONV 461/02, p. 16. Available at <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/02/cv00/00461en2.pdf>.
22. Constitutional Treaty, Art. I(40), para 3, p. 34; and Art. III-212, p. 162-3.
23. Re "structured cooperation," see *ibid.*, Art. I(40), para 6, p. 34; Art. III-213, p. 163; re "enhanced cooperation," see Art. I(43), p. 37 and Arts.III-322-329, pp. 214-16.
24. *Ibid.*, Art. I(42), p. 36; Art. III-231, p. 177.
25. "A Secure Europe in a Better World," p. 12.
26. Breffni O'Rourke, "EU: Military Presence Evolving, Despite Difficulties," *RFE/RL*, October 9, 2003, <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2003/10/09102003170723.asp>.
27. Jolyon Howorth, "Saint-Malo Plus Five: An Interim Assessment of ESDP," *Notre Europe*, policy paper no 7, November 2003, pp. 23-24.
28. "Germany Joins Anglo-French Defence Plan," *euobserver.com*, February 11, 2004, <http://www.euobserver.com/index.phtml?aid=14431>.
29. "Shame and blame" refer to the process by which individual EU member states are prodded by the commission and other member states to honor their commitments. In the close working environment of the EU, where ministers and heads of government meet frequently, very few want to be seen as the "odd man out" who is blocking progress. The EU's formal enforcement mechanisms may be weak, but this informal one actually works fairly well.
30. Missiroli, p. 58.
31. Austria is the other neutral EU member. As mentioned above, the neutral states were uncomfortable with the original mutual defense clause in the Constitutional Treaty. Continued support for neutrality was also reflected in the initial Irish

referendum on EU enlargement, which failed in part because the Irish saw it as an opportunity to vote against any Irish involvement in NATO.

32. For background on the UK perspective, see David Chuter, "The United Kingdom," in *The European Union and National Defence Policy*, ed. Jolyon Howorth and Anand Menon (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 105–20.

33. See Robert Soltyk, "Polska chce być w awangardzie współpracy obronnej UE," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 30, 2003.

34. Conversation with the author, May 2003.

35. Compiled from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2003–2004* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 247–55. To compare: 2002 U.S. defense expenditures were listed as \$348.5 billion (outlays); China's were \$51 billion.

36. Increased German defense expenditures are considered crucial to any improvement. On January 13, 2004, Defense Minister Peter Struck announced a major restructuring of the German armed forces, but it appears unlikely that total military spending will rise above its current 1.5 percent of GDP. "Reforming Reticence," *The Economist*, January 17–23, 2004, p. 43.

37. See Kori Shake, "The United States, ESDP and Constructive Duplication," in *Defending Europe*, pp. 107–32, for an alternative view of what capabilities the EU should develop.

38. Colin L. Powell, "A Strategy of Partnerships,"

Foreign Affairs 83, no. 1 (January–February 2004): 29–30.

39. Stanley R. Sloan, *NATO, the European Union, and the Atlantic Community: The Transatlantic Bargain Reconsidered* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 217.

40. Gerard Baker, "Against United Europe," *Weekly Standard*, September 22, 2003, pp. 23–25.

41. Chuter, p. 115.

42. Henry Kissinger's observations 40 years ago that transatlantic relations were a "troubled partnership" are still relevant. Henry Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

43. "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002, p. 25, www.dod.gov/pubs/index.html#Reports.

44. Barbara Conry, "The Western European Union as NATO's Successor," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 239, September 18, 1995.

45. Named after Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founding fathers.

46. Informal assessment by a State Department official.

47. Peter Starck, "Time Europe Defended Itself—EU Military Official," Reuters, January 18, 2004.

48. Bradley Graham, "U.S. May Halve Forces in Germany," *Washington Post*, March 25, 2004.